

SCRIPT

'We fight over water': Go inside this Mpumalanga community's ongoing struggle to access basic services.

Info slide:

Masakhane is an informal settlement in eMalahleni, Mpumalanga. People started living here over 50 years ago. But they still don't have running water.

Masakhane resident, Elisabeth Motlounge:

You have to carry water with a wheelbarrow and use buckets.

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There are over 3 700 residents living in Masakhane.

[\[2011 Census\]](#)

Until August 2020 they had no electricity despite living just 1.5km from an Eskom power station.

People living in Masakhane rely on the municipality to fill the 33 JoJo water tanks around the settlement.

Elisabeth Motlounge, Masakhane resident:

There's a big truck that brings water. So when one of you sees it and you see somebody start running with containers, you all have to follow suit and start running. Then you have to go and put your containers there in line. That's how you get water.

Info slide:

But the water trucks don't always turn up.

Wetu Memela, Assistant Programme Co-ordinator, Planact:

There are places that are going weeks without water. There are places where the situation is so bad that people are digging their own toilets, because there's just been absolutely no attempt by the municipality to help them with their sanitation issues.

Info slide

Planact is an organisation working in informal settlements around South Africa.

They help communities to tell municipalities their problems in a way that councillors will understand.

And they help residents hold municipalities accountable when services are not being delivered.

Info slide

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit South Africa, they launched the Asivikelane campaign.

Every two weeks about 430 people from the community answer three questions over WhatsApp:

- Was water available every time that you needed it over the last week?
- Were the toilets cleaned in the last 7 days?
- Was waste collected in your settlement in the last 7 days?

The campaign then circulates the results of the surveys publicly.

Wetu Memela, Assistant Programme Co-ordinator, Planact:

So with that work, and us releasing the data that we're getting, as scattered and haphazard as it was, and I think that's how we got the municipality's attention. We started publicising them on social media as well as bringing them to the municipality. And that's how they started bringing up steam and the municipality actually came up with what they call a COVID timetable. Which was basically a timetable of when the water came, how it was being delivered.

Info slide

Planact had been trying to get that water schedule for over three years before it was finally released on July 31 2020.

But it only lasted for one month.

Elisabeth Motlounge, Masakhane resident:

In the beginning when COVID-19 started, around March, that is the only time when what's on paper at the municipality started working. The truck used to come here three times a week. By the end of April, the truck only came here once [a week]. So it got worse.

Info slide:

Without running water, people struggle to wash their hands.

And become vulnerable to infection with the coronavirus.

[\[Slum Health: Arresting COVID-19 and Improving Well-Being in Urban Informal Settlements, Journal of Urban Health, 2020\]](#)

Elisabeth Motloun, Masakhane resident:

How do you sanitise? We don't have flushing toilets, we use pit toilets. You cannot touch anything as per corona rules. But if we had taps, maybe like one tap per street, it wouldn't be like that. Because then you would know that when you go there at any given time, there is water. But waiting for a truck to come, we fight over water.

Info slide:

eMalahleni municipality response to Bhekisisa's enquiries

Q: How does the municipality provide water to the community?

A: The informal settlements do not have bulk infrastructure and water is supplied by means of tankers which the municipality has contracted and those that it owns.

Q: How many JoJo tanks does the municipality fill in Masakhane?

A: For continual and easy access to water there are JoJo tanks installed at strategic areas for communities to access on a 24 hour basis.

Q: How often are the tanks filled?

A: There is a schedule developed in consultation with representatives of affected areas and to available resources. The frequency of filling is determined by number of filling points, distance to travel and size of tanks.

Q: We have seen a schedule from the municipality that says the settlement is supposed to receive water three times a week, however, residents say this only happened for the month of March due to the COVID-19 pandemic and thereafter the water delivery became irregular again. Can you please comment on this?

A: No response.

Ends

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