

No bridge over troubled waters for village



DESPERATE SITUATION: Mvume Springs villagers in Port St Johns have been trapped for the past three weeks as the only bridge that links them to the outside world has been washed away

Picture: SIKHO NTSHOBANE

Mvume Springs cut off for three weeks after rain

By **SIKHO NTSHOBANE**
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WHILE rain is a longed-for blessing in many African communities, for a small Port St Johns village, at the moment this is not the case.

Mvume Springs villagers have found themselves trapped after their only link to the outside world, a low-lying bridge, was washed away in heavy downpours last month.

As a result, hundreds of pupils from the village have not been able to attend Vulindlela Senior Secondary School and Nomandi Junior Secondary School in the neighbouring Mantusini village for the past three weeks.

Sick people and those who work outside the village have found themselves equally stranded.

The chief of Mvume Springs, Mthetheleli “Mhlabuhlangene” Nomphandana, shouting to the Daily Dispatch across the gushing torrent of the Mngazi River yesterday, issued an emotional plea to the paper saying they were desperate for help.

“Bring us the TV [television] people. They need to see this,” he pleaded with the Dispatch team.

“We can’t go to the shops to buy food. Sick people cannot get medication from hospitals across this bridge.

“Our children have not been to school for three weeks.”

Even the Dispatch team was unable to cross to the other side, where Nomphandana and some of his subjects, including several school children in uniform, were standing.

A contractor sent by the public works department arrived a few minutes later, but told the Dispatch team that due to the heavy currents, it would take until Thursday to build a proper “temporary bridge” to help children get to school.

A Grade 11 pupil at Vulindlela, Zusiphe Ntentiso, said they had missed out on a lot of crucial school work, including the controlled tests normally written around March.

“It’s always the same thing – when it rains, we can’t get to school and have to sit at home.”

Nomphandana revealed that Mvume Springs Senior Primary had been shut down since the rains hit the village last month as the principal and most of the teachers were on the wrong side of the river.

“We have been pleading with public works but seemingly they do not care about us.”

In October, the Dispatch reported how the same community had been left stranded after the bridge was washed away by heavy rains.

Yesterday, Nomphandana claimed that instead of fixing it, the government had only thrown in rocks last year.

“We are not sure whether we have to die first before they fix it,” he added.

One of the villagers, 26-year-old Nkululeko Mthiyeni, almost drowned

while rushing to work yesterday. However, he was saved by Nomphandana and other men.

He told the Dispatch that he was the only breadwinner in a family of six and could not afford to lose his job as a road construction worker.

Elderly Yaliwe Sango meanwhile was among scores of Mvume Springs villagers unable to fetch her arthritis and high blood pressure medication from a clinic in Mantusini.

She said she was scared to default on her treatment.

When contacted for comment yesterday, Eastern Cape education provincial spokesman Mali Mtima said they were worried about pupils in the village missing out on schoolwork.

He said they would appeal to the school to devise a “mop-up” strategy to enable the pupils to catch up what they had missed.

“We will speak with our sister department [public works] and the [Port St Johns] municipality to find out whose responsibility it is to ensure there is a bridge there.”

Health provincial spokesman Sizwe Kupelo said they would monitor the situation closely.

“We are fighting to reduce the rate of [medicine] defaulters, especially those with tuberculosis and HIV.”

Provincial public works spokesman Mphumzi Zuzile assured the Dispatch when contacted yesterday that the department would construct a temporary bridge.

He said a sum of R20-million had been set aside in the new financial year’s budget to construct a permanent bridge for Mvume Springs residents. — *sikhon@dispatch.co.za*