



# The Text

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## The Role of Visual Arts in Climate Change Awareness: Insights from Rural Communities in Alice

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### Abstract

This study explores visual arts as a tool for creating awareness about climate change in rural communities. Visual art uniquely communicates complex ideas and evokes emotions, making it a powerful tool for engaging rural communities on critical environmental issues. Rural communities are often disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, yet they may have limited access to information and resources to address these issues. Thus, using visual art as a means of awareness creation and education can play a crucial role in empowering rural communities to respond to the challenges posed by climate change.

This study employs a qualitative method approach and visual analysis of artworks to understand the effectiveness of using visual art as a means of climate change awareness. This research aims to contribute to the growing knowledge of using visual art to create climate change awareness in rural communities. The findings from this research provide valuable insights into the role of visual arts in creating climate change awareness, offering practical recommendations for designing and implementing effective visual arts interventions in rural areas.

**Keywords:** *visual art, climate change, awareness creation, rural communities*

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## Introduction

This study aims to show how visual arts can be used to raise awareness of climate change. According to Sovacool Benjamin (110), climate change is the change of weather patterns through time. It can be caused by greenhouse gases and human activity. Climate change is a pressing global issue that affects communities worldwide, including rural areas. In these rural communities, people are often deeply connected to the natural environment. In addition, art connects people emotionally and is a great way to bring attention to significant issues (Sacha, Jerome and Kegan 14). Furthermore, it was crucial to raise awareness about climate change and its impact on livelihoods, and one powerful and effective way of doing this is through visual arts (Amanda Gorsegner 16). This study has explained the two major themes of climate change: drought and floods. Therefore, visual art can be seen to educate people on the effects of climate change, including floods and drought, and promote awareness through visualization.

According to Roosen, Kloner Swim (85-110), Visual arts are art techniques that translate abstract ideas into tangible, created items. Furthermore, Roosen, Kloner Swim (85-110) assert that art has the capacity to employ specific plans to develop one-of-a-kind visible paintings on canvas with paints and brushes to raise awareness about climate change challenges. The roles of artworks have been increasing substantially due to their potential power for raising awareness and helping to educate a larger audience. Art has promoted an understanding of how people might combat climate change and build a more sustainable future by adopting preventive strategies (Keunhye Lee 26).

The researcher has introduced climate change issues such as flooding and drought and has shown how visual arts are used to raise awareness. Drought is a period of arid weather that lasts long enough for the lack of water to produce a significant imbalance in the affected areas (47). Drought vulnerability is a lack of water that affects people, livestock, and crops (21). Floods are caused by heavy rainfall, which can result in loss of life, property damage, and crop loss. According to Amanda Gorsegner (14), climate change art has increased public awareness of the issue through imagery. Visualization has enabled better communication, understanding, and problem-solving because illiteracy dominates rural areas.



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The study has been influenced by the study of Amanda David Gorseger (20) published under the headings: The role of art in the global climate change movement, the significant role of using art to address climate change, and the contemporary climate change movement require the integration of artists to respond to climate change challenges. The practical influencer is Diane Burko, a painter who conveys the devastating effects of floods, droughts, and other climate disasters in his images of landscapes altered by human activity. The work offers a powerful commentary on the consequences of climate change.

## Background of the Study

Climate change first appeared on the public agenda in the mid to late 1980s; mass communication about climate change and, more recently, how to communicate it most effectively has sharply increased (Moser Susanne, 31-53). According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change IPCC (17), climate change is the change of weather conditions over time caused by human activities or the emission of greenhouse gases from industries. According to Griggs David and Maria Naoguer (267-269), the world's climate system has changed demonstrably from the pre-industrial era, with some changes related to human activities. In addition, Solomon Susan (1704-1709) noted that climate change is a topical subject worldwide, and there is evidence that this phenomenon is taking place. It is further speculated by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change IPCC (67), that climate change and variability are widely characterized by weather events escalating worldwide and are more than likely to happen in the future. It is the biggest challenge the world is currently experiencing (15). Therefore, climate change has become a massive challenge, posing several threats and impacts on the environment and society. Some ways climate change has become a challenge include extreme weather events such as drought, floods, and storms.

Extreme weather events are the most noticeable effects, especially the drought and wildfires in some parts of South Africa. According to Kapwata Thandi, Gebreslasie, Mathee, and Wright (98), global warming manifests as climate variability, and has already been implicated in increased floods, extreme coldness, and other accompanying challenges of climate change that are affecting the public in general. Among the climate change effects discussed, the study focused on two specific impacts: floods and drought. It used visual art to create awareness about



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these effects, their causes, their impact on rural livelihoods, and the prevention measures that can be taken. effects. Furthermore, visual art can also be used to inspire action and advocacy on climate change; for instance, the artist Justin Brice Guariglia created a public installation that used LED lights to display messages about climate change and encourage people to act.

## Problem Statement

This study identified a problem: people need to be made aware of how to adapt to climate change, and there is a need to use visual arts towards climate change awareness. Climate change has become one of the increasing challenges (Cohen et al 23). There is strong confidence and evidence that climate change severely threatens current and future sustainable development (Tafesse Matewos 88). Omid Jamshidi (158) noted that climate change is an environmental problem affecting many sectors, such as agriculture, construction, and human settlement. The study area is highly affected by climate, primarily due to extreme weather conditions in the region, such as droughts and floods. Hamann Maike and Tuinder Vanessa (112) reported that the Eastern Cape faces several environmental threats, chiefly deforestation and pollution, resulting in climate change. This highlights that there is a need for an intervention strategy.

According to Kagan Sacha (41), applying appropriate preventative measures can help resolve climate change challenges. In addition, it was observed that although some rural communities are aware of climate change, they need to perceive it to the extent that climate adaptation is necessary. Hence, there is a need for additional measures like visual art to help create climate change awareness and educate people about its effects. Furthermore, Kagan Sacha (20) argues that art connects people on an emotional level and is, therefore, a very appropriate way to draw attention to important issues.

## Research Questions

### Main Research Question

The main research topic of the study is to assess and explore visual arts as a tool for climate change awareness creation in the rural communities of Alice.

The study will have the following questions.

How can visual art effectively raise climate change awareness in Alice's rural communities?

What is the current level of climate change awareness in Alice rural communities?



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What are the socio-economic characteristics of the rural people affected by climate change in Alice?

## Research Objective

To assess the effectiveness of visual arts in promoting climate change awareness among Alice's rural communities.

To determine the level of climate change awareness in Alice rural communities.

To profile the socio-economic characteristics of rural people affected by climate change in Alice.

## Literature Review

Climate change refers to a shift in climate resulting from human activities that directly or indirectly alter the composition of the global atmosphere, contributing to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods. In addition, the IPCC broadly defines climate change as a change in climate over time due to natural variability or human activity. According to Galafassi Diego (71-79), art has transformed climate change engagement into a practical, personal experience, bridging the gap between what we know and what we do about climate change. Through more generative, supporting, and integrative methods, artistic practices have encouraged new processes and offer new options for responding to climate change.

Droughts and flooding have become more common and severe due to climate change (IPCC). It is, therefore, critical to comprehend how communities adapt to these hazard-causing environmental conditions. In addition, Tellman Beth, Sullivan, Kuhn, and Kettner (70-86) state that flood risk is the frequency and severity of incidents, while vulnerability is defined as the people, livelihoods, ecosystems, and assets located where the risk has occurred. Vulnerability is the tendency to lose life, livelihood, property, and other aspects of well-being. Furthermore, flooding impacts most people of any environmental danger and impedes sustainable development. Investing in flood adaptation measures can lessen the loss of lives and livelihoods caused by floods.

Floods and other climate-related disasters have occurred in South Africa, particularly in the Durban and KwaZulu Natal provinces. A severe flood in Durban resulted in multiple deaths and property losses, with the poor living in flood-prone informal settlements in the municipality suffering the most damage (203). In addition, In Alice, at the start of 2020, a massive flood



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damaged almost everything, including businesses and infrastructure, and left thousands homeless.

People are vulnerable, so there was a need to use visual art to raise climate change awareness and educate people through visualization, as humans contribute to climate change.

Drought is a prolonged period of dryness in the natural climate cycle that can occur anywhere on the planet. It is a slow-onset disaster characterized by a rainfall shortage, resulting in a water shortage. Drought can significantly affect health, agriculture, and the environment (World Health Organization 02). Rankoana Sejabaledi (650- 672) states drought has impacted the South African economy and local communities. Drought is expected to worsen the decline in agricultural output, further reducing growth and stability, employment rates, food security, and demand for other goods, as well as poverty reduction in developing countries such as South Africa, where 70% of people live in rural areas dependent on subsistence farming. Socioeconomic droughts, which impact the water resources needed for municipal drinking water applications, result from a lack of supply (92).

Art has helped people visualize the problem and have a personal experience with it. It is especially crucial for climate change awareness because many still consider it an abstract issue that offers no direct threat. Art has helped form group identity and provide individuals with support in resisting climate change. In addition, Moser Susanne (31-53), raised awareness and increased support for climate change tragedy, and art has resulted in significant advances in effectively conveying climate change.

According to Guillard Mary, Navarro, Cortes, and Fleury (20-21), climate change risk perception for two distinct populations, one of which is more vulnerable to droughts and flooding, adaptation to climate change and its local implications (protective behavior and preventative behavior), and place attachment. The process of making changes to mitigate or completely prevent the adverse outcomes of climate change is known as adaptation. In addition, adaptation to climate change is defined as the adjustment process to reduce or avoid the negative impact of climate.

Artists who react to climate change share their interpretations, and art changes at lightning speed. It is claimed that the specific characteristics of art, for example, its ability to stir emotions,



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distinguish this kind of communication from ordinary climate change messages. Given that climate change inaction is associated with a lack of emotional engagement within an audience, this could contribute to increased interest in these issues (21). Thus, art has been an exciting component in a society's response to global environmental change, functioning as an emotional motor of behavior change.

According to Roosen Liselotte, Klockner, and Janet Swim (85-110), art is compared to other communication methods about climate change. For instance, modern environmental art can disturb behavior and sequences and extend the observer space for reflection. Art stimulated by environmental changes relates progressively to the audience's validation for climate engagement, using climate change-connected art events as a study field. The visual arts have been essential in providing new perspectives on climate change for people of all ages. Art offers a setting intended for significant, consolidative, reflexive methods, then spaces for creative imagination, experimentation, and new perspectives. Art also addresses and transforms emotions, creating hope, responsibility, compassion, and solidarity. Thus, skills and climate change education and participation can broaden people's imaginations and empower them to co-create new scenarios for transformational change.

An adaptive capacity complements a system and its components to cope with the impacts of dangerous events. Adaptation is the process whereby human beings are more capable of adapting to actual or expected climatic change, reducing their total vulnerability within a society. Adaptation is the adjustment process or action of households, communities, sectors, and regions to adjust to changes in circumstances, stress, risks, and opportunities. In addition, Adaptation in any society relates to action and measures taken to reduce the endangered of natural and human systems to the actual or expected impact of climate change as well as the adaptation of natural and human systems in response to the practical or desired results of climate change, thereby minimizing damage or benefits. Moreover, adaptation helps people protect their livelihoods, enhancing the potential benefits that can be drawn from it. The IPCC has confirmed why adaptation to climate change is essential for disaster risk management, given the negative impacts of drought. Disaster risks are reduced, while the environmental and human contexts that



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contribute to climate risks are modified through adaptation. This also helps people to plan and respond to the next disaster.

## Methodology

### Introduction

This section discusses the methods used by the researcher for the study. The phrase research methodology refers to various techniques used in studies to gather data, subsequently used to analyze, justify, and predict results.

### Research Design

This study adopted the qualitative research method. According to Silverman David (10-15), qualitative research seeks to learn from the experiences of individuals. Additionally, qualitative research collects non-numerical data, such as text-based videos. Audio to better understand concepts, opinions, or expertise (20-22). This study provided insights into a problem or generate new research ideas. This study addresses the following research objectives: To evaluate the effectiveness of visual arts in raising awareness of climate change in a rural community in Alice, as well as the research question: Does visual art raise awareness of climate change? Effectively in rural communities in Alice?

### Research Paradigm

Johner Abbadia (20-22) states that the strategy, model, or model of supervising research is called a research paradigm. The study will use an interpretive phenomenological approach.

### Sampling and sample size

According to Sharma Gaganpreet (749-750), sampling and sample size refer to the researcher's use of sampling methods to select a small number of representative subjects or people from a predetermined population to serve as subjects. Observational or experimental studies depending on the goals of the study. This study used probability sampling to identify 10 participants. The participation age range will be from 18 to 50 years old. The above author stated that probability sampling is any system in which the probability of selecting everyone is equal. They need more work but are much more precise.



## Visual narrative interpretation.

This section analyses and interprets visual narratives. Critical theory, which is the production and analysis of a body of visual artworks generated as an outcome process focused on studio practice, has been used as a method. Through using visual arts with acrylic paints to raise climate change awareness in rural communities, I have gained a deeper understanding of the power of art as a vehicle for communication and social change. This medium allowed me to create vibrant and eye-catching artworks that capture people's attention and convey the urgency and importance of addressing climate change. Working with acrylic paints has enabled me to experiment with different techniques and styles, allowing me to communicate my concerns about climate change effectively. Whether through abstract or realistic representations, I have experienced how art uniquely conveys complex concepts in a visually engaging and accessible manner. This has been especially critical when engaging with rural communities with limited access to formal education on climate change. The impact of using visual arts to raise climate change awareness in rural communities has been evident in the conversations and inspired actions. The experience of using acrylic paints in my practice to raise climate change awareness in rural communities has been transformative. It has allowed me to create visually striking artworks and fostered community engagement and empowerment.

## Reflection On Practice



**Figure1: FIRE**

**ARTIST: Akhona Totwana**

Painting with wildfire in rural communities has been an effective technique to investigate the impact of climate change and raise awareness about its consequences. Due to climate change, wildfires have become more frequent and severe in many locations, and rural communities are particularly exposed to their devastating impact. Rural villages are frequently densely forested or grassland, making them more vulnerable to wildfires. The painting's purpose was to represent the devastation caused by these fires on the natural landscape, wildlife, and communities. The artwork contributed to raising awareness of the effects of climate change on rural communities. They sparked discussions, pushing citizens to confront the root causes of climate change and strive toward long-term solutions.



**Figure 2: POLLUTION**

**ARTIST: Akhona Totwana**

The painting depicts factory smoke enveloping the globe, a powerful way to address industrial pollution's environmental and social impacts. It raised awareness about industrialization's consequences and prompted viewers to contemplate its environmental and human health effects. The factory smoke in the artwork represents air pollution, a significant result of industrial emissions. It emphasizes the deterioration of the climate and the probable global consequences.

By visualizing these issues, the painting brought climate change to light. Factories in rural areas frequently directly impact the local population's health.



**Figure3: THE BURNING WORLD**

**ARTIST: Akhona Totwana**

In the artwork, it was essential to acknowledge that factories and industrialization have played a significant role in contributing to climate change and profoundly impacted the environment, leading to rising temperatures, more frequent natural disasters, and other severe consequences that lead to health issues and death. It was also worth noting that art can raise awareness about climate change and inspire people to take action and know how it affects their lives.

### INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

The primary goal of this chapter is to compile the data gathered through interviews and field notes, discuss it, and present it in a manner consistent with the study's research objectives. The presenting style highlights the link between the research questions and the themes that emerged from the summary data to highlight the essential responses and insights gathered from the data analysis.

How do you think climate change affects your daily life and the lives of people in your community?



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Have you ever seen or participated in any activities or initiatives related to climate change awareness in your community?

How familiar are you with visual art for communication and expression?

How do you think using visual arts can encourage community engagement and action towards addressing climate change?

Are there any specific messages or themes related to climate change that you believe should be conveyed through visual art in your community?

What role can local artists play in using visual art for climate change awareness in rural communities?

- **How do you think climate change affects your daily life and the lives of people in your community?**

Participant 1: Climate change can lead to more frequent floods and drought, which can lead to damage to property, loss of crops, and disruptions to daily life.

Participant 2: Climate change can lead to extreme weather events, floods, drought, and heatwaves, which can disrupt communities and livelihoods.

Participant 3: Climate change is affecting our daily lives, with severe consequences for health, food supply, and water supply.

Participant 4: Climate change can affect different groups of people in different ways; for example, people who live in areas that are vulnerable to coastal storms, floods, and drought or people who live in poverty, older adults, and immigrant communities may be impacted.

Participant 5: Climate change affects people worldwide, and communities are experiencing the effects in different ways. In some communities, people are experiencing floods and drought; climate change also affects the economy and food security.

- **Have you ever seen or participated in any activities or initiatives related to climate change awareness in your community?**

Participant 1: I have been involved in climate change awareness initiatives like organizing educational campaigns and local sustainability projects to address this important issue.

Participant 2: I have provided information about climate change-related events and initiatives in local communities.



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Participant 3: I have seen climate change events or organizations in my community but have yet to participate.

Participant 4: I do not have physical presence in a community to participate in activities and initiatives that individuals and groups can undertake to raise awareness about climate change in their communities.

- **How familiar are you with visual art for communication and expression?**

Participant 1: I am quite familiar with this topic; visual arts, including painting, sculpture, installation art, and photography, can be used to communicate and express a wide range of ideas and emotions.

Participant 2: Visual art can be used to express societal or environmental issues such as climate change to evoke emotional responses.

Participant 3: I am quite familiar with visual art, but not to the extent that it can communicate and express something.

Participant 4: Yes, I am, but a little bit of reason is that it plays a significant role in communication and expression, allowing for the conveyance of complex ideas, emotions, and narratives in a single glance.

Participant 5: I am familiar with visual art, which has been used in many ways to communicate crucial issues.

- **How do you think using visual art can encourage community engagement and action towards addressing climate change?**

Participant 1: Visual art can be used to create a sense of urgency around the issue of climate change and can inspire people to take action to address the problem. Visual art has the power to mobilize people to take action and make a difference on the issue of climate change.

Participant 2: Visual art has a unique power to engage and inspire people. It can convey the urgency and impact of climate change in a way that words alone often cannot. By using visual art, communities can create a shared language that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers, making it easier to communicate the importance of taking action against climate change.

Participant 3: Visual art can be a potent tool for encouraging community engagement and action on climate change. For one, it can help people see the issue differently.



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Participant 4: Using visual art can encourage community engagement and action toward addressing climate change in several ways. Visual art can help raise awareness about climate change, making the issue more tangible and relatable. When people see an artwork that depicts the consequences of climate change, it can help them understand the issue of climate change; it can help them understand the problem on a more personal level and motivate them to take action.

Participant 5: visual art can inspire people to take action in their own lives, such as reducing their carbon footprint or supporting local environmental initiatives.

- **Are there any specific messages or themes related to climate change that you believe should be conveyed through visual art in your community?**

Participant 1: Many messages and themes related to climate change can be conveyed through visual art. Some include showcasing the consequences of human actions on the environment and inspiring hope and resilience in the face of climate challenges. The goal is to raise awareness, foster empathy, and encourage people to take action.

Participant 2: Several messages and themes related to climate change can be effectively conveyed through visual art. Art can be used to raise awareness about the impact of climate change and illustrate the effects of climate change on human health.

Participant 3: Yes, climate change affects almost everything and can lead to water scarcity and loss of food or crops; visual art can be used to convey those themes and raise awareness.

Participant 4: Several messages or themes related to climate change could be effectively conveyed through visual art in my community. One message could be the importance of individual action, such as conserving water or reducing energy consumption.

Participant 5: Art can be a powerful tool to communicate the message of climate change. Climate change art can help engage people and sometimes even change their behavior, as long as the message is hopeful and gives people ideas for change.

- **What role can local artists play in using visual art for climate change awareness in rural communities?**

Participant 1: Local artists can play a crucial role in using visual art to raise awareness about climate change in rural communities. Rural communities are often disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, and many people in these communities may need access to



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traditional sources of information about the issue. Local artists can reach out to their communities and help to educate and inspire action.

## Conclusion

Visual art has the potential to create climate change awareness in rural communities by bridging the gap between knowledge and local experiences. It communicates complex concepts in a relatable and accessible manner, sparking conversations about climate change and its impact on rural communities. Visual art also cultivates emotional connections with the environment, motivating individuals to act. It inspires creative thinking and imagination, empowering rural communities to envision innovative solutions and adapt to climate change challenges. Community engagement and participation in creating and appreciating visual art foster a sense of ownership and pride in environmental conservation efforts. However, further research is needed to explore its long-term impact and effectiveness and assess the scalability and sustainability of visual art projects in rural areas. Overall, visual art can empower rural communities to take an active role in mitigating and adapting to climate change, contributing to climate justice, and promoting inclusivity and equity in sustainable development efforts.

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