Hackathon hosted to generate solutions to water crisis

Rise, Barclays Africa's innovation hub in Cape Town, recently hosted a water hackathon to help harness the power of collaboration in finding solutions to the Western Cape's current water crisis.

Two consecutive years of drought have severely reduced stream flows into the dams of the Western Cape Water Supply Scheme, according to the City of Cape Town, which has said that the dams are likely to reach "extremely low levels" by the onset of the 2017 winter.

As part of efforts to find solutions, Rise hosted a hackathon – a sprint-like design event – in conjunction with Woolworths Holdings, convening industry experts, policymakers, conservationists, students, community members, scientists and engineers.

Tackling societies biggest challenges

Yasaman Hadjibashi, chief creation officer at Barclays Africa Group

"We are using the Rise co-creation platform to help bring people from various organisations and communities closer so that we can collectively tackle our biggest societal challenges and drive mass implementation of solutions," said Yasaman Hadjibashi, chief creation officer at Barclays Africa Group. "At Rise, we strongly believe that the most powerful way of finding solutions is to bring together the most diverse people, who would not ordinarily cross paths," said Hadjibashi.

Justin Smith, head of Sustainability at Woolworths, said: "At Woolworths, water is a critical input to our products, whether it is food or clothing. The efficient use of water is of utmost importance to enable the business to do what it does. I believe there is no one entity that can single-handedly come up with a solution to the water crisis we face, but that it is rather through collaborative efforts by stakeholders from all sectors that we'll find workable solutions."

Winning idea

Participants in the hackathon event were challenged to generate solutions to improve agricultural, industrial and residential water consumption. The winning idea, proposed by Water Surge, is to create an online and mobile public campaign that uses gamification and integrated social media to encourage behaviour shifts.

Water hackathon judging panel

"This is an innovation that could really help drive water-saving behaviour change across Cape Town, and could potentially be implemented in a short timeframe," said City of Cape Town water and energy efficiency strategist Sarah Rushmere.

Additional hackathon solutions proposed included:

- A modular water storage system that collects rainwater using panels,
- A big data system to track water usage along a supply chain,
- Partnerships with retailers to encourage shoppers to buy products that are produced using water responsibly,
- Voucher and coupon systems to encourage incentives for partnerships between government and the private sector, and
- Helping consumers understand the impact of producing different food groups on water supplies.

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