



water & sanitation

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Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPINION PIECE

Water for “Breakfast” the sweetest deal of all for mischievous village

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As the drought grips major parts of South Africa and destroying livestock and crops in its wake, it's business as usual for the community of Blakfesi - a tiny rural area in Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga. This is thanks to a water project that supplies water to their yards.

Sparsely populated with less than 500 households, the village is one of the 14 rural areas of Bushbuckridge that were prioritized for water reticulation by the Department of water and Sanitation in collaboration with the Mpumalanga Provincial Government and Bushbuckridge Local Municipality. They are benefitting from Phase 2 of a bulk water supply scheme that is targeting 67 local villages.

At 99% progress, the water project in Blakfesi, is almost complete and the locals expect it to be fully functional before the end of the year.

What's their secret?

“We are hard workers by nature. We wake up every morning to work in the fields and tender to our cattle. We have our breakfast very late in the day, sometimes at lunch time,” says Bertha Mngomezulu, a local housewife.

She says the name of the village was derived from the habit of having late breakfast after hard work by fellow villagers. Blakfesi is a Swati lexicon for breakfast.

However, the community of Blakfesi is not different from neighbouring communities who are prone to resorting to service delivery protests at the drop of a hat. Blakfesi villagers had their own way of registering their concerns; they connected illegal pipes to the bulk pipeline that supplies water from Injaka Water Treatment Works to other villages and divert the colourless resource to their households.

“That was mischievous of us but we couldn't sit by and watch water bypassing to other villages while we so close to the source,” Mngomezulu argues.

An official report on the state of water in Blakfesi and 13 of its neighbouring villages captures the problem succinctly: “The planning of Phase 2 has recommended that villages be reticulated immediately, starting with those closest to the source (Injaka Water Treatment Plant) due to a high number of of unauthorized connections and systems interferences as identified by the planning team. The planning brief also identifies infrastructure that must be refurbished, reservoirs that must be installed as well as the need for water conservation and water demand initiatives that must be adopted to ensure the success of this initiative.”

Last week President Jacob Zuma took along an entourage of 13 Cabinet Ministers during a Siyahlola visit to Blakfesi and its neighbours. He spent time listening to the challenges that hinder progress to the the government's service delivery programme in the area. Corruption among some of the Councillors was mentioned. Residents said some of them are linked to the illegal connections and the vandalizing of bulk supply pipes as a way of acquiring tenders for water tankers which they owned through friends and relatives.



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"We will deal decisively with corruption in the local government," President Zuma told crowds at a rally that was held Thulamahashe Stadium later that day.

Just like villagers of Blakfesi, Minister Nomvula Mokonyane of Water and Sanitation, is the least worried about the state of water in South Africa.

"It's a good thing that everybody is beginning to believe that water is everyone's business...There's no such thing as water shedding. What we are doing is water restrictions. We'll only reach a crisis point if not everybody is doing their part."

Mokonyane believes that Bushbuckridge, especially Blakfesi and the 13 villages, are a classical example of inter-governmental collaboration in getting communities to access basic services such as water. The government has intervenes decisively in the villages to ensure water supply, she says.

When Injaka Water Treatment Works was upgraded in 2014 local communities recived a total 75 megalitres a day while Phase Two added another 25 megalitres. At its completion early this year, Injaka pumped 100 litres a day to the communities.

So confident is Rand Water that they assured the President that water quality in the area is close to achieving the Blue Drop Status (high quality water). "This water will be sufficient to provide for the total needs of the Bushbuckridge community until at least 2023."

To date the Injaka Regional Bulk Water has provided more than 20 000 households with water throughout the two phases of its reticulation project. This covers about 35 villages in the area, the Rand Water report states.

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By Themba Khumalo