

LEARNING FROM CRISIS

A series of modular learnings from the 2017-2018
Cape Town water crisis

☺☺☺ THE RESILIENCE SHIFT

THE CAPE TOWN
DROUGHT RESPONSE
LEARNING INITIATIVE

module

12

Openness, partnerships and collaboration

The crisis period was a real-world demonstration of the value and importance of openness, partnerships and collaboration – between spheres of government, with citizens, between water users, among businesses.

Text component of module 12, accompanying the film www.vimeo.com/cinesouth/ctdri-trs-lfc-module-12

Duration: 18:09

Openness, partnerships and collaboration

Experience during the Cape Town water crisis demonstrated the value and importance of transparency, collaboration and partnerships. Early in the crisis the city government decided to start putting much more information out into the public realm, and that made a big difference. Scientists could work with this information and share it, encouraging debate on the basis of facts and evidence, rather than mistrust and suspicion. Intermediary organisations could translate the information and make it accessible for businesses and citizens. The acknowledgement that survival required collaboration and cooperation delivered better results. The lesson that was learnt was to be very transparent right from the start, and to combine this transparency with an open call to partner. The crisis demonstrated the importance of the different spheres of government working together, and the different users of the water system working together. Also in the business sector collaborative groups were pulled together, across industry and between competitors, with government, with civil society, coming together to align thinking and coordinate action.



One of the things that has emerged is the importance of partnerships

Assoc Prof Gina Ziervogel

Being very transparent with all stakeholders right from the start

Helen Davies

You need to be pulling the various stakeholders together to make a difference when these kind of large issues face you

Feroz Koor

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Experience during the Cape Town water crisis demonstrated the value and importance of transparency, collaboration and partnerships
- There was a change in the City of Cape Town’s approach in the course of the crisis, from “we’ll sort this out” to “we’re all in this together” – this acknowledgement that survival required collaboration, cooperation, and the pooling of resources delivered better results
- Early in the crisis the City decided to start putting much more information out into the public realm, and that made a big difference; scientists could work with this information and share it, encouraging debate on the basis of facts and evidence, rather than mistrust and suspicion; intermediary organisations could translate the information and make it accessible for businesses and citizens
- The lesson that was learnt was to be very transparent right from the start, and to combine this transparency with an open call to partner
- The crisis demonstrated the importance of the different spheres of government – local, provincial, national – working together, and the different users of the water system – municipalities and agriculture – working together
- Pulling together collaborative groups also worked in the business sector: across industry, between competitors, with government, with civil society, stakeholders came together to put their heads together to think around the common issue, align thinking, and coordinate action
- In dealing with citizens, officials in city management can tap into people’s intuitive understanding of the difficulties of managing, experienced in the day-to-day challenges and constraints of personal budgets or family circumstances
- The transfer of water from Groenland / Eikenhof at the height of the crisis was made possible by longstanding personal relationships
- City Bulk Water department had very close working relationship with national Department of Water and Sanitation during the drought
- Engineering advisory firm Aurecon supported the City during the drought; having a solid team inside the company that worked together well was critical
- In disaster management, large numbers of people from a range of disciplines and organisations were pulled together to coordinate activity and develop a coherent plan

Interviewees in order of appearance:**Assoc Prof Gina Ziervogel**

Research chair: African Climate and Development Initiative, University of Cape Town

Helen Davies

Chief Director: Green Economy, Western Cape Government

Feroz Koor

Group head of sustainability: Woolworths

Claire Pengelly

Water programme manager: GreenCape

Andrew Boraine

CEO: Western Cape Economic Development Partnership

Thabo Lusithi

Western Cape Water Caucus coordinator: Environmental Monitoring Group

Nathan Geffen

Founder: GroundUp

Barry Wood

Manager: Bulk water, City of Cape Town

Dr Lloyd Fisher-Jeffes

Water resources engineer: Aurecon

Colin Deiner

Chief Director: Disaster Management, Western Cape government

Full interviews on [Cape Town Drought Response Learning Initiative](#) website

Opinions expressed by interviewees are personal viewpoints
and do not necessarily reflect those of their organisations

STRUCTURE

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Hooks:

- One of the things that has emerged is the importance of partnerships (GZ)
- Being very transparent with all stakeholders right from the start (HD)
- You need to be pulling the various stakeholders together to make a difference when these kind of large issues face you (FK)

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PRINCIPLES

- The importance of collaboration and partnerships
- Change in City's approach over the course of the crisis, from "we'll sort this out" to "we're all in this together" (CP)
- Hierarchical view of the world + spin = the opposite of what citizens need; quite soon City decided to put much more information in public realm; this made a big difference (AB)
- Importance of partnerships and working together: across spheres of government, and between different users in the system (GZ)
- The power of collaboration: across industry, between competitors, with government, with civil society; not only in a crisis, but also before there is a crisis (FK)
- Being very transparent with all stakeholders right from the start; transparency and an open call to partner; set those partnerships and relationships up before the crisis (HD)
- As a city manager, you need to find ways to work with the people that you are servicing; be visible, be open to learning, be open-minded; tap into people's own understanding of the difficulty of managing; acknowledge that you need other people in doing this work (TL)
- Advantages of being transparent outweigh disadvantages; journalists and scientists can work with information and help disseminate it (NG)

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FOUR EXAMPLES

- City Bulk Water department had very close working relationship with national Department of Water and Sanitation during the drought (BW)
- The transfer of water from Groenland / Eikenhof at the height of the crisis was made possible by longstanding personal relationships (GZ)
- Having a solid team that worked together well was critical in the support that Aurecon was able to give the City during the drought (LFJ)
- In disaster management, large numbers of people from a range of disciplines and organisations were pulled together to coordinate activity and develop a coherent plan (CD)

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- 00:00:48 “I think the other thing that we really learnt from the crisis is the importance of collaboration and partnerships. I think in the early parts of the crisis, you know, the City of Cape Town was kind of saying to the citizens, don’t worry, we’ve got this, right, we’ll sort you guys out, you play your part, but don’t worry, we’ll sort this out, we’ll build enough new supply to survive. I think when the realisation and the acknowledgement came from the City that actually we were all in this together, and everyone had to play a role, otherwise we weren’t going to survive, and that for that to happen everyone had to collaborate, to pool their resources, they had to try and figure it out, because actually the City didn’t have the answers, nor did any other government sphere, it was everyone within the City and outside that had to try and help contribute to the solutions to get out of the crisis.”
- 00:01:42 “Some people in big municipal institutions – not just the City of Cape Town, but it happens around South Africa, around the world – tend to take quite a hierarchical view of the world: we’re elected, we’re in charge, we’ll tell you what to do. And people react badly to that sort of behaviour, that sort of attitude. It’s not a question of, well, this is a whole of society approach, we all have our bit to do, the public sector will do this, citizens need to do this, businesses need to do that, civil society, academia. If you start off by saying, we’re in charge, we know what to do, don’t worry, that is a very poor starting point for communicating and having your communications well received.”
- “And the other thing I, you know, a lot of what institutions of governance or government tend to do is that they are constantly trying to filter or spin the information, trying to put on the best side. When actually what citizens need, what businesses need, is the full picture, in a transparent way. And I think that what did happen quite soon is that the City did decide, took a decision to start putting much more information out into the public realm, and that made a big difference. Scientists could look at it and say they agreed or disagreed, but it encouraged debate, on the basis of facts and information and evidence, rather than suspicion and mistrust and fake news, and citizens, because groups like WWF started taking this information, or GreenCape started taking this information, and translating it into more accessible documentation, for businesses and for citizens that immediately empowered people to stop reacting as atomised individuals and start working together through citizen action, business action, to cooperate with the public authorities and to start turning the crisis around.”
- 00:04:11 “So one of the things that has emerged is the importance of partnerships, that you have to work together, different partners need to be involved in the responses, you need to work across spheres of government, the City needs to work with provincial government, who needs to work with national government,

but there are also other actors in the system, whether it's farmers, whether it's other landowners, and they all need to find a way to collaborate.”

00:04:32 “The power of collaboration. And across industry, between competitors, with government, with civil society, so when everybody came together to put their heads together to think around a common issue, I think the ability to – we couldn't influence the availability of water, but we could influence the planning around what to do. You need to be pulling the various stakeholders together to make a difference when these kind of large issues face you. But also I think it's about forward planning, and sometimes it's, can we, we get so caught up in the day to day that we don't have time to do these kind of things, but it might be better to pull these kind of collaborative groups earlier and have broader engagements so that you don't do it when you have to do it, you can forecast it happening and try to avoid having to go out there and say, people, there's going to be Day Zero and you're going to have to stand in a queue for water.”

00:05:28 “Being very transparent with all stakeholders right from the start; I think being open what City can control and what it has no control over; so I think something like rainfall is acknowledging how important rainfall is in terms of the water supply system. And that how much it rains is beyond the City's control. So I think that transparency, and then linked with that transparency is an open call to partner. And so for me the lesson learnt there is for us not to wait until another crisis is imminent before we look to build partnerships, but to look right now at how to set up ongoing partnerships with business, with civil society, so that as something starts becoming more pressing and potentially a crisis that we have those partnerships and relationships of trust built up.”

00:06:19 “You need to work with the people. You know, you need to find ways of how then do you work with the people that you are servicing. You need to be visible, you need to be out there, you need to be open to learning, you need to be open-minded, you know, so for me that's critical. And also be meaningful, when you're doing those participations, or those engagements with communities, do say when you are struggling, do say when this is not feasible, you know, people do have their own budgets at their households, you know, people do have children that they're also managing, you know, they know the difficulties of managing, I think tap into what people are already doing, people have stokvels, you know, people are already having things that they know that difficult, you know, people are not expecting the City to do or the city manager to come up with the solutions, you know, some solutions are there with the people on the ground or those communities. I think for me it's firstly acknowledging that, that you are also a human being as much as you are a city manager, that you also need other people to assist you to do this work.”

00:07:23 “When a city plays open cards, when it's transparent, when it provides information to its citizens, to its residents, to the scientists in the city, not

necessarily those just working for the City, but at universities, it's likely to be beneficial, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. And so by being open there are a lot of other people who could come, like GroundUp, like the UCT scientists, who could use that information that the City provided, and inform other residents, so the knowledge disseminated. That was a much better approach than holding back information."

00:08:07 "The other area that, you know, needs to be carefully worked through in these kind of scenarios is relationships with your stakeholders and other partners in the water supply system. We do abstract most of our water from dams owned and operated by the national Department of Water and Sanitation. We had during the crisis a very close working relationship with them in terms of where we were drawing our water, and there were regular drought meetings which they convened, with all the different role-players from ourselves as the City of Cape Town, but also the other municipalities surrounding us, as well as agriculture and the different irrigation boards."

"So it is important to build trust across the different stakeholders in your system, and that you work together. You cannot fight with one another while you're facing a crisis."

"And then on the provincial government side they were really providing a lot of support around the disaster response, and trying to facilitate that not only in the city of Cape Town, but also in the surrounding areas, because their mandate obviously extends beyond where the City of Cape Town operates."

"So, you know, my experience is that, you know, you've just got to try and work together and have a common purpose and try and overcome the obstacles that a crisis might throw at you."

00:09:49 "One of the ways that the City got additional water into the system in the early months of 2018 was through a transfer of water from Eikenhof dam and the Groenland farmers. And what's interesting about this story is it's really about long-term relationships. And so one of the officials from the Department of Water and Sanitation who's worked in the Western Cape for thirty years was speaking to these farmers and they said, but we've got water in our dams, why should we have to have 60% restrictions? And he said, that's fine, but are you able to transfer some of this water to the City of Cape Town's water supply system? And they said, OK, we can do that. They didn't get paid for it, they ceded the water, so they gave it to the City of Cape Town, so that they didn't have to be as heavily restricted. Importantly, the Department of Water and Sanitation had to pay Eskom, the power providers, to pump the water into the Western Cape system, and then the City of Cape Town paid the Department of Water for that electricity, and effectively for the water."

“And one of the stories around this is about how this agreement happened. So instead of signing a formal agreement, the person from the Department of Water and Sanitation who’d known these people for decades, did it on a handshake, and really trusted them and said, will you go through with this, and they said, yes, we will. So that’s a wonderful story about how personal relations are important, understanding the system, where water is, how things work, and using the current regulatory system to enable it.”

00:11:25

“I’ve been fortunate to experience different aspects of the drought, and I think one of the key ones that affected a number of places was the value of having teams that, and the personal relationships in those teams. So whether it was the personal relationship between City officials and Water Affairs officials to facilitate things happening, or personal relationships and having a solid team that you can rely on back at Aurecon, where we had people working in the Tshwane office, with teams down here but we all collaborated and, you know, you brought in expertise from a range of things, so we had experienced planners, experienced hydrologists, engineers, everything coming together to work that. I don’t think our support of the City could have been possible without that team, I don’t think anyone holds all the knowledge and I think the City also recognised that, with things like the section 80 committee, where they brought in others, that for me at least, that was one important learning, is that the team, that having a solid team that works together well is critical for getting through.”

“I think if I ever have to be in a similar situation, in terms of another city, hopefully not Cape Town, it would be that they need to get their message out there as quickly as possible, as clearly as possible, and also share what they’re doing. I think as a sector often we provide water or we do this work, but a lot of what goes, happens in the background, never gets to the fore, and I think a lot of people who deserve a lot of recognition from the City and from Water Affairs and from other stakeholders that had been involved – agriculture – will never get that recognition, because, well, we don’t recognise them, and I think that’s part of where the, could be a good way of solving some of the unhappiness in that you only really realise how much people are doing for you and that you can’t really be unhappy, unless you know what they’re doing. So, I mean I definitely learned that in my experience, and I think many Capetonians would be quite shocked at how hard people from private sector, public, government at all levels, have worked to get through this drought. And that doesn’t diminish the role that all those individuals played in terms of getting through the drought – without the citizens’ reaction in reducing at fifty percent, or their demand hugely, it wasn’t quite fifty, but reducing their demand hugely, we wouldn’t have got through the drought, but equally so without all the work that was done by various in essence small number of people in various stages of government, we wouldn’t have got through, so I think getting the message out there also helps build a bit of a team

spirit, like, we know what you're going through, or thank you sort of vibe, sort of idea, you know, like thank you, you can show appreciation and understand what others are going through. I think I would definitely encourage people to do that more."

00:14:56

"The strong thing about disaster management is the kind of relationships you build up. So for example, you know, what we learnt in the drought in 2010, a lot of the people we met there, especially on the agricultural side, were people we could rely on again. Building relationships is extremely important. You had, for example with the Knysna fires, we built a field hospital; now we had health issues with the drought, you had the same people that you are calling to your meetings. The other nice thing about, or good thing about disaster management is you don't just have to work with the people within your government – you can bring in national government, you can bring in NGOs, you can bring in agricultural forums, you know, so whoever you need, and even specialists, private specialists, everybody becomes part of that command system that you develop for a major incident, and everybody then has a role to play. And I think that was what was important for us, so it wasn't oversight as much as it was coordination. And that was really the important thing. Everybody must know what the other one is doing, and when that starts happening then you really break down the silos and everybody can sort of pull in the same direction."

"The advantage of us activating our disaster management centre under the provincial declaration allowed us to bring in all those different organisations, whether they were government departments, whether they were NGOs, whether they were representatives of organised agriculture, you know, whoever it was, volunteers, experts, those are the people that we could bring in and we could have access to on a daily basis, so at one stage we had them there every day, and then the idea having everybody in the disaster centre every day, it was late in 2017, was that they could have their plans done. And while you've got one component like health for example planning, just across the table from them you have the humanitarian people, so they could immediately interact, and we wanted to walk out of there with the plans in place. It took a month. We got all that in place. Then we had everybody there three days a week, and then we had them there twice a week. And so we carried on and as we got through the summer and that included almost eighty different organisations, and it depended on the amount of representation you had, so all the provincial departments were there, large number of national departments, your security services, the police, the defence force, state security, they were all there. And everybody was looking at their specific component of the situation, and they would then come in and they would contribute, you know, to the larger picture, and that way we could keep our hand on pretty much everything that was happening."

Source material from the Cape Town Drought Response Film Library,
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