

PRESS RELEASE: C19 Women's Solidarity Forum sends urgent request to the President and Ministries to address the water crisis water in 24 communities

For IMMEDIATE RELEASE, 22 April 2020

The struggle for water amongst communities in townships and rural areas throughout South Africa has been a long suffering issue. Coupled with the growing COVID-19 crisis in the country, the present situation has only contributed to a mounting health crisis which adversely impacts communities fighting for their basic survival and access to essential services. As caregivers in their communities, women are the ones who are most burdened with lack and hard to access water provisions.

To better support and amplify their plight the C19 Women's Solidarity Forum together with other civil society organisations acting on behalf of over 200 communities across the country, who are at the frontline of experiencing the threat of the COVID-19 crisis, have called on the government to address their demands.

There are extreme water problems confronting 24 communities that span across the following provinces including KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Western Cape and Eastern Cape. They have struggled for years to get a steady and reliable supply of clean water to poor communities with many sharing communal taps, facing frequent water disruptions, faulty taps and ailing infrastructure. Many communities have repeatedly raised their concerns to their local councillors and local municipalities, with some having registered their problems to the Ministry without redress. Now, during the COVID-19 crisis when risks are multiplied, they have made further requests which have still not being addressed.

'The informal settlement of Iraq does not have access to water. Women are walking about 2 kilometres every day to collect water. Since the lockdown which has restricted the movement of women, they have been turned away by police when they try to collect water. Now some of the women they wait until it gets dark for them to collect water so that they won't be seen by police. This has put a lot strain on the women.' - Phola/Ogies- Mpumalanga resident

The letter issued to government states four demands including:

1. Immediate rendering of water tankers to these mentioned communities and the many hundreds of others who report failed water supply until permanent water solutions are in place.
2. Most of these mentioned communities have been speaking to and lobbying local councillors, municipalities, and even the national ministry for years and their water problems remain unresolved. A permanent solution to the supply of water to these areas post COVID-19 is needed. There is also a need to thoroughly investigate why communities, who have raised concerns to the authorities for many years, have not had their needs addressed.
3. To issue strict orders to the police and military to not interfere with and threaten women while they are trying to secure water. As a 'force for kindness' we would expect that public officers actively support these efforts to secure basic and essential services; and
4. At least half of these communities' report that mines are draining rivers and underground aquifers from which they access water by borehole. Since many of these communities live in water scarce regions and have suffered drought in the last decade, this raises critical questions about water licencing.

Contacts

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Appendix: A – Letter



21 April 2020

For the attention of:

President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa
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Minister Lindiwe Sisulu: Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation
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Dr Olive Shisana, Hon. Professor (UCT)
President's Special Advisor on Social Policy
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Dear Sirs/Madam

Regarding: Urgent request to address acute water shortages affecting women and their families in 24 communities across the country

The C19 Women's Solidarity Forum is linked to and stands in solidarity with women in more than 200 largely rural and extremely poor communities across the country who are at the frontline of the COVID 19 crisis. We have long standing ties with these communities.

We wish to bring to your attention the extreme water problems confronting 24 communities who confront COVID 19 without an essential resource for health, including good hygiene, and well-being.

We acknowledge the important commitments and efforts of the President, Command Structure and the Ministry of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation to centralise the delivery of water to communities in this time of crisis. The 41 000-water tanker intervention has been important, and we acknowledge the critical efforts of Minister Sisulu to address banditry which is undermining the delivery of water to stressed communities.

Despite these commitments and interventions, the C19 Women's Solidarity Forum is aware of at least 24 communities currently deprived of water supplies, which realities existed well before the start of the pandemic and the instituting of a national lockdown.

These communities of concern have, without exception, all registered their complaints from years prior to the COVID 19 crisis, to their local councillors and local municipalities, with some having registered their problems to the Ministry without redress. Now, during the COVID 19 crisis when risks are multiplied, they have made further requests which are still not being addressed.

Women in communities are the ones who carry the burden of water problems. They are standing for long hours waiting for water supplies, which exposes them to others and heightens the risk of COVID 19 transmission. Some women report that they are walking long distances of two kilometres and more to fetch water for washing hands, bathing and drinking. This places women at grave risk of sexual violence as predatory men attack them on their way. And scarce money in desperately poor households is being diverted to pay private water vendors, often the only avenue to obtain clean water supplies.

The communities in severe water distress are listed below:

1. **Somkhele**, Mtubatuba Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal
2. **Phola/Ogies**, Nkangala District Municipality, Mpumalanga
3. **Steenbokpan**, Lephhalale, Limpopo
4. **Shongoane**, Lephhalale, Limpopo
5. **Mabuela Village**, Mokopane, Limpopo
6. **Sekutlong Village**, Fetakgomo Tubatse local municipality, Limpopo
7. **Ndondo Square**, Sakhisizwe Municipality, Eastern Cape
8. **Rhodana**, Emalahleni municipality, Eastern Cape
9. **Nobanjane, Ngcizele and Nxaxo villages**, Amatole District Municipality, Eastern Cape
10. **Nduli township with two informal settlements**, Witzenburg Municipality, Western Cape
11. **Tulbagh with four informal settlements**, Witzenburg Municipality, Western Cape
12. **Wolseley with two informal settlements**, Witzenburg Municipality, Western Cape
13. **Various farms**, Robertson, Western Cape

See details in Annexure A.

To urgently address the dire situation in which many thousands of women and their families find themselves, we demand the following:

- Immediate rendering of water tankers to these mentioned communities and the many hundreds of others who report failed water supply until permanent water solutions are in place.
- Most of these mentioned communities have been speaking to and lobbying local councillors, municipalities, and even the national ministry for years and their water problems remain unresolved. A permanent solution to the supply of water to these areas post COVID 19 is needed.

There is also need to thoroughly investigate why communities, who have raised concerns to the authorities for many years, have not had their needs addressed.

- To issue strict orders to the police and military to not interfere with and threaten women while they are trying to secure water. As a 'force for kindness' we would expect that public officers actively support these efforts to secure basic and essential services; and
- At least half of these communities' report that mines are draining rivers and underground aquifers from which they access water by borehole. Since many of these communities live in water scarce regions and have suffered drought in the last decade, this raises critical questions about water licencing.

For further information contact:

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Yours sincerely,

C19 Women's Solidarity Forum: WoMin African Alliance, Witzenberg Justice Centre, Trust for Community Outreach and Education (TCOE), Women On Farms, Women Affected by Mining United in Action (WAMUA), International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG), Rural Women's Assembly (RWA), The Commercial, Stevedoring, Agricultural and Allied Workers Union (CSAAWU)

Annexure A

	Name of community	Geographic location	Nature of problem
1	Somkhele	Mtubatuba Municipality, Kwazulu Natal	Have not had adequate water access for years. A water tanker only passes through on Wednesdays carrying 2 500 litres of water to be shared amongst a population estimated at 5 791 (in 2011 national census).
2	Phola/Ogies	Nkangala District Municipality, Mpumalanga	The informal settlement of Iraq does not have access to water. Women are walking about 2 kilometres every day to collect water. Since the lockdown which has restricted women's movements, they have been turned away by police when they try to collect water. Now some of the women wait until it gets dark for them to collect water so that they won't be seen by police. This has put a lot strain on the women.
3	Steenbokpan	Lephalale, Limpopo	Water problems are not new to this community. For 5 years water tanks left by the municipality have been dry. At the only available waterpoint there, women can stand for a whole day to fill a 20-litre bucket. The ministry promised water tankers which have yet to come.
4	Shongoane	Lephalale, Limpopo	To obtain access to water, community members (mainly women) must walk kilometres or stand in long queues for a day when there is water available. Households can buy water for R500 (2500 litres) or R4 (20 litres). This is unaffordable for most households.
5	Mabuela Village	Mokopane, Limpopo	The community, and this falls to women, collect water from nearby streams. During the lockdown they are confronting police harassment when they walk to collect water. Households can buy water from private water vendors but the price per drum has now increased to R100.00, which is unaffordable.
6	Sekutlong Village	Fetakgomo Tubatse local	Communities used to collect water from Motsi River, polluted by mining since 2017. Some families continue to fetch water from the river as they cannot afford

		municipality, Limpopo	to buy water. Since the lockdown the water tanker has only visited on 6 April. It was supposed to come every Sunday. The community leaders called on 12 April and were told there was a shortage of diesel. On 15 April, the municipality advised after a second follow up call by the community that the next tanker would only come on 26 April.
7	Ndondo Square	Sakhisizwe Municipality, Eastern Cape	Residents usually depend on trucked water, which is unreliable, inconsistent and inadequate. This has greatly impacted elderly people. Ndondo Square currently does not have access to water.
8	Rhodana	Emalahleni municipality, Eastern Cape	<u>Residents of</u> Rhodana have no access to water. Although a reservoir has been built, certain sections of the village do not have access. People resort to springs, also used by animals, which are unhygienic and unsafe.
9	Nobanjane, Ngcizele and Nxaxo villages	Amatole District Municipality, Eastern Cape	Three villages - Nobanjane, Ngcizele and Nxaxo – of approximately 600 households are experiencing dire water shortages, a longstanding problem. On 14 April, ten leaders of these three villages, organised under the umbrella body Coastal Links, were arrested for gathering to solicit a response to the water crisis in their communities.
10	Nduli township with two informal settlements	Witzenburg Municipality, Western Cape	Nduli, Tulbagh and Wolseley (with a total of 8 informal settlements) have no water tanks or improved sanitation facilities, a problem they have endured for 6-7 years. Nduli Township has confirmed COVID 19 cases, so water access is critical.
11	Tulbagh with four informal settlements		
12	Wolseley with two informal settlements		
13	Various farms	Robertson, Western Cape	Farm dwellers have not received water for three weeks. The canal water is dirty as the water is coming from the mountain. And there has been no rain. At least two farms are affected. The farm dwellers receive 200 litres of water every second day which is not enough to meet even basic needs. There is a growing crisis on the farms.