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Title: Elderly forced to spend pensions on water as village taps run dry

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Elderly forced to spend pensions on water as village taps run dry

Deputy president to lead delegation to Eastern Cape amid numerous challenges including water supply

ZUBENAM MHLATHI and ASANDA NINI

Seventy-six-year-old Nozole Ntlokwa says she no longer remembers what it feels like to open a tap and see water splash out.

"I've lost count of the years since I last saw a tap that drips water in our community," she said.

For Ntlokwa and other residents of Ngolo village, securing water is a constant struggle. Rainfall is unreliable, and many households are forced to spend what little they have on buying water.

For pensioners, that means using their social grants to cover the cost of water for drinking, cooking and washing. "We rely on rain and we are forced to buy water with our elderly grant money," Ntlokwa said.

"If we run out of water mid-month, I go into debt to buy water again. Those who cannot afford it, fetch from the rivers where livestock drink." These and other service delivery problems in the OR Tambo district have drawn the attention of the national government.

Deputy president Paul Mashatile will visit former statesman Nelson Mandela's home village of Qunu on Thursday, about 35km from Ngolo, to assess service delivery.

Mashatile will lead a high-level delegation of cabinet ministers on a fact-finding mission to establish service delivery challenges faced by communities in the area.

On Tuesday, Mashatile's spokesperson Keith Khoza confirmed the visit as part of "government efforts to strengthen the capacity to deliver public services to communities".

"The working visit by the deputy president takes place in response to service delivery concerns raised by representatives of the Qunu community...



PAUL MASHATILE

nity... relating to, among other things, lack of adequate water and sanitation, electricity, access roads and infrastructure.

"The visit offers the opportunity for the government to address service delivery challenges affecting the community of Qunu, and will be a platform to evaluate progress achieved in the rollout of the district development model," Khoza said.

Mashatile was expected to be joined by premier Oscar Mabuyane and several members of President Cyril Ramaphosa's cabinet to "interact with local stakeholders, and visit key projects in sectors such as agriculture, water and sanitation, small, medium and micro enterprises, which continue to drive job creation initiatives, enhance economic growth and help to eradicate poverty", Khoza said.

As part of the Mashatile visit, build-up programme, sport, arts and culture deputy minister Peace Mabe will visit the Mthatha Arts Centre, while public works and infrastructure deputy minister Sihle Zikalala will formally hand over ownership of two bridges in Port St Johns.

Mashatile and small business development minister Stella Nkomo will visit the Siphe Development & Capacity Agency at Kaplen village in Mthatha on Thursday.

Later, the deputy president will join water & sanitation minister Penny Majodina at water infrastructure projects in Qunu.

On Tuesday, abathembu senior traditional leader Nkosi Mfundo Bhuvulengwe Mtrara said one of the biggest challenges in the area was unemployment.

"Qunu is Mandela's home and attracts a lot of tourists, but there's not even a decent B&B in the area, or any other tourism-related project.

"People feel the department of tourism has done nothing for the area, despite it being a tourist attraction. "The nearby Mqhelezweni village has been identified as a national heritage site, but there is not even a decent road leading to it."

Nearby villages had constant water challenges. Mthatha businessman and Eastern Cape Chamber of Business president Vuyisile Ntshathu said he doubted any significant change would come from Mashatile's visit.

"He will come, and make a lot of promises, like all others, but leave us with nothing," Mthatha Ratepayers & Residents Association spokesperson and municipal councillor Madyibi Ngxekana said: "I have lost strength in speaking about the service delivery challenges we face."

"All I can say is the deputy president has arrived here very late, as the term of local government nears its end. People are tired of empty promises."

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No to Fossil Fuels



The Red Rebel brigade of Extinction Rebellion Cape Town and Greenpeace Africa members protest outside the African Energy Week conference at the Cape Town International Convention Centre on Tuesday. The Red Rebels are highlighting the complicity of the fossil fuel industry in the climate crisis and calling on conference delegates to embrace a new energy future. Picture: CALLO RANCES/BRENTON GEACH

Provincial co-operative governance & traditional affairs spokesperson Phello Oliphant said pressing service delivery

challenges in the OR Tambo district, "especially in Qunu, Libode, Ngqeleni, Mqanduli, and many other villages [included] no water, the terrible state of the roads, absence of electricity, poverty, lack of recreational facilities for young people, poor connectivity and job opportunities".

Some Ngolo villagers said they spent thousands a month on water from private tankers or bought small containers of water for about R100 each.

The community recently found some relief through a partnership with Transkei

Quarries, which has donated four jojo tanks, each holding 5,000 litres.

The tanks are filled weekly. "They donated the jojo tanks, and we fetch water from there when the municipal tanks have not been filled," Ntlokwa said.

Transkei Quarries community liaison officer Afika Sodo said the initiative was to ease immediate hardships while the municipality worked on longer-term solutions.

OR Tambo district municipal spokesperson Ncebakazi Kolwane acknowledged the severity of the water shortages.

"One of the main pressures on our network is that many households have been upgraded illegally, moving from the original RDP standard supply to high-level household connections. "This has resulted in a far higher demand than the system was designed to carry."

Kolwane said the municipality had deployed 18 water storage tanks, extended and repaired water reticulation pipes,

and drilled five boreholes.

Not one has produced a sustainable yield.

Despite these efforts, residents said they had been hearing empty promises for more than a decade.

Zama Ntanjana said the community was tired of waiting. "We are tired of the municipality's empty promises."

"We were promised boreholes, but we never got feedback. These tanks are not enough for the community."

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