

## The Water Crisis

Section 77 of Zimbabwe's Constitution states that "every person has a right to safe, clean and potable water and the State must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within the limits of the resources available to it, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right."<sup>1</sup> Lack of key water treatment chemicals forced Harare's water treatment plant Morton Jaffray to halt production on 23 September 2019, leaving over one million people without running water.<sup>2</sup> Harare City Council (HCC) cited foreign currency shortages as the reason for the shutdown. Deputy Mayor, Enock Mupamawonde urged government to declare the water situation a national disaster, enlisting that the local authority needs at least 40 million Zimbabwe Dollars (US\$2.7 million) a month for water chemicals, against a revenue of 15 million Zimbabwe dollars they collect per month.<sup>3</sup>

The World Health Organisation (WHO) stipulates that ideally every person should access between 50 and 100 litres of water per day to ensure the most basic needs are met and the outbreak of disease is prevented.<sup>4</sup> With the serious shortages of this precious and life- saving liquid many citizens in Zimbabwe fall far short of this standard. Citizens need clean water for drinking, personal sanitation, washing of clothes, food preparation and personal and household hygiene.

Sustainable Development Goal 6 urges duty bearers to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. In the current situation this goal remains a pipe dream unless there is more commitment and political will on the part of local and central government to improve the situation.

Even at the continental level, Africa is also concerned by the water deficits most citizens face on the continent and the N'gor Declaration by Africa Water ministers is hinged on highlighting the importance of accessibility of clean and affordable water.

Some residents have resorted to drilling boreholes to access clean water, however these boreholes require electricity to pump water, something which is a challenge considering the constant power cuts lasting up to 18 hours daily. Generally, many local authorities throughout the country cannot pump running water to residents due to power cuts.<sup>5</sup> Those with water tanks on their properties rely on individuals or privately-owned water companies to pump water into the tanks at considerable cost often pegged in USD. Residents are mostly dependent on city or donor-drilled boreholes. These water sources are sometimes unclean due to poor sanitation as evidenced by the September 2018

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<sup>1</sup> Section 77, Constitution of Zimbabwe

<sup>2</sup> CNN <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/09/24/africa/harare-water-crisis-intl/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> VOA <https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/zimbabwe-harare-water-works-shutdown/5095383.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/humanright\\_to\\_water\\_and\\_sanitation\\_media\\_brief.pdf](https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/humanright_to_water_and_sanitation_media_brief.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> The Standard <https://www.thestandard.co.zw/2019/07/21/zimbabwe-reels-18-hr-power-cuts-cripple-business-push-cost-living/>

cholera outbreak which resulted in over 30 deaths.<sup>6</sup> These boreholes have been monopolised by some unscrupulous individuals who are extorting residents in order for them to get water. In Chitungwiza in Zengeza 4 (Zengeza West constituency) ZPP recorded a truck selling a bucket of water at \$1.50 ZWL. Desperate residents are left with no option but to purchase the water.<sup>7</sup> In Epworth Constituency, Ward 2, three youths are manning a borehole and forcing residents to purchase two buckets of water at \$1.50 ZWL.<sup>8</sup>

Women and children especially young girls bear the brunt of the water crisis. This group spends most of their days looking for water and there have been unconfirmed reports of men soliciting sexual favours from women so that they easily access water at boreholes. School children spend long hours in water queues resulting in them getting to school tired as they at times queue up to the early hours of the morning. Without water, the chances of them attending school and learning productively are compromised. The water and sanitation crisis places millions of residents at risk of contracting waterborne diseases. Residents have often resorted to drinking water from shallow, unprotected wells that are contaminated. The crisis has brought about issues of extortion, exploitation and school absenteeism. ZPP is also concerned about the conflicts that erupt at the watering holes as citizens jostle to get their buckets ahead of the many hoping to get the precious liquid ahead of everyone else.

**ZPP calls upon government and local authorities** to ensure the right to water is protected and upheld. Every citizen must enjoy the right to clean and safe water. Law enforcement agents should bring to book those responsible for the extortion of citizens, particularly the exploitation of women and children especially young girls. The peace and security of women and young girls who spend countless hours waiting in long queues to draw water is unfortunately not guaranteed. ZPP also calls on the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission to seriously investigate the acute shortages of water faced by citizens in most urban centres.

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If you are concerned about acts of violence in your community ZPP encourages you to get in touch on WhatsApp numbers: +263 774 883 406 and +263 774 883 417 and Toll free number 080 80199



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<sup>6</sup> WHO <https://www.who.int/csr/don/20-september-2018-cholera-zimbabwe/en/>

<sup>7</sup> Zimbabwe Peace Project

<sup>8</sup> Zimbabwe Peace Project