



LIMTHANDE Melani fetches water from trucks making a delivery to Makhaza residents in Khayelitsha. The lack of readily available water in many parts of the country poses an added security risk for women, says the writer. | AYANDA NDAMANE African News Agency (ANA)

# Tap into water access to avert woman, child abuse

*Collecting water for their families in the dark in remote areas puts women at high risk*

AS WE commemorate the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children, it is crucial that we look at the role of the lack of access to reliable water supply in their abuse.

Water is life as it is central to every aspect of life. It is therefore critical that every person has access to water for basic needs. As we commemorate the 16 Days of Activism, it is crucial that we examine this.

Not all South Africans have access to water directly from the taps in their households.

Even some of those with taps in their households sometimes have to go out to get water due to different challenges, such as water rationing or challenges with the supply systems and limited water supply due to drought.

In rural areas, community members have to collect water from water tankers or directly from rivers and streams.

The onus of ensuring water availability in the household then rests with women and the girl child.

This then exposes women to abuse in their households if it happens that

## COMMENT



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there is no water, as they are seen as collectors of water and have to make sure that there is always water in the household.

The lack of household access to water is a burden to women as they have to wake up in the early hours of the morning to collect water for their families.

In some areas, water comes out once a week late at night or around midnight, and women must stay awake to be able to collect and store water for their families for the whole week.

This is a serious strain on women as they also have to wake up and do

other chores and go to work. Collecting water for their families also exposes women to physical, sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of unscrupulous preying criminals who see them as easy targets when they go to collect water in the wee hours when it is still dark.

These criminals prey on women who collect water in the streams and rivers and in dark corners where the women have to pass. Reliable access to water is therefore important to protect women against abuse as criminals usually target and prey on women fetching water in remote areas.

This is the reality faced by women committed to making the lives of their families better. It is therefore important that the government fulfils its mandate of providing access to water by ensuring reliable water supply closer to these wonderful women of our country.

The government must accelerate its water provision projects to ensure that communities, especially the rural communities, have access to water in their backyards to relieve women of the burden of scouring for water

for their families. Access to water is a basic human right and it is therefore important that the government fast-tracks universal access to water for all citizens, especially the most vulnerable communities in the rural areas.

This will go a long way in protecting them from exploitation and abuse.

The crime statistics during the lockdown have shown that the coronavirus pandemic has led to more hardships for women.

The pandemic has brought with it an increase in gender-based violence with the majority of victims being women and children, so it is critical to make water easily accessible to all.

The pandemic has laid bare the challenges faced by communities, especially by women in accessing much-needed water, therefore the government must ensure a sustainable and long-lasting water supply solution to the vulnerable communities so as to protect and preserve the dignity of our women.

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