



POLITICS AND DISASTER RESPONSE

CAPE TOWN'S WATER CRISIS or 'DAY ZERO' – 2 SEPTEMBER 2019

Jerome van Rooij, Co-director, African Climate Finance Hub





CLIMATIC AND GOVERNANCE CONTEXT

- SA/WC is prone to important cyclical drought events (e.g., 1920s/30s, 1970s & 1990s)
- Responsibility for water provision is divided between the 3 spheres of government:
 1. National government - major water infrastructure.
 2. Provincial government - oversight and support.
 3. Local government – water supply systems.
- Disaster relief is a shared mandate (concurrent national & provincial legislative competencies, with local level empowered to deal with number of closely related functions)
- WC is the only province run by an opposition party (the DA since 2008), which also controls Cape Town metro. Consequently, rumours of deliberate political subversion by the ANC have abounded.

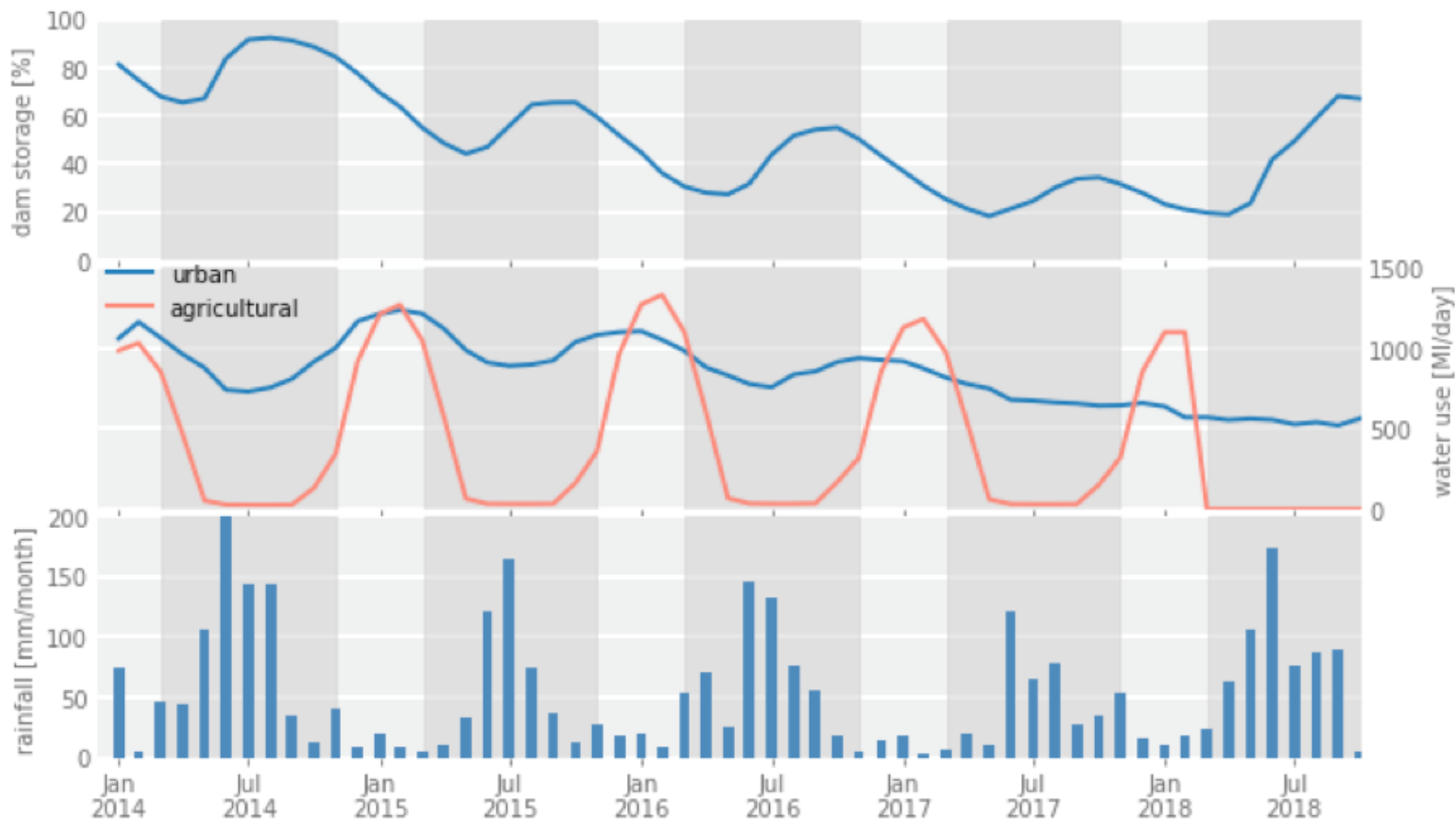




CRISIS AT A GLANCE

- WC rainfall June 2015 - June 2018 was 50 - 70% of the long-term average
- 2016 studies estimated probability of rainfall being low again in 2017 at 1 in 1000; many rainfall records in 2017 were the lowest ever registered (since the 1880s³)
- Cape Town's water consumption fell from a ~1,200 Ml/day high in 2015 to a low of <500 in early 2018; only city to achieve such reduction without interrupting supply [IWA award 2018]
- In July 2017 'Day Zero' was projected for March 2018; by June 2018 it was off the table altogether for 2019





Dam levels, urban and agricultural use and rainfall in the Western Cape from 2014 to 2018



HOW IT PLAYED OUT IN PARLIAMENT 1 (National Assembly debate 08/03/2018¹)

ANC Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation Pamela Tshwete:

"We are sick and tired of giving you [the DA-run Western Cape] money and you do nothing and keep blaming national government!"; "We don't politicise water. You do. You politicise water!"; "We must always give money to them, as if they're the only ones experiencing the drought"

DA MP Leon Basson:

"Shame on the ANC government!"; "The system failed at the level of national government."; "It is clear national government dropped the ball."





HOW IT PLAYED OUT IN PARLIAMENT 2

EFF MP Sam Matiase:

"The juvenile behaviour of the ANC and DA is not helpful and must stop."

NFP MP Munzoor Shaik-Emam:

The crisis was caused by "sheer negligence, recklessness and poor management"; "There is plenty of water!"; "They wanted to create a crisis to give a tender and get money for the 2019 elections."





INTER-SPHERE DYNAMICS: DEPT OF WATER & SANITATION

Although DWS restrictions on agriculture were escalated (up to 60% in Dec 2017):

- Not effectively enforced prior to 2017/18 summer irrigation season (when Minister deploys additional teams from elsewhere)

- For 2016/17 effected too late in season

[For urban use, the City's restriction levels tended to precede DWS']

Showed lack of leadership (incl. on communication campaign), slow to make available infrastructure funding

In Feb. 2017 Cape Town Mayor appeals to DWS for relief funding.

Regional departmental director opposes the request, saying:

"Although the water situation is concerning, it is not yet at crisis level ... We still have time for intervention"

WC Premier Helen Zille later observes:

"We soon learnt why the department was so determined to avoid... fork(ing) out money for capital infrastructure. They had none. By that stage the department was already R4.3bn in the red..."





INTER-SPHERE DYNAMICS: NATIONAL TREASURY

NT's Cities Support Programme engaged 2 international experts via WB in late 2017; advise prioritizing demand management over augmentation, and groundwater over desalination (akin to City technocrats' view)

Grants City special permission to raise water tariffs more than once in a year (financial incentive & additional revenue)





CITY-LEVEL DYNAMICS

Responsibility for drought response during 2017 passed from City's DWS to WRTT in Directorate of Mayor, to Mayor herself, and then back to DWS in early 2018; - trust issues (NT-procured outside expertise helped), political heft vs. 'costly distraction'

Council took away Mayor's drought leadership powers in Jan. 2018; in Feb. it passed a motion of no confidence against her (crisis as cause or pretext for party internal power contest?)





KEY PILLARS OF CITY'S RESPONSE

Water supply & demand management: WMDs & pressure management (60-70ml/day saved); proactive allowance reductions (down to 50l/person/day in early 2018) & tariff increases, esp. for consumption above allowance; augmentation projects

Communication: statements & media campaigns; naming roads of top 100 water consumers; Water Dashboard; Water Map; 'Think Water' website page, 'Day Zero' narrative (pushed by communication management consultancy³)

Disaster planning Prior to 2017 Critical Water Shortages Disaster Plan, no procedure in place for dealing with such city-wide emergency (case for most SA cities). Concerns about practicability of 200 water collection points for >4m people

Raising 'assurance' level Previously 98%; now target is 99.5%





LESSONS

Natural disasters are inherently political and can result in party-political point-scoring, ineffective intergovernmental coordination and contestation over mandates/responsibilities

Care should be taken with ad hoc reassignment of responsibilities (not compromising technical decision-making processes)

City took on more than constitutionally demanded; if new default position, will this be recognized by > transfers from national level, or will City have to seek other funding mechanisms?

Heavy reliance on budget reprioritization is not ideal as impacts other services; consider how decisions are made on disaster relief funding requests.





QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Will shift in consumption behaviour last? (future potential & implications thereof)
- On what basis should water security be planned? (beware of 'it will never happen' thinking)
- How to counteract political disincentives for investing in resilience? (prevention better than cure, but less appealing politically) How to strike a balance between funding for the two?
- Are present institutional arrangements, planning & budgetary provision levels for disaster management sufficient? (in country context)
- What special procurement procedures are appropriate for such crises?





“Any study of disasters that disregards their entanglement with power relations and political action misses an important dimension without which, I would claim, disaster situations cannot be fully understood.”; “post-disaster situations easily become sites of political contestation”.

Exploring the Link between Natural Disasters and Politics: Case Studies of Pakistan and Peru
Martin Sökefeld Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Ludwig-Max, 2012





DISASTER DECLARATIONS

Jan. 2016: WCPG applies to the NDMC for a province-wide disaster declaration; go-ahead given for declarations in only 5/30 municipalities - excl. Cape Town².

May 2017: Cabinet declares a provincial disaster

Feb. 2018: National state of disaster declared – 1st in SA

June 2018: National state of disaster lapses and isn't renewed; WC remains a provincial disaster

