

## The Politics and Ethics of Water Security in Cape Town

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### Project Background Information/Introduction:

From 2015-2018, the City of Cape Town in South Africa underwent a severe drought resulting in a water crisis. The city set strict water restrictions to avoid what was called “day zero”: the day that six of Cape Town’s rain-fed dams supplying water to the city would become critically low, leading to the shutting of taps and establishment of water collection points across the city. While the water crisis had a city-wide impact and made headlines around the world, contrasting experiences between citizens residing in informal settlements and those in urban dwellings reflected social inequality with regards to water use and access. The water crisis disproportionately affected residents in informal settlements. Historical fragmentation in land-use policies and service provision have resulted in the current unjust distribution of water in the City of Cape Town. In its Water Strategy, the City of Cape Town highlights that water and sanitation services in informal settlements remain an ongoing challenge. The city has committed to building water resilience for all citizens through sustainable financing, water sensitive design, transparent and inclusive urban water management and increased collaboration between various stakeholders, in order to avoid future water restrictions and improve the city’s preparedness to shock and stresses on its water system. Increasing water demand is putting pressure on South Africa’s allocation and management of water resources. Moreover, as semi-arid country prone to droughts water resources are precariously threatened. With water being regarded as a basic human right, sites of water insecurity provide a critical window for exploring the political and ethical dimensions related to the equitable provision and governance of water service delivery.

### Research Aim/Objectives/Questions/Hypotheses:

This study seeks to examine Cape Town’s use of resilience as a response to crisis and a means to achieving equitable water security.

### Data/Methods/Analysis:

The data for this study will be qualitative and collected through semi-structured interviews with government and non-government actors working in the water sector of South Africa.

### **Contributions to the SDGs:**

This study contributes to the ongoing need to develop water policies that improve sustainable access to safe drinking water through an exploration of the dynamics of water governance. As an essential resource enabling life, water has an all-encompassing cultural, social, economic, political and environmental pertinence. This research contributes to SDGs: 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation; 10- Reduced Inequalities; 11 – Sustainable Cities; and 13 – Climate Action

### **Project Information:**

- Supervisors/partners
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- Project Duration: 3 Years
- Project Resources (funded by): Durham University Global Challenges Research Fund
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