

FEBRUARY 2025



The BULLETIN

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A THIRSTY CITY

PAGE 4



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“It’s exhausting and discouraging. I’ve had to reduce the number of chickens because I can’t afford to water them all. I even considered shutting down, but this is my livelihood—what else can I do? (7)”

Blessing Moyo, a small livestock farmer



“Most toilets here use the flush system, which depends on consistent water supply. Now, people resort to bushes for open defecation, especially schoolchildren and young men. (23)”

Marvelous Mlauzi, Entumbane resident

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FEBRUARY 2025

A Thirsty City: Exploring Byo's Water Crisis

The city's water crisis reveals decades of mismanagement, forcing families and businesses to confront rising costs and an uncertain future. What will it take to turn the tide?

by The Citizen Bulletin | @The_CBNews

Bulawayo continues to grapple with a worsening water crisis. While recent rains have brought some relief to the city's supply dams, the challenges of aging infrastructure, climate change, and systemic failures remain stark.

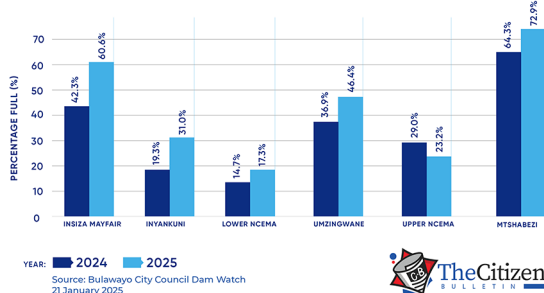
With water shortages shaping everyday life, the city's struggle highlights the fragile balance between natural resources and urban survival. As of January 2025, the city's dams show some improvement in capacity compared to 2024, but the picture remains far from hopeful. The municipality, according to authorities, requires at least \$40 million to effectively address the ongoing water crisis and implement sustainable solutions.

The re-commissioning of dams such as Umzingwane and Upper Ncema offers a glimmer of hope. Umzingwane Dam, for instance, has seen its levels rise to 46.4%, up from 36.9% in January 2024. Similarly, Insiza Mayfair Dam now stands at 60.6%, a marked increase from last year's 42.3%. However, critical dams like Inyankuni and Lower Ncema remain at precariously low levels of 31.0% and 17.3%, respectively.

Despite these slight gains, the city's total water reserves are still insufficient to sustain its growing population of over 600,000.

The ongoing crisis is compounded by decades of neglect in water infrastructure development. No new dams have been constructed since 1975, and existing facilities are ill-equipped to handle Bulawayo's population surge. In addition to this infrastructural stagnation, the city's supply dams suffer from severe siltation, caused by illegal gold panning, deforestation, and poor land management in catchment areas. This sediment buildup reduces storage capacity, preventing dams from fully replenishing even during periods of heavy rainfall.

**Bulawayo Dam Levels:
Percentage Full Comparison (2024 vs 2025)**



Leaking pipes force residents to collect water from unsafe sources. | Photo: Bekithemba Mpfu/The Citizen

Bulletin

The climate crisis remains an ever-present threat, with erratic weather patterns such as the El Niño phenomenon disrupting the city's rainfall cycle. Although the 2025 rainy season has seen better inflows compared to 2024, annual precipitation levels remain below the long-term average of 460mm. Rising temperatures, which have steadily increased over the years, exacerbate evaporation rates, further depleting water reserves.

The effects of the water shortages ripple across every sector of the city. Residents in high-density suburbs like Cowdray Park and Emganwini continue to endure dry taps and long queues at overcrowded boreholes. Small businesses, unable to afford expensive water deliveries or alternative sources, face mounting challenges in maintaining operations.

Informal traders, restaurants, and small-scale manufacturers—many of whom are the lifeblood of the city's economy—are especially hard-hit, with some forced to shut down entirely.



Residents rely on Jojo tanks, wells, and boreholes as taps run dry. | Photo: Bekithemba Mpofu/The Citizen Bulletin

The recent dam statistics also reveal a glaring inequity in water distribution. While dams like Mtshabezi now boast 72.9% capacity - an increase from 64.3% in 2024 - areas reliant on other dams with critically low levels face harsher realities. This uneven distribution underscores the urgent need for long-term planning and investment in water management systems.

Despite these challenges, the city authorities have been slow to implement meaningful solutions. Proposals for water recycling, alternative supply sources, and dam desilting projects have

largely stalled due to limited funding and bureaucratic delays. Meanwhile, residents continue to bear the brunt of the crisis, with many questioning whether the city's leadership truly grasps the severity of the situation.

Our series, A Thirsty City, takes an in-depth look at the city's water crisis from multiple angles—examining its root causes, impacts on daily life, and potential solutions. Through human interest stories, explainers, and expert analysis, we aim to illuminate the urgency of the issue and spark meaningful dialogue about the way forward. This is an ongoing reporting project, and we remain committed to covering the crisis for as long as it persists. ■

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Dry Taps, Drained Wallets

As the water crisis deepens, residents face the stark realities of dwindling supplies and rising costs.

by Sharon Sibindi | @The_CBNews

Blessing Moyo, a small livestock farmer, and mother of 3 from Emganwini, begins her day at 4 a.m. to feed her chickens. Her poultry project relies heavily on water - not just to keep the birds hydrated but also to maintain the cleanliness and hygiene of their pens but in Bulawayo, water is as scarce as it is essential.

To cope, Moyo invested in a 1,000-liter JoJo tank for \$180. Yet, filling it comes at a steep cost.

“The tank has been a lifesaver, but I spend \$50 every week on water deliveries,” she says. “That’s money I could have used to buy feed, medicine, or even expand my operations. Instead, I’m barely breaking even.”

For small business owners like Moyo, the water crisis is not just an inconvenience but a daily struggle for survival.

“Water is essential - not just for the chickens to drink but also for cleaning their pens and maintaining hygiene,” she says. Without it, the risk of disease looms, threatening to derail her entire operation.

Late water deliveries often force her to fetch buckets herself, walking long distances to keep her business afloat.

“It’s exhausting and discouraging,” she says, shaking her head. “I’ve had to reduce the number of chickens because I can’t afford to water them all. I even considered shutting down, but this is my livelihood—what else can I do?”



To keep her business running, Moyo balances buckets of water on her head, fetched from distant sources. | Photo: Bekithemba Mpofu/The Citizen Bulletin

Adding to the uncertainty, reports in 2024 revealed that the Bulawayo City Council (BCC) had received an unsolicited bid to use drones for surveying JoJo tank owners, potentially introducing a billing system that could further drive-up costs.

BCC remains tight-lipped about the drone usage claims and did not respond to a request for comment. However, the local authority doesn't have a bylaw explicitly prohibiting the use of JoJo tanks.

Tinashe Ngwenya, who runs a car wash in Emganwini, says the cost of running his business would double if BCC implements its proposed drone surveillance system to monitor JoJo tank users.

Ngwenya is struggling to make a profit due to the city's erratic water supply.

"Every morning, I get up at dawn to set up the car wash, hoping to attract customers early in the day. But without a reliable water supply, I often find myself sitting idle," he explains.

"Washing cars isn't just about having soap and tools; it's water dependent. If there's no water, there's no business," Ngwenya adds.

The inconsistency in water availability has driven many of his regular customers elsewhere.

"People want a guarantee that when they bring their cars, they'll leave with them clean. But I can't promise that anymore," he says with frustration.

Competitors with JoJo tanks or boreholes are capturing the customers he has lost. Unable to afford such infrastructure, Ngwenya spends hours queuing at community boreholes to fetch water.

"Sometimes I fill up buckets and jerry cans just to get through the day," he says. "It's exhausting, and it doesn't even last long. I can't compete with businesses that have steady water supplies."



Ngwenya fetches water in buckets and gallons as competitors with steady supplies take his customers. | Photo: Bekithemba Mpofu/The Citizen Bulletin

The financial strain is evident.

"My income has dropped significantly because fewer cars are coming in. On some days, I don't even make enough to cover my operating costs, let alone take anything home," he says. "I'm running at a loss most of the time."

Ngwenya is now contemplating a tough decision.

"I'm considering closing down. This business was my main source of income, but without water, I feel like I'm fighting a losing battle. It's heartbreaking, but I don't know how much longer I can hold on."

In the food sector, the water crisis is threatening hygiene and profitability.

Edwin Ncube, a butcher who runs a store in Nketa, spends over \$200 each month on water deliveries to maintain good hygiene.

“Hygiene is everything in this line of work,” Ncube says. “Without clean water, maintaining these standards becomes nearly impossible. The safety of my customers depends on this, and so does my reputation.”

Ncube begins his day early to coordinate water deliveries before opening his shop.

“If there’s a delay, I risk having to close for the day because I won’t compromise on hygiene,” he says.

Despite his efforts, the crisis is taking a toll.

“Customers are more cautious these days,” Ncube admits. “They ask a lot of questions about how I’m managing the water situation, and some have even stopped coming. The perception of poor hygiene, even when it’s not true, can destroy a food business.”

Street vendors like Jane Ncube, who sell cooked food at Nketa 6 garage, are also grappling with the crisis.

“I need water to cook and wash the food I sell,” she says. “I’ve had to buy buckets of water from other vendors for \$1 each. I use five buckets a day, and this eats into my profits.”



With water shortages worsening, some residents now buy water from individuals operating scanias. | Photo: Bekithemba Mpofu/The Citizen Bulletin

Bulawayo’s water challenges are deeply entrenched in its history. For decades, the city has faced persistent water shortages driven by reliance on supply dams located in a neighboring province, aging infrastructure, and outdated water management systems.

The municipality depends on six key dams—Insiza, Inyankuni, Mtshabezi, Umzingwane, Lower Ncema, and Upper Ncema—all located in Matabeleland South. However, these dams have consistently fallen short of meeting the demands of the city’s growing population. In late 2024, Umzingwane and Upper Ncema dams were decommissioned due to critically low water levels, a development that exacerbated the crisis.

“

Life without consistent access to water is a daily struggle...And on top of this, residents still have to pay their monthly city council bills. It’s unsustainable.

Permanent Ngoma, Executive Director of the Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association (BPRA)

”

Bulawayo Mayor David Coltart describes the situation as catastrophic.

“Our dams are just over 24% full, which is alarming for this time of year,” he said in December. “Despite the rains, we’ve experienced limited runoff because our catchment areas have been devastated by

illegal gold panning.”

In 2024, BCC requested that the central government declare the water crisis a national disaster. This would have enabled the city to mobilize local and international resources to address the problem.

However, the request was rejected, and the central government instead appointed a technical committee to explore alternative solutions.

“The crisis has only deepened,” Coltart says. “Frequent power outages limit the amount of water we can pump, and unfortunately, this means water rationing will remain in place for the foreseeable future.”



Construction of major projects continues, but experts urge authorities to prioritize infrastructure repairs, catchment protection, and water conservation. | Illustration: The Citizen Bulletin

Long-term solutions, such as building additional dams or tapping into alternative water sources like the Zambezi River Pipeline Project, remain on the table but come with hefty price tags.

In the short term, experts have urged authorities to focus on repairing existing infrastructure, addressing illegal activities in catchment areas, and increasing public awareness about water conservation. ■





Life Without Access

The city's water crisis exposes deep inequalities, forcing vulnerable residents to confront daily struggles for basic survival.

by Margaret Lubinda | @The_CBNews

The current water crisis gripping Bulawayo was predicted years ago. The city's geographical location and the effects of climate change have long been central to its water challenges. However, these natural issues are now compounded by human-made and structural problems.

Researchers trace the roots of the crisis back to 1986, a time when water was still accessible through boreholes, bowsers, and manageable water-shedding schedules—a stark contrast to today.

With the city's population now at 668,949 and a housing waiting list of 130,000, the city's

crumbling sewer and water systems are buckling under immense strain. Rapid urbanization, particularly in high-density suburbs, has increased water demand, contributing to severe water stress.

This explains why water shortages are most acute in high-density suburbs compared to eastern suburbs, where population density is lower.

In Emganwini, for instance, taps have been dry for over a month. Residents now rely on four out of six operational boreholes, which are in poor condition. Residents are required to pay \$2 monthly for borehole maintenance.

Vulnerable groups such as people with

disabilities, pregnant women, schoolchildren, and the elderly have normalized going days without bathing or washing clothes, reserving the little water they get for basic household chores.



A cobweb-covered tap reflecting Bulawayo's worsening water crisis and prolonged shortages. | Photo: Freepik

At Tashas, a neighbourhood grappling with a severe water crisis, two JoJo tanks were installed by a local politician a few years back. However, the tanks remain perpetually dry.

“They were installed a long time ago, but they are always empty,” says a resident who requested anonymity for fear of reprisals. “We even arranged a meeting with community elders to inform our Councilor (Mpumelelo Moyo) that if JoJo tanks stay empty for too long, they crack. But he didn’t attend the meeting.”

“

We’ve tried to get water delivered via bowzers, calling everyone we could. But they ignore us or only send water sporadically.

a resident

”

Residents allege Moyo lives in Montgomery, making him disconnected from their struggles.

With no office to report issues, residents claim they rely on phone calls, which are never unanswered. Moyo, however, denies the accusations and insists that he lives in the ward.

“We have had water since last week and on Friday, even as we speak, it’s still there,” Moyo told The Citizen Bulletin. “Some people have an agenda, and you have to understand if it is one person or the residents. Put the person on a conference call with me, because I stay in Emganwini, in the Island area, I do not stay in Montgomery as the person says.”

For Khathazile Mathonsi, born in 1958, the water crisis is just another chapter in a life of hardship. Blind since childhood due to measles, Mathonsi left Zimbabwe in 2000 for South Africa, seeking a better life.



A visually impaired resident struggles with water shortages and poor sanitation. | Photo: Margaret Bulinda/The Citizen Bulletin

For 12 years, she survived by begging on the streets of Johannesburg. Now a resident of Cowdray Park, Mathonsi’s home is filled with water containers she brought from South Africa, all filled to prepare for the city’s erratic water supply.

“Over 200 people queue at the community borehole, and as a visually impaired person,

accessing water is a serious challenge,” she says.

The borehole is 400 meters from her house, but she often spends the day without water when her grandchildren are at school.

Mathonsi is among the residents of Cowdray Park’s Hlalani Kuhle area, a community established after the central government’s 2005 Operation Murambatsvina program. The operation demolished informal housing, and residents were resettled in un-serviced stands.

The suburb still lacks proper ablution facilities due to disputes between the Bulawayo City Council (BCC) and the central government.

BCC argued that its bylaws prohibit the occupation of houses without proper sanitation, but the central government continued with the program. As a result, Hlalani Kuhle remains unserviced to date.

In 2019, Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube allocated ZW\$45.2 million for water and sewer projects in Cowdray Park, but four years later, little has changed.

“I’ve been suffering from diarrhea for three days now,” Mathonsi told our reporter. “I have to use the Blair toilet, but I’m weak and have soiled my blankets and clothes. My grandchildren help clean up when they return from school.”

In Pumula South, residents face a different crisis: overflowing sewage.

For over a year, 17 households near Athens supermarket have endured a smelly, fly-infested environment, with wastewater pooling in their yards.

“We’ve reported this issue multiple times,” says Hlengiwe Mpfu, a community leader. “We’ve visited Council offices, made phone calls, and received reference numbers, but nothing has been done.”



Overflowing sewage endangers Bulawayo residents' health as the water crisis persists. | Photo: Margaret Bulinda/The Citizen Bulletin

Mpfu says the lack of water makes the situation worse. “We avoid using the toilets because flushing them only leaves waste behind. The smell is unbearable, and we fear for our health.”

Ward 17 Councilor Sikhululekile Moyo acknowledges the issue but blames delays on a lack of funds. “This is a known hotspot for sewage bursts. The Council is working on a resolution, but the process is delayed due to financial constraints,” she says.

Disability Development Consultant Tsepang Nare says local authorities should ensure that people with disabilities are not excluded from water interventions.

“In other countries, authorities keep databases of people with disabilities and the elderly to ensure they receive targeted assistance during crises,” Nare says.

Bulawayo Mayor David Coltart concedes that the city lacks deliberate policies for vulnerable groups but insists efforts are being made to assist everyone.

“We do all in our power to ensure that vulnerable groups are the least affected,” Coltart says. “But we face serious challenges due to low dam levels, illegal gold panning in catchment areas, and frequent power cuts.”

As the water crisis deepens, countless residents are left to navigate a parched and unequal reality, with no clear solutions on the horizon. ■



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Water Privatization: A Lifeline or A New Crisis?

Should water remain a public resource, or is private sector involvement the answer? As debates heat up, the stakes for residents couldn't be higher.

by Fairness Moyana | [@The_CBNews](#)

Water can seem endless: it covers 70% of the earth's surface, yet climate change is making the world's water supply unreliable.

Bulawayo is currently facing one of its worst water challenges in years exacerbated by the El-Niño induced drought.

With ever changing weather patterns due to climate change, recurring droughts have led to severe water challenges amid increasing demand and decreasing supply.

In 2024, the Bulawayo City Council (BCC) started implementing a tight water rationing regime in a desperate attempt to salvage the little left at the

city's supply dams.

Amidst the crisis, calls for privatization as an urgent intervention to meet rising demand have started to grow louder.

"Privatization of water for Bulawayo is something that needs to be considered thoroughly and can't run along by itself but can work hand in hand with the (central) government," argues Thabani Singwango, a climate advocate and Geographic Information System (GIS) specialist.

He, however, calls this “a complex issue that often exacerbates inequality in accessing water through pricing,” where companies prioritize profit.



Bulawayo: Water as a right or a commodity? | Illustration generated using Poe, OpenAI

Water privatization typically involves a private company taking over the management and operation of a water system, often through a lease or concession agreement with the council.

This can include responsibilities like infrastructure maintenance, billing, and customer service.

The private company may also invest in upgrades and expansions.

Research shows that local authorities are turning to water privatisation as they struggle to meet demand primarily due to climate change.

United Nations estimates show that during the last century alone, water use exceeded the rate of population growth.

The agency estimates more than one in six people worldwide do not have access to enough safe water a day to meet basic needs.

With the economic hardships forcing more people to migrate to cities, existing infrastructure as that of Bulawayo is creaking.

In Bulawayo, the water crisis is further exacerbated by aging water infrastructure, which has resulted in more than 48% of water sources classified as non-revenue.

Proposed solutions to the water crisis have failed to meet the needs of the city’s growing population of over 600 000 residents, according to the 2022 census carried out by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZimStats).

A report by the Transnational Institute (TNI), Public Services International Research Unit and the Multinational Observatory suggests that 180 cities and communities in 35 countries, including Buenos Aires, Johannesburg, Paris, Accra, Berlin, La Paz, Maputo and Kuala Lumpur, have all “re-municipalised” their water systems in the past decade.

A proposal for water privatization by the BCC was met with strong opposition from residents.

The municipality had planned to establish a private water and sanitation utility in partnership with a Dutch company, Vitens Evides International.

The Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association (BPRA), however, expressed concerns that this move could lead to higher costs for water and infringe on the constitutional rights of residents to access the precious liquid.

BPRA also criticized the lack of transparency in the process, particularly regarding the selection criteria for the Dutch company.

They also questioned the financial implications of setting up the utility and whether the costs will be passed on to residents.

The advocacy group reiterated its willingness to take action to prevent the initiative from proceeding, arguing that it was initiated

without adequate consultation with residents.

Hardlife Mudzingwa, a water activist, warns that water privatization will exacerbate the challenges faced by residents rather than solve them.

“I don’t think privatization of water is the solution. What we are facing is limited access to water for citizens,” says Mudzingwa, the National Coordinator of the Community Water Alliance. “Any solution should address the root causes of the problem. The assumption of those pushing for privatization is that local authorities are failing, so we need to give water services to private entities,” he adds.

Mudzingwa emphasizes governance as the core issue rather than resources, pointing to the financial strain caused by composite billing systems. These systems bundle charges for services such as refuse collection - often not delivered - with water bills, creating unnecessary financial burdens for residents.

“Privatization comes with exorbitant charges and issues around affordability, which will only worsen the challenges we are facing,” Mudzingwa says. He also warns that such measures could lead to social risks, including disease outbreaks and potential civil conflicts.

Academic research underscores Mudzingwa’s concerns. In the journal article [“An Assessment of Law and Practice of the Right to Water: Evidence from Zimbabwe,”](#) Jephias Mapuva links Zimbabwe’s water privatization efforts to the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) of the 1990s. He explains that the commercialization of public entities, including water services, was a key feature of ESAP, but notes that these initiatives have often been misapplied, leaving marginalized communities with limited access to water.

Similarly, a study titled [“Commercialisation of Water Supply in Zimbabwe and Its Effects on the Poor: A Working Framework”](#) by Tinashe Mukonavanhu and colleagues examines the impact of neoliberal policies on water provision. The researchers found that the commercialization

of water services has heightened poverty levels as many residents cannot afford the increased costs associated with privatized water supply. The study advocates for a balanced approach that ensures equitable access to water while addressing economic sustainability.

Adding to the urgency of the crisis, a recent report by the Zimbabwe Multi-Donor Trust Fund (Zimfund) reveals that Bulawayo requires US\$55 million in the short term to repair its water and sanitation infrastructure.

In response to reports suggesting plans to privatize water services, Bulawayo mayor David Coltart clarified the city’s intentions.

“There is no intention to make the department a private business, but a stand-alone asset for the council that would ring-fence revenue for water and sanitation projects,” Coltart said during a press briefing in 2024.

Coltart explained that historically, revenue generated from water services had been diverted to other council activities. “With this project, all surplus revenue will be used for specific programmes related to water and sanitation,” he said, emphasizing that the move is aimed at better management rather than privatization.

In a [recent meeting](#), Town Clerk Christopher Dube emphasized the need for a municipally owned water utility as a countermeasure to the ongoing push for privatization by the government. He warned that failure to proceed with this proposal could lead to the government imposing privatization, which would leave the city without control over its water supply.

While no national policy explicitly promotes full-scale water privatization, government agencies have acknowledged the need for innovative financing models to tackle the growing urban water crisis. The debate continues over whether private sector participation should be expanded, with advocates pointing to successful PPPs in other sectors and critics warning of the risks of inequality and increased costs for consumers. ■



A Struggle with Aging Infrastructure

Aging infrastructure and silted dams are crippling the city's water system, leaving residents and businesses in a constant struggle for survival.

by Sharon Sibindi | @The_CBNews

“How long can we keep living like this?” asks Taurai Kandemwa, a frustrated 40-year-old resident of Cowdray Park.

“These politicians came to us before the 2023 elections, waving their manifestos and promising to fix the water crisis. They spoke as if solutions were just around the corner, but instead, the water crisis has worsened.”

Kandemwa describes how the decommissioning

of Umzingwane and Upper Ncema dams in October 2024 has worsened an already dire situation.

“Every day, we wake up wondering if water will flow from our taps or if we’ll spend another day queuing at boreholes or buying expensive water from vendors,” he says.

“

It's exhausting. How do they expect us to run homes, schools, or businesses without water?

Taurai Kandemwa

”

Bulawayo residents are enduring the city's worst water challenges in years, primarily due to recurring droughts and outdated infrastructure.

A System Stuck in the Past

The city's water infrastructure, including its reservoirs, has not been upgraded for decades. No new dams have been constructed since 1975, despite the city's rapidly growing population.

In the 1950s, the city's population was 91,635. By 2024, the population had grown to 658,028, with an annual growth rate of 1.31%, according to the United Nations World Urbanization Prospects.



As aging infrastructure and dry dams worsen shortages, residents rely on boreholes or purchase water at high prices. | Photo: Bekithemba Mpofu/The Citizen Bulletin

The city's oldest dam, Lower Ncema, was built in 1943, while Umzingwane was completed in 1956. The largest dam, Inyankuni, with a carrying capacity of 80 million cubic meters, was constructed in 1965. Insiza, the newest dam, was built in 1975, a year after the completion of Upper Ncema. Since then, no additional dams have been built to support the city's expanding population.

A Long-Delayed Solution

The Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project (MZWP), first proposed in 1912, has become a symbol of broken promises. The project, which seeks to bring water from the Zambezi River to Bulawayo, has missed countless deadlines.

In 1992, the late activist Arnold Payne drew national attention to the issue by pushing a wheelbarrow filled with water from the Zambezi River to Bulawayo. Despite his efforts and the formation of Operation Desperation Trust to raise funds, the project stalled.

Construction resumed in 2017 after the Chinese Exim Bank provided \$864 million in funding. However, the project has repeatedly failed to meet deadlines. President Emmerson Mnangagwa pledged to complete the project by 2019, then by 2023, and most recently by December 2024.

Blame Game

Matabeleland Institute for Human Rights coordinator Khumbulani Maphosa says the city's water problems stem from decades of neglect and misplaced priorities.

"This infrastructure didn't get old overnight," Maphosa says. "It has been aging every day, and there are people in offices employed to manage it. They failed to act, and now we're blaming the infrastructure as if it's at fault for aging. Aging is part of its life span."

Maphosa cautions against

using poor-quality materials in replacing infrastructure.

“We need to prioritize quality over cost,” he says. “Using substandard products will only create more problems. It’s better to replace infrastructure slowly with durable materials that can last 100 years than to use cheap products that fail within months.”

Maphosa also advocates for devolving water governance to local authorities.



Workers repair a pump at Umzingwane, upgrading Bulawayo’s aging water system. | Photo: Sharon Sibindi/
The Citizen Bulletin

“Centralizing water governance under a new devolution framework is inconsistent with good policy,” he says. “We need to give local authorities the resources and autonomy to manage water systems effectively.”

Risks of Inaction

Policy analyst Effie Ncube says aging infrastructure is at the heart of the city’s water crisis.

“The city’s outdated pipes, treatment facilities, and technologies are causing frequent leaks, contamination risks, and inefficiencies in water management,” Ncube says.

He warns that the current state of the infrastructure is costing the city in more ways than one.

“Obsolete systems lead to water losses and

reduced revenue due to breakages. Residents are going weeks without clean water, forcing them to turn to unsafe sources. This increases the risk of waterborne diseases, putting a strain on limited health resources.”

Ncube emphasizes the need for cooperation between local and central governments to address the issue.

“There’s a need to increase budgetary allocations for water supply at both the local and national levels,” he says. “Public-private partnerships could also help by leveraging private sector expertise, technology, and funding. The damage is too extensive to be left solely to local authorities.”

Bulawayo City Council (BCC) once proposed recycling water from Khami Dam, which was decommissioned in 1988 due to heavy pollution. However, residents rejected the idea due to health concerns. The municipality estimates it would cost \$26 million to purify the dam’s water for consumption.

A Silent Threat: Siltation

Adding to the city’s woes is the issue of siltation, which has significantly reduced the capacity of its dams. Illegal gold panning, deforestation, and poor land management in catchment areas have exacerbated the problem.

“Siltation is a critical issue that must be addressed urgently,” Ncube says. “Even during periods of heavy rainfall, dams fail to fill because of sediment buildup. Without action, we’ll continue to see diminishing water supplies despite adequate rains.”

Despite repeated calls for interventions, efforts to address siltation have been slow, leaving the city’s already strained water system more vulnerable. Experts warn that without comprehensive catchment management and reforestation programs, the city’s dams will struggle to meet the needs of its growing population, a situation that could deepen the water crisis for generations to come. ■

School Shortage Hits Cowdray Park

Cowdray Park, one of Bulawayo's largest and fastest-growing suburbs, is grappling with a severe shortage of schools, clinics, and other essential amenities. While the suburb's population continues to expand rapidly, infrastructure development has failed to keep pace with the growing demand.

Cowdray Park is home to 75 000 residents, spreading across more than 27 000 stands, including residential, commercial, and industrial zones, according to 2022 Population and Housing Census - [Chronicle](#) ■

Chivayo Offers Highlanders A Lifeline

Controversial businessman Wicknell Chivayo has offered to settle Highlanders' US\$27 000 debt to former coach Baltermar Brito and his assistant Antonio Joao Torres after the club was banned from registering new players by FIFA.

Chivayo, who made his millions in government tenders in Zimbabwe and across Africa, stepped in after the skint Bulawayo club sent an SOS less than a month before the new Premier Soccer League season gets Underway. - [ZimLive](#) ■

Zimbabwe Loses Vital Health Reporting Support

The Internews Health Journalism Network (HJN), a global program supporting health journalists, has announced that it will be suspending operations due to a funding freeze resulting from the US government's recent aid suspension.

Internews Global Health Director and lead for HJN explained that the network's activities will be put on hold from February 7, 2025, onwards. - [Nehanda Radio](#) ■

Rural Teachers' Oracle: 4-Years No Salary for Chere

A trained teacher and human rights activist, Robin Chere (40) has gone for four years without settling his eyes on his payslip after government stopped paying him and several of his colleagues.

An oracle who stands up for education rights, mostly for the rural teachers under the Amalgamated Rural Teachers Union of Zimbabwe flagship that has clashed with government on several occasions, especially on salary issues, Chere is paying the price. - [NewsDay](#) ■

FEBRUARY 2025

A Drying City's Climate Crisis

With dams drying up and rainfall patterns disrupted by climate change, residents are grappling with a worsening water crisis that exposes the city's fragile infrastructure and deep inequalities.

by Fairness Moyana | @The_CBNews

Twenty nine-year-old Sibusisiwe Dlomo carefully straps her baby on her back, lifts a 20-litre bucket onto her head, and holds another container with her right hand.

Having woken up at 5 a.m. to secure a spot in a long queue for water, Dlomo finally makes her way home three hours later with her precious haul.

In New Magwegwe, her home, a high-density suburb; water shortages have become a routine.

"We are sometimes forced to rely on this borehole, which serves hundreds of households," she says, her face a grim reminder of how climate-induced droughts have reshaped her daily life.

“

Conflicts often erupt here, leading to verbal abuse and physical confrontations, especially targeting women and girls.

Sibusisiwe Dlomo

”

Bulawayo, the country's second-largest city, is feeling the severe impacts of climate change, with changing weather patterns leading to recurring droughts and drying dams. These challenges, compounded by the El Niño phenomenon, are worsening the water crisis.

According to the Weather Atlas, the city's weather over the past five years has been marked by a subtropical steppe climate with notable seasonal shifts in temperature, humidity, and rainfall. Average annual precipitation is a meager 460mm.

Data shows a troubling trend. In 2018, the city recorded an average annual temperature of 22.23°C and rainfall of just 28.66mm. By 2024, temperatures had climbed to 27.2°C, signaling rising climate variability.

The El Niño drought of 2024 further exacerbated the situation, leaving the city's supply dams nearly empty. Despite this year's slightly better rainfall of 1,098.7mm compared to 491mm the previous year, dams remain at a precarious 44.43% capacity, with drawable volumes at just 167,623,509 cubic metres.

The decommissioning of Umzingwane Dam in November 2023 and Upper Ncema Dam in October 2024 has only worsened the crisis. High-lying suburbs like Cowdray Park, Lobengula West, and Emganwini have been hardest hit, with some areas going nearly six months without tap water.

**The water crisis
disproportionately affects**

women, who are forced to walk long distances to fetch the precious liquid for cooking and household chores.

Desperate residents have turned to unsafe water sources, leading to health risks and waterborne disease outbreaks. Marvelous Mlauzi of Entumbane describes how erratic water supplies have turned basic sanitation into a luxury.

“Most toilets here use the flush system, which depends on consistent water supply,” she explains. “Now, people resort to bushes for open defecation, especially schoolchildren and young men. It’s unhygienic and increases the risk of disease.”



Schoolchildren and young men resort to open defecation to conserve water amid the worsening crisis. | Illustration generated using DALL-E, ChatGPT

In 2024, diarrhoea cases surged to 555 by August, a staggering 693% increase from 370 cases in July, according to the Bulawayo City Council (BCC) reports. The Health and Child Care Ministry’s weekly Disease Surveillance Report in June 2024 noted 6,386 diarrhoea cases, including one death, mostly affecting children under five.

“Bulawayo’s drying dams and erratic rainfall are clear indicators of how climate change is disrupting our city,” says Moffat Ncube, a researcher with Water Alliance. “The El Niño phenomenon, deforestation, and poor land management have all compounded the crisis.”

Ncube warns that worsening climate

patterns will continue to strain resources, leading to disease, suffering, and potential societal breakdown if urgent action isn’t taken.

Pundits believe the city’s long-term solution lies in the Gwayi-Shangani Dam, a \$1 billion project first proposed in 1992. Once completed, the dam’s potential yield of 634 million cubic metres could provide the city with a reliable water source. However, delays caused by bureaucracy and political wrangling have derailed the project repeatedly.

In 2023, President Emmerson Mnangagwa promised to complete the dam ahead of the August general elections. The deadline was later pushed to December 2024 and now 2025.

Zimbabwe is listed among the top African nations at risk of water stress. Experts are calling for robust climate adaptation strategies, including reforestation, improved catchment management, and investment in resilient water infrastructure.



Climate experts urge robust adaptation strategies, including reforestation. | Photos: Freepik

“Our hopes now lie with the completion of Gwayi-Shangani Dam, but beyond that, we need the Bulawayo City Council to craft policies that mainstream climate change,” says 54-year-old Nqobile Bhebhe, a community activist from New Magwegwe.

“Without bold action, Bulawayo will continue to face this cycle of drought and despair.” ■

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