

Water & Toilet Indaba

Position Paper

Introduction

Early in 2022, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba gave a message of hope for a water sensitive and inclusive Cape Town. He invited parties involved to design together a 'Water & Toilet' *Indaba* to simulate trust and inclusion. An *Indaba* is a (safe space) platform of taking together courageous conversations and actions, build trust and celebrate the dream in the present.

The word *Indaba* comes from isiZulu, one of South Africa's major languages, and describes purposeful gatherings in order to discern the needs of a village. The concept has been adapted and applied to different situations to encourage dialogue and discussion in a transparent, honest, and constructive matter, and possibly help decision making and consensus building. It describes a new way of working and is based on the principles of (eco)Ubuntu: 'I am because we are. We are because the planet is'. This new way of working seeks to change the assumptions by which we live by and design our policies from distrust to trust, from exclusion to inclusion and from narrow self-interest to common interest.

As part of a new step in the collaboration, this paper outlines the concept of *Indaba*, describes its potential as well as its risks, and gives examples of best practices around the world where *Indaba* has been used. The examples show how *Indaba* is already a proven method. At the same time, we will see how *Indaba* must be properly and creatively designed in every context anew, so that it fits the objectives of that particular context.

What is *Indaba*

At an *Indaba*, members of a community meet for the specific purpose of listening to others' views about a concern facing the community. Everyone is encouraged to speak, which helps the community understand the matter from a variety of viewpoints. As a concern becomes more fully understood, the community is better able to identify those places where common ground may exist, despite the differences that remain, and to find a way forward together.



Archbishop Thabo Makgoba



Listen to Archbishop Thabo's podcast 'Message of hope for a water sensitive and inclusive Cape Town' (2022)

An *Indaba* can be seen as both a journey and an adventure; a process rather than an end in itself. This type of journey involves leaving comfortable assumptions behind and stepping into the cultural context of others who may have very different habits, expectations, and assumptions. It is also an adventure; it challenges how we think about the world and about others. Experiencing an *Indaba* will be unusual, involve risk, and lead to unexpected and perhaps transformative outcomes.

Listening is therefore a core aspect of an *Indaba*. Each person listens to understand a viewpoint or situation and any circumstances surrounding it from the position of the speaker. The listening needs to be open-minded, without evaluating or critiquing what is being said, particularly if the listener may hold a different view. Questions may be asked in order to understand more fully, but they are not intended to provoke an argument or criticize a speaker's viewpoint. Through this process, *Indaba* participants engage in both mutual listening and mutual learning about the complexity of a concern from many angles. An *Indaba* therefore lends itself well for complex societal issues, where different, possibly conflicting, interests are at stake.

When designing an *Indaba*, one can consider the following five steps as part of the journey:

- 1. Sharing the vision:** collaboratively developing the *Indaba* journey and setting its themes, then clearly communicating its purpose to all involved;
- 2. Gathering:** inviting and preparing participants for the *Indaba* process;
- 3. Encounter:** enabling participants to personally experience one another's contexts to help them understand the others' worldviews and form deeper relationships on which trust can develop;
- 4. Genuine conversation:** using facilitated conversation to help participants listen and speak authentically and openly;

- 5. Going out:** living out *Indaba* through actions in communities and enabling all to walk together in common purpose or missions.

In the end, the objective of an *Indaba* is to establish a platform for transformative discussions between actors in a way that is not about positioning or antagonism, but rather a transparent, honest, and constructive dialogue reflecting on the complex challenges and opportunities on the table. When working together with all parties involved, one is in a better position to understand and evaluate the context being confronted with and to cement meaningful long-lasting partnerships.

Risks of *Indaba*

Since dialogue and discussion are at the core of *Indaba*, communication and communication styles are an important and essential factor in making *Indaba* a success. Especially when using *Indaba* cross-culturally, one might encounter cultural differences in communication styles and different ideas about what is appropriate to be discussed and with whom. Cross-culturally in this case does not only refer to working with multiple nationalities or ethnicities but also working with actors from different sectors, as each sector comes with its own values, norms, and thus culture. Exposing participants to different understandings and realities during an *Indaba* may prompt dissatisfaction with their own culture's norms and way of life. Participants therefore need to be prepared to exhibit sensitivity toward other cultural understandings and relationships, which can help them reflect on the assumptions they bring to the conversation, listen openly, and encourage one another to speak.

To mitigate these possible risks, it is important to involve all parties in the planning from an early stage. Engaging in a pre-*Indaba* prior to designing a full *Indaba* could be a way to go about this. A pre-*Indaba* can help identify the goal of the envisioned *Indaba*, the parties involved, their interests and needs, and the journey to be developed

with these partners. Taking extra time to voice one's needs and expectations can help prevent miscommunication or mismatched expectations in a later stage.

More generally, time is an essential factor to a successful *Indaba*. *Indaba* is neither a quick nor easy way to make decisions, especially with a large group. It requires sizeable amounts of time to find common ground and a pathway forward. It therefore also presents a limitation; it requires patience and must allow for embracing the long journey instead of quick fixes. Choosing to engage in an *Indaba* might therefore not be applicable to every topic or challenge. Questions that need quick answers or urgent response might be more successfully tackled through other methods.

Examples of *Indaba*

Courageous conversation around mining in South Africa

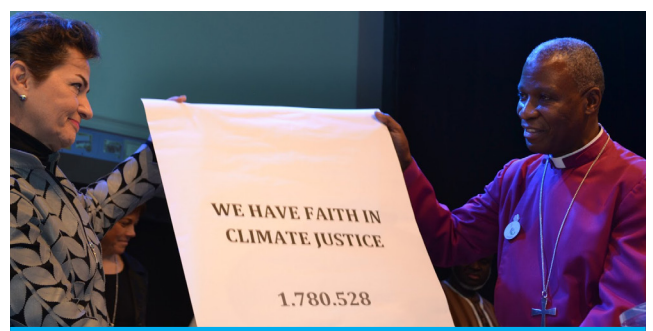
In 2015, representatives of the South African mining sector, civil society and faith communities met at the invitation of Archbishop Thabo in Cape Town to discuss the future of the mining industry in South Africa. These talks were not just monologues, nor a safe space to hide from the socio-economic challenges facing South Africa's society. Instead, it provided opportunities for real courageous dialogue which resulted in actions that will contribute to co-creating a vision of the future of the mining industry in South Africa.

The *Indaba* started with meetings at the archbishop's home in October 2015, and had a follow-up session in February of 2016. More sessions followed, and participation and the number of actors continued to grow. Stakeholders shared a commitment to seek collaborative solutions to the problems which threaten the sustainability of mining and the communities in which mines operate.² In the end, the courageous conversations resulted in finding new ways of working together which can be replicated throughout Southern Africa and potentially globally.



Climate negotiations in Paris

Indaba has also been used as a negotiation tactic during the climate talks. It was first introduced in climate negotiation talks in Durban in 2011 where in the last minutes of the meeting, negotiators reached a deadlock. To prevent talks from collapsing, the South African presidency asked representatives from the main countries to form a standing circle and speak directly to each other. Instead of repeating stated positions, each party was encouraged to speak personally and state their "red lines," which are thresholds that they don't want to cross. But while telling others their hard limits, they were also asked to provide solutions to find a common ground.



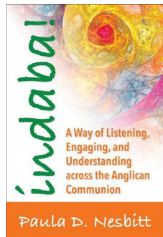
Archbishop Thabo and Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, during the COP21 that culminated in the Paris Agreement of 2015. *Indaba* was used as a key element of the negotiations in Paris.

A few years later in 2015, when climate negotiations in Paris got particularly tricky, *Indaba* was used in private rooms at all hours of the day. It resulted in breakthroughs and helped move

² Thabo Makgoba (2017)

forward the negotiation results. The technique clearly impressed many. "It is a very effective way to streamline negotiations and bridge differences. It has the advantage of being participatory yet fair," one West African diplomat told the Guardian. "It should be used much more when no way through a problem can be found."³

Anglican church



Within the Anglican community, *Indaba* has been used in several instances to facilitate conversation and dialogue about sensitive topics. For example, in 2008 it was used at the Lambeth Conference to avoid the polarizing methodology of voting for and against resolutions. In Zambia, when concerns over violence came up prior to the 2016 general election, an ecumenical effort involving members of Pentecostal, episcopal and evangelical groups led to a change in political rhetoric.⁴ The *Indaba* suggested that such a process may have had a powerful role across religious and secular institutions in decreasing tensions and seeking solutions.

Looking ahead: 'Water & Toilet' *Indaba*

In Archbishop Thabo's message of hope for a water sensitive Cape Town, he called the ambitions of the water strategy 'Godly'. At the same time, he stressed that the strategy should be made tangible and concrete. Designing a 'Water & Toilet' *Indaba* can be instrumental in taking the next steps. In Archbishop Thabo's view, the (inter)faith community can play a role as bridge-builders in order to contribute some of the transitions that has to be made towards a water sensitive and inclusive Cape Town. The aim for this *Indaba* is to create strong frameworks for water and sanitation in different pilot areas that can serve as a model that can be used to build trust between the authorities and the informal settlements.

One of the potential pilot areas identified is the

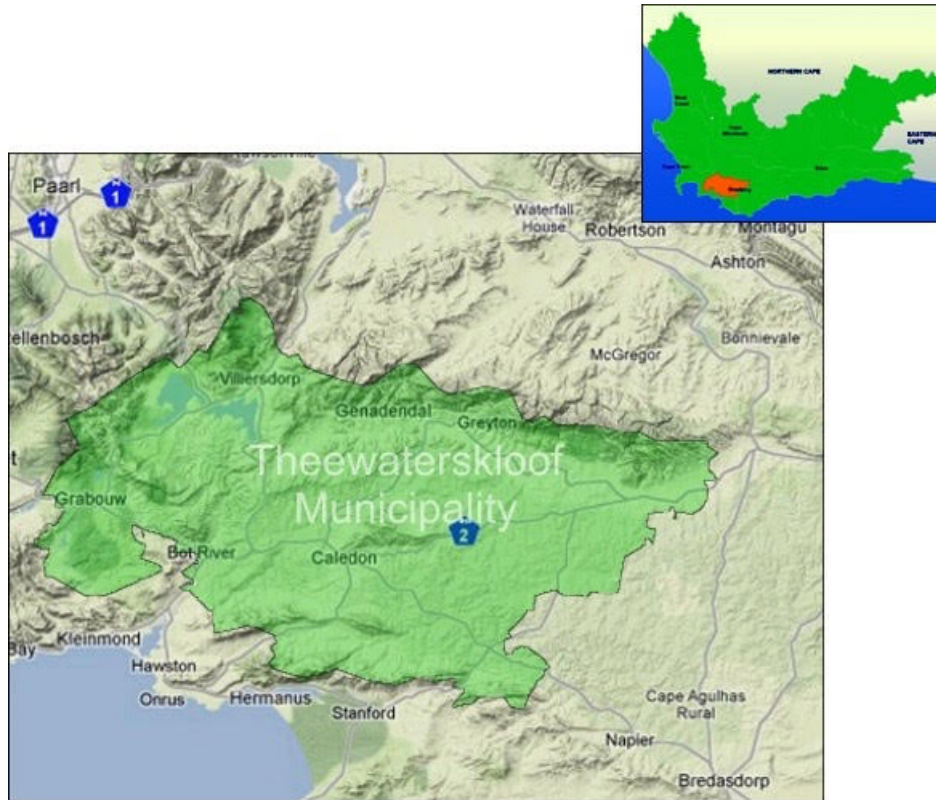
Theewaterskloof municipality, east of the city of Cape Town. It is part of the subcatchment area that feeds the Theewaterskloofdam, one of the big dams that are essential for the water supply of Cape Town. The water in the dams is used as raw water to produce drinking water. As a result of the influx of people from other parts of South Africa looking for work and a better life in the city, a lot of informal settlements spring up in the area around Cape Town, among them the Theewaterskloof municipality. Two of these towns are Villiersdorp and Grabouw. The fast and uncontrolled growth of informal settlements in these small towns is typical of many similar towns along the main transport corridors approaching Cape Town. Such influx challenges local authorities to organize adequate water services (drinking water and sanitation) and to tackle the pollution of water systems (among other challenges).



The potential project in Theewaterskloof would aim to decrease the impact of the diffuse pollution of water upstream in the informal settlements of Villiersdorp and Grabouw. To what extent and how this can be achieved would be an important learning aspect of this project. It would involve close cooperation with the local communities, since they play an important role as both stakeholders and polluters. Experience from the past shows that improvements are hard to achieve for the authorities without ownership and support of the communities. This project would seek to pilot the concept of community enrollment as

³ Vaughn and Randerson (2015)

⁴ Nesbitt (2017): 206



envisaged and informally developed by transport practitioners at the City of Cape Town, and further considered by the University of Western Cape and the Vrije Universiteit of Amsterdam. Briefly this means putting the community and its natural dynamics and value systems at the heart of the project, with help of existing value-based networks - such as faith based communities - as a bridge to the authorities. It is a value-driven approach, that makes use of African traditions like storytelling to empower communities to take responsibility for their environment.

Sources

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