

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

8

Inequality and social cohesion in a crisis

The crisis highlighted the plight of half a million poor Capetonians effectively living Day Zero all the time. While it made social differences more stark, there was convergence of water usage across income groups.

Text component of module 8, accompanying the film www.vimeo.com/cinesouth/ctdri-trs-lfc-module-8

Duration: 17:37

Inequality and social cohesion in a crisis

As suburban Capetonians were struggling to come to terms with water scarcity and the need to drastically reduce their water consumption, it was often overlooked that half a million people in the city – about one in eight – living in either informal settlements or informal structures in backyards, effectively endure Day Zero conditions all the time. Some informal settlement dwellers have to walk five minutes to the nearest tap or toilet, and then queue for twenty minutes to fill a bucket of water for the day. The crisis brought into sharp relief the city's stark socio-economic divides, raising serious moral questions, as the well-off were able to avail themselves of solutions out of reach for the poor – whether buying bottled water, installing rainwater tanks or drilling boreholes. On the other hand there was also a large degree of convergence – starting from dramatic differences before the crisis – in water usage levels across income groups during the crisis. For the city's future water strategy to be holistic, it will have to take the needs of the people in informal settlements very seriously, and integrate these into the overall plan.



Who has access to water and who doesn't, and the question of the haves and the have-nots, and those who can afford to buy water and those who can't afford to buy water, making social differences more stark

Feroz Koor

There's another side to this problem, there's another challenge, there's another thing to understand: people who've literally been living Day Zero since they've moved into an informal settlement

Charlton Ziervogel

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- While the prospect of manual collection of daily rations of water scared Capetonians accustomed to reticulated water supply, the reality is that a substantial proportion of Cape Town's population live under Day Zero conditions whether there is a drought or not
- It is not unusual for an informal settlement dweller to have to walk 5 minutes to a tap or toilet, queue for 20 minutes to get 25 litres of water for the day, and carry the water to her home in a bucket on her head
- Municipalities aim to supply one toilet for every 5 households and one tap for every 20 households
- In reality, in some instances the ratios in informal settlements are as high as 50 to 70 households per toilet and 140 households per tap
- There are 140,000 households in Cape Town living in informality, amounting to more than 500,000 people, out of the city's total population of around 4 million; they use only 5% of the city's water
- Communities in informal settlements had already come up with innovative and resilient solutions to living with water scarcity, and would have been able to teach many lessons to middle-class households coming to terms with it during the crisis
- The crisis made existing social differences more stark, with some people able to buy bottled water, install rainwater tanks, drill boreholes, or planning to leave the city for overseas or holiday homes elsewhere in the event of a serious crisis; this raised serious moral questions around access to basic necessities during a crisis
- Usage levels across income groups converged during the crisis: before the crisis high-income households were consuming dramatically more water than low-income households; usage data show high-income household consumption levels steadily declining over the crisis period, and at the peak of the drought even overtaking low-income household consumption
- Research interviews confirm households across the board making behavioural changes; as opposed to the divisiveness, free-riding and finger-pointing which was often emphasised, there was also cooperation and community-building
- The city's new water strategy needs to take people in informal settlements and their situation very seriously, and integrate it into the overall plan; part of the challenge is that improved access to water (such as flush toilets) will increase total water demand

Interviewees in order of appearance:

Feroz Koor

Group head of sustainability: Woolworths

Charlton Ziervogel

Managing Director: Community Organisation Resource Centre

Mavis Manyati

Community leader: Block 6, Philippi

Prof Martine Visser

Professor: School of Economics, University of Cape Town

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

STRUCTURE

- 00:00:05 Hooks:
- The crisis made social differences more stark (FK)
 - There's another side to this problem: people who've been living Day Zero since they moved into an informal settlement (CZ)
- 00:00:59 **THE EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE OF AN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT DWELLER**
- Uses 25 litres of water per day; walks 5 minutes from her home to the nearest tap, then queues for 20 minutes; carries the water in a bucket on her head to her house; walks 5 minutes from her home to the nearest toilet, that is often flooded or blocked
 - 728 households in her settlement, with 2,076 people; between them they have 6 taps (MM)
- 00:03:32 **ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES: ISSUES AROUND RATIOS AND QUALITY**
- 140,000 households in Cape Town living in informality (informal settlements and informal structures in backyards), amounting to well over 500,000 people
 - Municipalities in South Africa aim for ratios of 5 households per toilet and 20 households per tap, both within 100 to 200 metres walking distance – international standard for emergency situations
 - Reality in Cape Town sometimes much worse, with 50 to 70 families sharing a toilet, and as many as 140 families sharing a tap
 - And quality of service delivery can also be an issue (CZ)
- 00:11:27 **SOCIAL DIFFERENCES WERE EXACERBATED DURING THE CRISIS ...**
- The crisis made social differences more stark, with some people able to buy bottled water, install rainwater tanks, drill boreholes, planning to leave the city for overseas or holiday homes elsewhere in the event of a serious crisis – raising moral questions (FK)
- 00:12:28 **... BUT THERE WAS ALSO CONVERGENCE IN USAGE**
- Before the crisis high-income households were consuming dramatically more water than low-income households; during the crisis usage levels converged across income levels (MV)
- 00:14:45 **TO BE HOLISTIC, FUTURE WATER STRATEGY HAS TO TAKE INFORMAL SETTLEMENT DWELLERS INTO ACCOUNT**
- Big proposition: nothing for us without us (CZ)

INDEX

- 00:00:59 People living in informal settlements tended to complain that it was the more well-off people living in the suburbs who were using more water, with their pools, baths and showers – all non-existent in informal settlements; the suburbanites in turn used to complain that it was the people in informal settlements who were wasting water.
- “I use 25 litre per day for washing, for me to wash and to cook ... and I take 5 minutes to go to the tap to fetch some water, 5 minutes from my house, and then I queue for more than 20 minutes; I carry the water from the tap by putting it here [on my head], then to my house. It’s 5 minutes to go to the toilet; we are sharing the toilets, who are always blocked ... That thing is a challenge and is a mess because there’s always flooding, drainage, and blockage of the toilets.”
- There are 728 households in her settlement; 2,076 people who are living there; between them they have 6 taps. “When they are broken, the City takes long time to maintain. That is a challenge to us.”
- 00:03:32 Ratios municipalities try to aim for in South Africa: 5 households per toilet, within 100 or 200 metres walking distance; 20 households per tap, within a similar walking distance. These figures are considered acceptable [internationally] in terms of emergency relief. “The reality inside of informal settlements is that people live with a situation that is much worse ... and in some settlements where you’ve got high density and a high population, you can easily get in excess of 140 families sharing one tap or 50 to 70 families having to access a toilet. There are instances where there are areas that are better than others, but overall ... the reality is that many people, this half a million that we speak of, have an access to basic services which is quite low, and then the quality of the service can also be problematic.”
- In Cape Town there are over 140,000 households living in informality, which is defined to include people living in informal settlements (collections of shacks constructed of zinc, cardboard, plastic) and people living in similar structures in backyards of formal homes. “Both sets of people have issues around access to basic services.” These over 140,000 households easily number more than 500,000 individuals in Cape Town – “so it’s quite a significant proportion of the population that is essentially living in a situation where they don’t have good or decent access to basic services; and then on the flipside Cape Town is known for being the Mother City, major tourist attraction, often saying having European-level infrastructure, but there’s two sides to the story.”
- “There was clearly a misconception around what life is actually like inside of those informal settlements and what access to water actually looks like. So this thing that many middle-class people were fearing, which was I’m going to have to pick up a can and go and stand in a line for who knows how long to get my ration of

water was the reality for informal settlement dwellers every day ... The informal settlements use about 5% of the city's water supply. And so now if you think of that 5% for that half a million people, and Cape Town is maybe four and a half million – three and a half / four million – you suddenly realise that that is a very very bad misconception.”

“The challenges that the informal settlement communities were facing are so different to what was happening in terms of this fear that was starting to well up inside of basically the middle class in the city ... We deal with people who've literally been living Day Zero since they've moved into an informal settlement. There's always not enough water, queueing for water was a reality, not something that you have to think, oh, but what's going to happen? how am I going to get by? This idea of people having to reduce their consumption, which I know had lots of people who live in formal houses thinking, how am I going to do this? 87 litres per person is such a little, and now you want us to go down to 50 litres per person, and we're working with communities who can have a hundred, two hundred people queueing at a tap in the morning, trying to collect one bucket of water to see to their daily needs, which could be like 25 litres for the day per person, or for a family. So the challenge, the experience was different.”

“If anything, we were looking at this and saying: how do we get others to actually see the innovative and resilient solutions that these communities have already developed in terms of tackling scarcity of water? If anything, they could probably show a household how to get by on way less water than what we are used to ... So our experience in terms of the drought space was a very different one. Our job was to try and get that voice in there, to get people to understand, OK yes, the drought is a major problem, it's a concern, but there are a whole set of people who have a different experience.”

00:11:27

“Given where we were going, it could also exacerbate a situation of haves and have-nots ... What about people who can't afford to buy [bottled] water? Must we force them to stand in queues while the privileged can buy water? And what about all those people who could sink boreholes? And, I mean, we had areas where people were still watering their lawns [with borehole water], and they felt it's my right to, I'm drawing, but I mean that's a common resource ... If you have to start thinking about it from the bigger perspective of what does it say about society, and who has access to these kind of basic necessities? I mean, either you can buy your way out of the problem, or you suffer, and then there are those who are even more privileged – you just leave the city of Cape Town, so there were considerable people who were saying, I'll go to Johannesburg, or I go overseas, or I go to my holiday house, and these were genuine conversations you had, and then you just realised that it also causes the inequality to be much more pronounced.”

00:12:28

“One of the things that I find really fascinating about citizens’ response to the Cape Town drought was if you look at sort of a graphic of different income quintiles and how they behaved over time, you start off at the beginning of the drought with high-income households consuming dramatically more than low-income households, and over time, as the drought escalated, these [high-income] households came down, came down, came down until high- and low-income households converged in their consumption, and at some point, at the peak of the drought, the high-income households even overtook the low-income households. And one may argue that they had more access to resources, installing rainwater tanks, some of them being able to access borehole water, and so a certain sector of the population going sort of off the grid, but to a large extent I would also argue that those households in some sense stepped in where the City wasn’t able to deliver. But as a whole, we see that all these groups made drastic changes to their consumption over time and really made a behavioural effort. We interviewed households, and it’s clear that across the board everybody were going around carrying water in buckets from the shower to flush the loo, for instance, and for me it’s a really empowering message of how a city as divided as Cape Town can come together and really made a change; make a change and really sort of save itself from this imminent crisis, and I think that is a very heartening thought for other cities as well, that citizens can come together like this and make a massive change. And in some sense that is also community building, rather than being divisive and being about finger-pointing, that people realise that they could make a difference, but that everybody had to work together. So, it’s like really from a behavioural insights perspective the message of cooperation, that people stop free-riding and relying on others’ behaviour but rather come together and that everybody makes a huge effort, and in the Cape Town case we really saw that.”

00:14:45

“As I sit here today and think about the area of work that I’m involved in, that our organisation is involved in – informality in the city of Cape Town – it raises a lot of questions around where are we going? How are we going to tackle this in the future? Because we *are* pushing for increased access to basic services for these informal settlements, and ideal is this aim for a flush toilet, for example, and it does beg the question that this means increased water usage, so how do you balance that equation, how do you bring a half a million people who are basically living in Day Zero conditions up to a standard that is OK, but in an environment where Cape Town’s water situation is going to get probably, this might be the new normal for us for the next decade.”

“The solution is a complex one, but our big proposition is that, and I’m going to refer back to something our community partners always say, is: nothing for us without us. And I think that’s the big issue here, is like, this [the city’s new water] strategy, to be a holistic one, it needs to take informal settlements and their situation very seriously, and integrate it into the overall plan. I mean you want an

holistic strategy, and part of that is definitely having to consider the people that actually have a very different relationship to water than the majority.”

Produced by the [Cape Town Drought Response Learning Initiative](#) for [The Resilience Shift](#)

Interviewer: [Peter Willis](#)

Film and text: [Victor van Aswegen](#)

18 February 2020