



## The value of potable water in ancient and modern societies

by Marika vd Walt

- In December 2013 the Southern African Institute for Water and Society would have had an international conference on water research and heritage in Masvingo near the Great Zimbabwe Ruins.
- The conference was moved to Mapungubwe because of economic problems in Zimbabwe.
- It was a pity because most delegates could not attend.
- We had received about 50 abstracts from people of whom the majority were from Zimbabwe. Many complained about the decay of water and sanitation infrastructure in Zimbabwe as a result of the country's economic problems.

- The value of potable water to Zimbabwean society is clear when the results of water contamination are considered.
- According to the American CDC, as of May 2, 2012, a total of 4,185 suspected cases of typhoid fever had been identified in Harare. Hospitalization was reported for 1,788 patients (43%), and two deaths were reported.
- Rationing of piped, treated water from municipal systems obliges residents to use unimproved water sources to meet their water needs, putting them at risk for gastrointestinal infections. Frequent sewer blockages compound this problem.

- Mark Nyandoro from the Department of Economic History, University of Zimbabwe wrote a paper entitled **Water development and Zimbabwe's hydropolitical landscape in the first decade of independence (1980-1990)**
- He argued that Zimbabwe inherited a relatively efficient though skewed water provision infrastructure in 1980. The failure by the government to expand the faltering water infrastructure at a time of burgeoning urban growth compromised water-development.

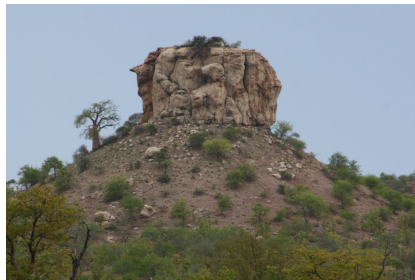
- Jephias Matunhu from Midlands State University Zimbabwe wrote an abstract entitled **Water insecurity in Zimbabwe: time to reflect.**
- He stated that in 2000, 85 percent of the population had access to safe water, and by 2008, access to safe water had declined to 74 percent of the population due to poor maintenance of water infrastructure and a general decline in investment in the sector. In rural communities boreholes are largely in a state of disrepair while rivers and dams silt. In urban areas, water supply system is too old and inadequate to meet domestic and industrial demand. Shortages in water supply are linked to water borne diseases and depressed industrial production.

- Donatus Dube and his colleagues Parekh C.T, Siangwata S and Nyathi M tested the efficacy of claypots in purifying water. They wrote a paper entitled **Developing and testing a culturally acceptable water purifier for rural communities in Zimbabwe.**
- Dube *et al* stated that results revealed that the clay pots were effective in eliminating microorganisms in water and can be applied sustainably by poor communities in the rural areas.
- It is my view that no modern African society should have to revert to using clay pots to purify their water. That is why the city of Tshwane should be capable of supplying potable water to all its residents.

- Rabson Wuriga of Great Zimbabwe University was the convenor of the conference. He wrote a paper entitled **Probing falsification of people’s real predicament in matters of water: an existential perspective on experiences of water shortages in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.**
- He stated that despite water shortages officials would ask “what water problem?” when asked to explain the reasons for poor service delivery.
- During the discussion after his talk it became apparent that the state of water legislation in Zimbabwe is somewhere between obscure or difficult to find and non-existent.
- Old-fashioned rule of law is thus important to the proper functioning of water service delivery.

- The CoT has water service delivery policies and by-laws in place.
- We should be thankful, but we should also insist by way of our representatives on council and by way of the courts that the City keeps to its own policies and delivers services to its residents. Democracy requires it.

- In South Africa the modern and the ancient live side to side.
- The residents of Tshwane might not be aware that the Voortrekker Monument reminds of an ancient rainmaking hill.
- Some argue that the Voortrekker Monument was modelled after this hill that was used for rain making ceremonies at Mapungubwe.



*We should treasure our heritage, but we should also ensure that we have a future in the modern world where a working city is a must.*

*Marika van der Walt 2014*

