

**Honourable Minister Lindiwe Sisulu**

Department of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation

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22 April 2020

Dear Minister Sisulu

**URGENT REQUEST FOR PROVISION OF WATER TANKS, RELIABLE WATER SUPPLY, AND SANITATION PACKS TO COMMUNITIES WITHOUT ACCESS TO WATER**

1. We refer to the above and confirm that the South African Water Caucus (SAWC) requests urgent intervention in respect of a number of communities without access to water and basic sanitation.
2. The SAWC is a network of more than twenty community-based organisations and non-government organisations active in promoting the wise, equitable and just use, protection and provision of water. SAWC was formed in the lead up to the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and has active members across the country, some of whom have organised provincial water caucuses in order to facilitate co-ordination and outreach to water-stressed communities.
3. Our outreach efforts over the last while have revealed that a number of communities are still unable to access water despite the urgent need for water and adequate sanitation in order to combat COVID-19. Handwashing with soap and water has been consistently highlighted as a key

preventative measure against the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>1</sup> and those without access to clean water and reliable supply, face increased risks of contracting the coronavirus.

4. Since President Ramaphosa [announced](#) the national lockdown to reduce the spread of COVID-19, on 23 March 2020, we have witnessed a positive shift in service delivery, with a number of our communities being provided with water. We are therefore grateful to you Minister Sisulu and your team, for facilitating such access. However, a number of communities remain without access to water and require urgent assistance from government to address their water and sanitation needs, among other basic services. We draw your attention to such communities in **Annexure A**, attached hereto, and we remain committed to working with your team in order to provide updated information as it becomes available.
5. We refer to the **Water and Sanitation Emergency Procurement COVID-19 Disaster Response Directions, 2020 (“the Directions”)**, issued in terms of Regulation 10(8) of the regulations pursuant to section 27(2) of the Disaster Management Act, 2002, published in the Government Gazette<sup>2</sup> on 15 April 2020.
6. The directions provide for the establishment and regulation of the administration of the National Disaster Water Command Centre for the purpose of the centralisation of emergency procurement and provision of water and sanitation equipment. Importantly, we note Directive 7 of the Directions which states that:

“in fulfilling its constitutional obligations of providing access to basic water supply and to basic sanitation necessary to secure sufficient water and an environment not harmful to human health or well-being, and, specifically to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 epidemic, the Department may employ emergency procurement measures for the procurement of the following goods and services:

- (a) Water;
- (b) water tankers;
- (c) water tanks;
- (d) installation of water tanks and stands;
- (e) taps and communal stand pipes; and
- (f) sanitation packs consisting of-
  - (i) hand soap;
  - (ii) sanitisers;
  - (iii) rubber gloves; and
  - (iv) masks; and
- (g) ablution blocks and toilets.”

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<sup>1</sup> South African Medical Research Council ‘*Yes, washing our hands really can help curb the spread of coronavirus*’

(<https://www.samrc.ac.za/news/yes-washing-our-hands-really-can-help-curb-spread-coronavirus>).

<sup>2</sup> Government Gazette, No. 43231, Notice 464, 15 April 2020.

7. We also refer to the media statement issued by the Department of Water and Sanitation (the “Department”) on 8 April 2020, titled “[\*Minister Lindiwe Sisulu directs officials to increase pace in provision of water during Coronavirus COVID-19 lockdown\*](#)”. This media statement provides an update on progress made by the Department to provide water tanks and tankers to affected communities, especially in rural areas and informal settlements, in response to your directive issued in March 2020.
8. On 9 April 2020, the Centre for Environmental Rights [wrote](#) to the Department, on behalf of Vukani Environmental Justice Movement in Action, to request the urgent provision of reliable water supply to various communities in eMalahleni. We commend the Department’s swift intervention to deliver water to those communities the following day. However, as you rightly state, the fact that the Department, provincial authorities and water entities are yet to reach some of our people, is an ongoing cause for concern. Furthermore, the [hotline](#) established by the Department for all water queries is not effective for rural communities as many of them are not aware of this hotline and don’t have access to a telephone or network.
9. **In this regard, we would like to draw your attention to several communities that do not have access to reliable water supply and/or sanitation products. As indicated, a list of these communities is attached hereto as Annexure A.**
10. The residents in these communities continue to experience a daily violation of their guaranteed rights enshrined in sections 24 and 27 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The communities living in these areas are in desperate need of urgent government intervention for the protection and fulfilment of their basic constitutional rights, not only to address the current COVID-19 crisis, but also to provide sustainable access to water beyond the crisis. During this time there is also a need to acknowledge the lifelong effects that environmental factors have on children, and that there arises a heightened duty on government to protect children in these distressed communities, since the consequences of the pandemic exacerbates their vulnerability.<sup>3</sup>
11. SAWC therefore hereby requests that government – led by you and your Department and the National Disaster Water Command Centre – prioritise the provision of water tanks and/or tankers and sanitation packs to the abovementioned communities with the greatest of urgency. Furthermore, SAWC emphasises the importance of social distancing during the distribution of the water from these tanks or tankers in order to reduce the risk of spreading the coronavirus, in accordance with directive 7(3) in the Directions

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<sup>3</sup> Section 28(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. See also: United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council Report, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: *Realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment* (Available at: <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/43/30>).

12. Please take note that the list of affected communities in paragraph 9 above is a non-exhaustive list,<sup>4</sup> and that SAWC may receive updates from time to time regarding additional affected communities. As such, SAWC requests that the Department kindly indicate a contact person with whom SAWC can liaise regarding any updates and additional information, within this week.
13. We also ask that the National Disaster Water Command Centre kindly provide us with weekly public updates on its activities and the communities it is assisting, starting from this week, and provide us with an accessible mechanism, such as a WhatsApp group, to allow us, and other interested and affected parties, to lodge emergency water and sanitary service requests.

Yours faithfully

**SOUTH AFRICAN WATER CAUCUS MEMBERS AND AFFILIATES:**

1. Western Cape: Zinzi Mgwigwi and Khaya Mateta
2. Mpumalanga: Thelma Nkosi and Bafana Hlatshwayo
3. Gauteng: Samson Mokwena
4. Eastern Cape: Aaron Ranayeke and Phumla Mbulawa
5. Limpopo: Mashile Phalane and Gilbert Moela
6. Free State: Ephraime Mosibi and Thetso Mokonyane
7. KwaZulu-Natal: Caroline Ntaopane
8. Centre for Environmental Rights: Leanne Govindsamy and Zahra Omar
9. Environmental Monitoring Group: Thabo Lusithi, Nick Hamer, Siyabonga Myeza, Apiwe Mdunyelwa and Erna Curry
10. Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance: Samson Mokwena
11. WoMin: Caroline Ntaopane
12. Cooperative and Policy Alternative Centre (COPAC): Courtney Morgan
13. South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC): Courtney Morgan
14. C-19 People's Coalition South Africa: Nicole Naidoo
15. C-19 People's Coalition Eastern Cape: Mthobeli Mabaso
16. African Water Commons Collective: Faeza Meyer and Ebrahim Fourie
17. Mary Galvin
18. Victor Munnik

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<sup>4</sup> We also bring to your attention a map of water-stressed communities compiled by the South African Food Sovereignty Campaign (SAFSC). See: <https://www.safsc.org.za/water-stressed-communities-map/>.

**ANNEXURE A:  
LIST OF COMMUNITIES IN URGENT NEED OF WATER AND/OR SANITATION PRODUCTS**

**WESTERN CAPE**

1. **Shukushukuma Community (Mfuleni)**

The community of Shukushukuma in Mfuleni has faced issues with access to water since the lockdown. There are approximately 200 people who are using just two taps and there are persistent water outages, particularly during the day. Soap is not provided.

2. **Joe Slovo Community**

People living in this community do not have access to water or soap and are unable to afford either.

3. **Khayelitsha Community**

In this community the water trucks arrive once a day at 10:00 and provide water in one location and no soap is provided. Elderly people are unable to walk long distances and shouldn't be doing so given that they are at a higher risk from fatally contracting Covid-19.

4. **Makhaza Community, Khayelitsha**

Water supply is continuously interrupted and there are regular sewer bursts which pose a health risk to the community.

5. **Silvertown Informal Settlement**

Existing water infrastructure is ageing and does not extend far enough to reach all homes making water access very difficult. Soap is not provided.

6. **Greenpark Township (next to Delft and Mfuleni)**

In this community, the water pressure is very low, making access difficult and time consuming. The existing taps are very far apart and far from informal houses. Most taps also do not have caps, which were stolen a long time ago. The bucket toilet system is not cleaned or drained posing a health hazard. Soap is not provided.

7. **Eastridge, Westridge, Tafelsig, Beacon Valley (Mitchell's Plain), Lavender Hill and Retreat**

Backyard dwellers of formal houses do not have water due to cut-offs and water management devices (WMDs) that limit water to 350 litres per day. Soap is not provided.

8. **Nduli township (two informal settlements), Tulbagh (four informal settlements) and Wolseley (two informal settlements) (Witzenburg Municipality)**

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.

9. **Various farms, Robertson (Langeberg Municipality)**

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.

## LIMPOPO

10. **Ga-Madiba Village (N11), Mokopane community (Mogalakwena Local Municipality)**

Some areas have no water tanks. Other areas have water tanks but they are empty. There is a burst sewerage pipe close to the community which poses a health risk. No soap is provided.

11. **Steenbokpan and Shongoane Communities, Lephhalale**

Water tanks in the area have been dry for five years and the remaining water point, far from the settlement, women wait for an entire day to fill a 20-litre bucket.

In Shongoane, to obtain access to water, community members (mainly women) 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.

12. **Mabuela Village, Mokopane**

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.

13. **Sekutlong Village (Fetakgomo Tubatse local municipality)**

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 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.

## EASTERN CAPE

14. **Nombanjane, Nxarxo and Ngcizele Villages (Centane region, Mnquma Local Municipality, Amathole District Municipality)**

Communities in this area comprise approximately 600 households and have faced a lack of water access for many years. Despite repeatedly bringing this to the attention of the Mayor of their municipality, little has been done. No soap is provided in this area as well.

The SAWC finds it particularly concerning that on, Tuesday 14 April, 10 leaders from the three areas were arrested for contravening the COVID-19 Emergency Regulations and charged. They will appear in Court on the 13 May 2020.

15. **Mendwana Community, Ward 21 (Mbhashe Local Municipality, Amathole District Municipality)**

The community of Mendwana comprises approximately 480 households and has no water and is relying on a natural spring which is located far away from community members, making it particularly difficult for the elderly. No soap is provided.

16. **Ndondo Square (Sakhisizwe Municipality)**

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.

17. **Rodana, EMalahleni (Chris Hani District Municipality)**

Residents of 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.

18. **Elundini Community, Ward 4 (Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality)**

This community has no water due to no infrastructure: the unavailability of diesel to pump water to stand pipes during this crisis.

19. **Mkhubiso Village (Raymond Mhlaba Local Municipality, Amathole District Municipality)**

This village has no running water.

20. **Tyefu and Hlosini Villages (Ngqushwa Local Municipality, Amathole District Municipality)**

These villages have been without water for years now. Earlier this year, a letter was sent to the MEC requesting an urgent meeting regarding this issue, but this meeting was postponed by the Spokesperson due to the coronavirus crisis.

## MPUMALANGA

21. **Silobela township, Carolina (Albert Luthuli Local Municipality, Gert Sibande District Municipality)**

There is a shortage of clean water in the Silobela township.

22. **Clewer and Vosman townships, eMalaheni (Nkangala District Municipality)**

There is a need for JoJo water tanks in these townships.

23. **Arnot farm, Middelburg**

The community residing on this farm obtains water from a river stream which is a long distance away. They require reliable access to water supply.

24. **Phola/Ogies (Nkangala District Municipality)**

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.

## KWAZULU NATAL

25. **Somkhele (Mtubatuba Municipality)**

The community in Somkhele has 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).