

Water Crisis Rages Across South Africa

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South Africa is usually said to be a country without enough water. Water scarcity in South Africa is linked to the inferior availability of clean usable water to meet all the demands within the country. Even where fresh water is possible to access, some cities like Joburg have an old dying network of water infrastructure, with leaks not uncommon in the CBD as well as the eastern suburbs and increasingly, areas in the direction of Auckland Park, at least, resulting in a big wastage of resources. The struggle with access to clean and safe water is neither a new nor a Joburg thing, it is widespread.

The well-known case of Andries Tatane is a stark reminder that many people struggle to access clean and safe water.

Over the last few weeks, this problem about water became even more serious for Johannesburg Metro residents as taps ran dry for the second time in the space of a few days. The City blamed the stop in the running of water on a problem from a primary supplier to Johannesburg Water (JW). In Brixton, Hurtstill, Crosby, Westdene, Sophiatown, Westbury, and well into Randburg, Cosmo City, and surrounding areas, taps ran dry between 04 and 05 March 2024.

According to a statement posted by JW on X (formerly Twitter) dated 04 March 2024, the problem was due to a power outage at the Eikenhof pump station, but the flow of water was expected to be restored shortly after that incident. When it was restored, some areas experienced low pressure while others did not have any flowing water at all.

In Mpumalanga, residents are also experiencing water cuts. At the beginning of 2024, parts of the province experienced water cuts. In and around the Secunda area, the complete shut-off was so severe community members had to buy water. There were later donations of at least ten litres of drinkable water to each household by the Secunda Mall providing some relief.

Speaking to Motang* by telephone, the Mbalenhle-based resident of the province confirmed that they have been struggling with water supply to their homes. Motang told Karibu!, "Apparently the municipality owes Rand Water and they'll be pumping water at a low capacity, I don't know for how long. We didn't even know we owed Rand Water. This is a circus."

In the earlier Mpumalanga case affecting Mbalenhle, Govan Mbeki, Secunda, Leslie, and Kinross the issue was sourced back to the Rand Water Bloemendal pump not churning out water to the aforementioned areas. According to a statement posted by the municipality, the issue had to do with electrical power and needed Eskom to help resolve it.

Water treatment facilities are close to a total collapse while nearly half of the clean water in South Africa is lost through leaks or cannot be accounted for. According to the Nation Blue Drop Risk Rating, to receive the Blue Drop certification "water supply

systems must meet 95% of the criteria for delivering clean, drinking water and only 26 of South Africa's 958 water supply systems managed this."

Particularly in the Eastern Cape the issue of unsafe water has been on the rise. During the winter school held at Khanya College in July 2023, participants from the province highlighted several issues that they were facing regarding unsafe drinking water. On realising that the crisis is very bad and countrywide, Khanya College led a picket on 27 July 2023 at the Constitutional Hill.

The choice to picket outside the Constitutional Hill Court emerged after activists at the school agreed that clean water is a basic human right which the government is failing to provide. The government is also failing to disclose to people when the water is not safe for drinking which means the government lacks regard for people's lives.

The water crisis hits hard on working class people in particular because they generally cannot afford to buy bottled water to drink. The government sometimes insists that people generally boil their water first before using but with the loadshedding a permanent reality now and high electricity prices it is hard for working class people to cover all these government shortfalls.

"The toilet is the biggest problem that I have because we have women here that need to sit and when there is no water, they can get quite dirty at times, and I worry about infections they might contract. The city never alerts us when they are going to cut the water so for now, we store water in advance but that also can only last up until a certain point, when that runs out, we then have to ask around from our sister shelters, those with water give us as much as we can."

"When it comes to the issue having to boil water before drinking, to be honest we don't do that here. There are 105 people that live here so we simply can't do that. I guess we are all just taking a risk and drinking straight from the tap, and we just have to hope for the best health-wise. So far no one has been sick here, but I can't say it will always be that way," said Nehemiah the caretaker of Strabane Mercy Centre for the Homeless on Kerk Street.

This article is an amalgum of various submissions by FAJs around Gauteng. The various articles were submitted in March 2024. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online (www.Karibu.org.za), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.