

## Africa

# Water a pipe dream

Health facilities in Mozambique are struggling to operate without running water

Ruth Ansah Ayisi

A swelling crowd of people has gathered at the rural health centre at Monte Xiluvo in Nhamatanda district in the central Mozambican province of Sofala. Most are mothers with young children who try to protect themselves from the gusty wind as they wait for their consultation with Caetano Mendosa, the nurse responsible for the centre.

As he opens the door for the next patient, swirls of dust blow into the consultation room. It is a credit to the health centre that it's kept as clean as it is, because there is no running water.

"The lack of piped water is the biggest problem we face," says Mendosa, who sees about 1 000 patients every month. "We have to ask their relatives to fetch water for us. It is especially hard for the midwife to conserve water. Imagine assisting deliveries with little water."

The midwife, Emilia Ofece, delivers about 50 babies a month. Each evening Ofece ensures the large water container she uses is full before she goes home, which is conveniently situated next door. "I ask those accompanying pregnant women to help with more water if necessary."

The lack of piped water in certain health centres reflects the reality in rural areas of Mozambique. Few in these regions have the luxury of piped water and even safe water sources are unavailable to most. An

estimated 57% of the rural population (about nine million people) do not have access to potable water, according to official figures.

People resorting to unsafe water supplies contributes to the country's high child mortality rates, with diarrhoea being one of the main killers. An estimated 152 children out of every 1 000 live births do not live to celebrate their fifth birthday; in Norway the mortality rate for under-fives is four per 1 000 live births, according to the United Nations' *Human Development Report 2006*.

Juvenaldo Amos, Sofala's coordinator of malaria, tuberculosis, leprosy, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/Aids, acknowledges that the lack of water in health centres "is a serious problem". But he says there is a renewed drive to improve the water supply. The government is building new centres only where it is possible to install piped water and efforts are being made to ensure that all existing health facilities soon have running water.

Providing homes with accessible, safe water is also a government priority. Nationally the aim is to ensure

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that at least 55% of the rural population has access to potable water by 2009 and to have 70% with access by 2015. This is to enable Mozambique to meet its commitments under the Millennium Development Goals, says Joaquim Jorge, head of the rural water department.

Although there has been gradual progress — in 2001 only 36% of the rural population had access to safe water supplies — Jorge concedes that it is a major challenge to meet the targets. One of the main obstacles is financing. About \$10-million is needed annually to dig boreholes and fit handpumps or install small piped water systems to meet the goals: "We're dependent on our partners." As government can contribute only 10% of the total amount of money needed, the hope is that international donors cover the remaining costs.

Even if the funds are forthcoming, though, it is a challenge to find good quality water. In some areas — such as the southern provinces of Inhambane and Gaza and in parts of Sofala, like Nhamatanda — the water is brackish and so it is more

costly to ensure water provision. In addition, the maintenance of water sources is a constant battle, says Jorge.

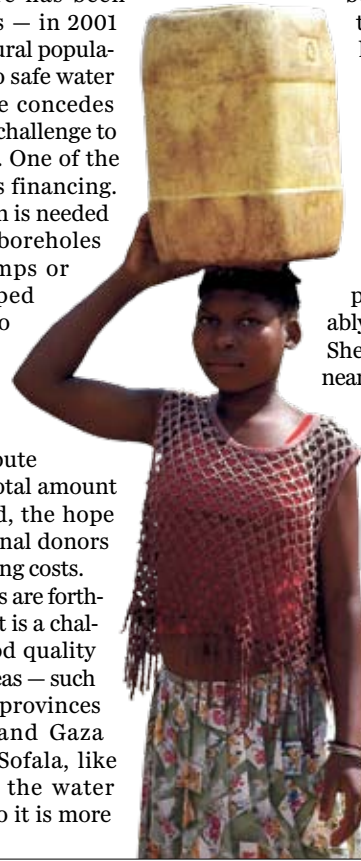
The ministry is in the process of decentralising all of its structures. There is a policy to use local workforces to dig boreholes and build and repair handpumps. Local people are

being trained to maintain the equipment and local business people are being encouraged to stock spare parts.

Fina Miguel (14) has been waiting for most of the morning near an electric water pump that often does not work owing to frequent power cuts, most probably because of cable theft. She lives in Monte Xiluvo, near the health centre.

Fina tries to be at the well by four in the morning to avoid the long queues. "I need to fetch water in the morning as I have school in the afternoon."

The power comes on again and she fills one of her carriers with water. Her look is one of relief as she hoists the heavy 25-litre water carrier on to her head. — IPS



## Namibia and Angola at odds over dam site

IPS

Political interests and specialist lobby groups appear once again to have stalled plans to dam the Cunene River where it forms the border between Angola and Namibia. After years of negotiations, expensive feasibility studies and considerable political rhetoric, the proposed Epupa Dam is no closer to being constructed.

In April the Namibian government issued a briefing paper claiming the Russian Federation was interested in forming a joint venture for the construction of a power station on the Cunene River.

Two months later Namibian Minister of Mines and Energy Erkki Nghintina was quoted in *The Namibian* as saying: "All [further] questions with regard to the Epupa project need no immediate consideration."

Soon after Namibia and Angola opened negotiations in 1991 for the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Cunene River, a division arose over the location. Namibia preferred a site 4km downstream from the Epupa falls, while Angola made a case in favour of a site in the Baynes Hills, a further 40km downstream.

Feasibility studies have shown that both sites are viable for water storage and electricity generation.

Epupa would be more cost-effective, but more destructive to the environment. It would also affect a greater number of the Himba people, who live in the north-west of Namibia.

## Bulawayo faces water crisis

Mike Nyoni in Harare

The government is refusing to tackle increasing water shortages and instances of waterborne diseases in Bulawayo because of a struggle over control of the city's water supply.

Unless local officials hand over control of the water supply to a government agency, the central authorities have said they will not help the residents of the second-largest city.

Resistance to a takeover is fuelled by reports that it has failed to tackle the water crisis in Harare and other cities. In the capital, residents of the poorer suburbs of Mabvuku, Tafara and Glen View sometimes go without tap water for up to four weeks at a time. Even the wealthy are beginning

to suffer, with the water supply in the upmarket suburb of Glen Lorne drying up two weeks ago. And even where there is access to water, it is often unfit for human consumption.

Water shortages in Harare have led to doctors treating 900 cases of diarrhoea a day, according to the state-run *Herald* newspaper on August 20. "We have decided to continue treating all diarrhoea-related cases free of charge," says Harare health director Prosper Chonzi in the report.

The Bulawayo authorities have resorted to stringent water rationing, allowing residents water for only a few hours every three days.

In Harare, Gweru and Mutare the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (Zinwa), a government agency,

took control of the supply and distribution of water after President Robert Mugabe's regime fired opposition mayors and councillors and appointed its own commissioners.

But the Bulawayo city council has resisted a Zinwa takeover bid.

Situated in the heart of Matabeleland, 450km west of Harare, Bulawayo has battled for years with water shortages owing to drought and a rapidly increasing population.

The ambitious and expensive Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project, which plans to pipe water from the Zambezi river 450km away to Matabeleland, has remained a pipe dream for political reasons.

Even if there was the political will to see it through, the recession-hit

government lacks the resources.

Bulawayo's worst water crisis ever is compounded by the fact that government refuses to help unless the city allows a government agency to take control of the water.

City mayor Japhet Ndabeni-Ncube last week accused the government of trying to destroy the city. People are unable to bath or flush their toilets, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks. Most people answer nature's call in the bush or open public spaces.

While the effects of the water crisis may be similar in Bulawayo and Harare, analysts say the causes are different. Water shortages in Bulawayo are exacerbated by drought and the standoff over control of supply, whereas those in Harare are

the result of gross mismanagement, inefficiency and a lack of planning as the city's population expands.

"Harare is very different from Bulawayo," said a Harare council employee who requested anonymity. "Our water problems here are man-made. The shortages are mainly as a result of old pipes that keep bursting. A lot of expensively treated water is wasted through leakages."

He said any deaths from water-related illnesses could be blamed on poor management of the city's affairs. Since Zinwa took over water management in the capital nearly a year ago, supplies have worsened. This has fuelled resistance by Bulawayo residents who say they have no faith in Zinwa given its track record.

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