**Cape Town Drought Response Film Library**

**Gina Ziervogel interview | 25 October 2018 | Duration: 1:01:22**

**KEY POINTS**

* One of the biggest lessons coming out of the drought is the importance of partnerships
* The city government / national government interface was one of the challenges
* There were both positive and negative sides to Day Zero communication
* There has been a shift within Cape Town city government thinking towards greater self-sufficiency to ensure its own security of supply; this is in line with a worldwide trend of national governments being slow to take action to adapt to climate change and cities taking on this responsibility as a result
* Data availability and access very important, including availability to citizens; this improved during the course of the crisis but one of the lessons is that data has to be available at the beginning to help build public trust and an understanding of what is happening
* Very little evidence of leadership from national level and the national DWS on this issue
* Experience of more than a decade with water demand management helped
* Tension between water resilience and fiscal resilience: lower use means less revenue
* Limited capacity within the city government to handle stories on social media
* Lessons we can learn from the crisis: 1) embrace a systems approach to managing water; 2) strengthen the horizontal management of water within local governments; 3) understand the local water system; 4) the capacity to manage a crisis is best developed before the crisis; 5) the limitations of the financial model for water need to be recognised; 6) understand the intricacies of water governance; 7) create a network system of supply; 8) invest in partnerships beyond the city government; 9) share information about the water situation to build public trust; 10) actively seek external expertise and advice

* It is normally very difficult to get people to respond and adapt to climate impacts, but the water crisis gave everybody in the city a sense of what a significant climate impact looks like and what happens when we are not prepared; we should therefore use this experience – where citizens gained a lived sense of what it might mean in the future and therefore of how important it is to put in place things now – as a catalyst for action.

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00:00:05 During the drought one of the challenges was how the city government interfaced with the national government; how local, provincial and national government worked together: interfaced well at a technical level, but there were often challenges and breakdowns at leadership level; “to respond to a crisis you really need to be flexible”: city government was able to exhibit flexibility in some of its internal responses but when they had to depend on national government it was often very hard to act with the same degree of flexibility; national government’s delays inhibited the city government’s flexibility

00:01:58 Water Resilience Task Team instituted at beginning of winter 2017 rainfall period; initial augmentation plans; delays were helpful to create time to ask whether this was the right strategy or not; shift to water demand management in October 2017; World Bank experts also in October 2017; story developing where city government put in place communications; pronouncement by mayor De Lille January 2018

00:05:39 Positive and negative sides to Day Zero communication

00:07:01 Reliance on surface water supplied by national government; shift within city government thinking towards greater self-sufficiency

00:09:24 “One of the things that the drought has really shown us is just how connected we are to water and to the water supply system”; challenges with water supply to a city when the water does not come from within the city; alien vegetation in the catchment areas taking water from the WCWSS; but because of the governance structure the city government often does not have control over that; “so one of the things that has emerged is the importance of partnerships”

00:10:57 Issue of insufficient data: you need data to make decisions; data availability and access very important; also data available to citizens; improvement in data availability and accessibility over the course of the crisis; one of the lessons is that data has to be available at the beginning; “if the city government can share that at the beginning it can help to build public trust and an understanding of what is happening within the city and what role cities have in water management”; national department: gaps in data and modelling

00:12:52 Critical: managing the water supply and how water was transferred between the Big Six dams during the crisis

00:13:30 Business sector; partnerships emerged during the drought that facilitated collaboration between government and the business sector; in the end this was a success story; challenges around businesses accessing their own water; normally it takes the national department over three hundred days to process licence applications; this was sped up during the crisis, but it does bring up questions; also issue around the standard of that water

00:16:08 Drought was the first national disaster that South Africa has ever had, “yet there was very little evidence of leadership from national level and the national DWS on this issue”

00:16:57 Questions around how water is governed; if a city has capacity should it take on more responsibility?; but current structuring of mandates might be an impediment to this; because capacity is sometimes lacking in other municipalities, the national department is thinking about going the opposite direction and taking responsibility away from them; precedent for municipalities taking on responsibility for something that’s not in their mandate: provision of housing

00:18:27 In many countries there’s been a delay from national governments to take action to adapt to climate change; “so what we’ve seen across the world is cities taking on this responsibility, putting in place adaptation responses that make sure that they are ready for the climate impacts”; Cape Town city government moving towards ensuring its own security of supply, so this can be seen as an adaptation response where the city government wants to make sure the city is well adapted and prepared; “unfortunately often these measures are being undermined by the governance system across spheres, so if your national department is not able to support you in your water response strategy it often becomes quite hard to follow through with that”

00:19:30 Groenland / Eikenhof transfer; story illustrates how longstanding personal relationships and detailed understanding of the system can be used to optimise resources within the framework of an existing regulatory system

00:21:10 Assurance level of supply related to the severity of the drought; businesses require higher levels of supply assurance than households; pricing can be differentiated to take account of different assurance levels required by various categories of water users; large numbers of households not able to pay for water and are being cross-subsidised by users who are paying

00:24:29 Water demand management; city government has had a water demand management division for over ten years; “so when there was a crisis they were able to scale things up rapidly rather than trying new things in the midst of a crisis”; pressure management reduction; water demand management devices

00:27:04 Reduction in use also means reduction in revenue from water sales; there is a tension between water resilience and fiscal resilience

00:29:03 City government’s limited ability to handle often unfounded and unhelpful stories being shared on social media

00:29:55 Huge amount of technical capacity within city and provincial government; also ability to draw on expertise from outside city government; this could have been done in a more structured way and more use could have been made of external resources; not enough space for learning and reflection that are actually really important when you’re trying to get your response right

00:31:50 Holistic response; transversal management in city government; drought was opportunity to embrace transversal management; it worked in some ways and did not work in others; instances of cross-departmental collaboration and instances of failure of collaboration

00:34:24 One of the biggest lessons coming out of the drought is the importance of partnerships; initial approach of city government alienated some of the groups that wanted to help; other instances where partnerships and collaboration did emerge successfully; “the more we can engage across different groups, the more we can work together and find ways to address this problem collaboratively”

00:36:00 An ongoing crisis like this takes its toll on the individuals involved; building a resilient city requires thinking about the psychological well-being of the people in the city government

00:36:56 Tensions between politicians and technocrats in decision-making; speaks to bigger point of how politicians and technocrats should engage

00:39:11 Engagement of academics and technical experts by city government

00:40:21 We need to have better systems to link up the research and information that does exist with people who are asking the questions

00:40:57 Some research is only now starting to feed into the city’s responses; an example is the research on stormwater management and sustainable urban drainage; previously this was not really embraced by the city government but after the crisis the need for it is more apparent, “which shows why it is so important to have that research in place, so that when the system is ready to take it on it exists”

00:41:51 During the crisis a lot of demand for information, and academics played an important role in this; Section 80 Committee is a way of bringing on board outside experts; it played an important role but could have been better utilised

00:44:59 Her professional involvement in work around the drought from a number of angles; interviewed over twenty key people involved in the government drought response at national, provincial and city level

00:46:30 What needs to be done for Cape Town to become more water resilient: need to have more of a systems understanding, become more flexible, understand the environment but also understand the people, understand the pressures on the system, take a long-term view; think about what water means across scales; understand each of these scales and understand what’s happening; need to strengthen partnerships; it is clear that responsibility for water “can no longer be just the remit of the city government; it has to be a partnership”; “we have to collaborate across sectors and across scales and that requires partnerships and working together”; need to recognise the high levels of inequality in the city and take the water and sanitation needs and views of the urban poor into consideration; “the richness is in the diversity, but to really embrace a water resilient city we need to take on all of these perspectives”

00:49:51 The reasons the drought escalated into a crisis: main reason is climate related; city’s water supply system is not designed to cope with three consecutive years of below-average rainfall; on top of this a number of other issues exacerbated the reduction in water supply; there were challenges in the governance of the system: “the national department and their engagement with the city was strained in terms of managing the WCWSS, and this really put pressure on the system because in previous years restrictions weren’t enforced or there hadn’t been enough understanding of water availability, around who was using what water, and so that created some questions around water supply and who was getting what and how much would be available”

00:50:51 From a governance perspective, what enabled us to cope with the crisis and get out of it and what were the challenges that made it more extreme? challenges: poor coordination between the spheres of government, between city, provincial and national government; poor coordination and collaboration between political representatives, technical experts and strategic managers; capacity challenges, particularly with national DWS; enablers: the way city government worked with provincial government to support businesses; local and international expertise drawn on; city of Cape Town’s water management department was able to work collaboratively across different departments and with politicians to implement responses: “because they were able to develop these relationships and work collaboratively it meant that there was significant reduction in water use which actually got us out of the crisis”

00:53:30 What were the challenges and enablers relating to information and communication around the drought? challenges: there wasn’t sufficient available data or communication at the beginning of the drought; mixed messages from government around what should be done, which was confusing for many people; enablers: water dashboard; water outlook summary; a lot of really well developed communication material from the city government

00:55:18 Lessons that we can learn: 1) embrace a systems approach to managing water; 2) strengthen the horizontal management of water within local governments; 3) understand the local water system; 4) the capacity to manage a crisis is best developed before the crisis; 5) the limitations of the financial model for water need to be recognised; 6) understand the intricacies of water governance; 7) create a network system of supply; 8) invest in partnerships beyond the city government; 9) share information about the water situation to build public trust; 10) actively seek external expertise and advice

00:59:21 “I’ve always been interested in adaptation to climate change, how people and organisations respond to climate impacts and how hard it is to get people to do that, because it seems as though only when they’re directly faced with it do they want to respond. And so for me this drought has been a really important opportunity where I’ve seen the whole of Cape Town, from citizens across the board to businesses to the city government to the national government, go ‘this is what a significant climate impact looks like, oh dear, we are not prepared’ and so I really feel we need to use this opportunity to experience what needs to be done in terms of adapting to climate change. We need to see how important it is to put in place measures now that can help us cope better with impacts that we are going to face in the future. So I hope that citizens who normally felt a bit disconnected from nature, from climate impacts, from what it means, now have a lived sense of what it might mean in the future, and therefore how important it is to put in place things now, for future change.”

**BIO**

Associate Professor Gina Ziervogel is AXA Research Chair with the African Climate & Development Initiative (ACDI) at UCT. A geographer by training, with a PhD in Geography from the University of Oxford, she has 18 years of experience in the field of adaptation and vulnerability to global environmental change. Her research areas include municipal adaptation strategies, adaptation governance, institutional barriers and enablers to adaptation and transdisciplinary processes for urban transformation. During the 2017-18 Cape Town drought she was invited by the City of Cape Town to sit on its Section 80 Water Advisory Committee. Gina has been part of the Drought Response Learning Initiative since its inception in March 2018.

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