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South Africa

17,000 households deliberately deprived of water

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[Amandla!](#) Interviewed Nqobile Ndima, an activist in the struggle for water in Phumlamqashi informal settlement near the [Lenasia](#) suburb, in the province of [Gauteng](#). [1]

Nqobile Ndima: I'm an activist, a resident. We moved to Phumlamqashi in 2017. At first, we were happy that we found a place here. We built shacks for ourselves. In fact, it's not a shack, it's a home to us. Then we connected the water. There were existing communal taps. As a community, we gathered together and contributed R50 per household to buy the pipes and materials. So by June 2018, everyone had water in their yard.

Then in 2023, our councillor, our so-called councillor, came. She has never come before. Even if we've had strikes and riots, she has never showed up. But in 2023, she came with a notice saying they will disconnect the pipes. We won't get water anymore. Then, after that, notice we just saw the JMPD [Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department], with a lot of police, a lot of security, and private security. And they just disconnected that huge pipe which supplied Extension 3, which is Vlakfontein, and Phumlamqashi as well.

People of the community, they gathered there to ask, why are they disconnecting the water without even informing us when are they going to disconnect? That's when the JMPD and the Metro police people, they started firing at the community. And then, because the Taxi Association were part of the strike, they shot back at the JMPD. So the struggle then started.

We stayed almost a year without having any tanks. There was no plan to get us water after disconnecting. There were only 15 households that had water at that time, because their connection was somewhere else. But we struggled. We have 17,868 shacks in Phumlamqashi. Just imagine all those shacks gathering at those 15 households just to get water. It was nine to ten months before we started getting jojo tanks.

Amandla!: Did they explain in any way why they were doing this?

NN: None of them answered us. We asked, "Why are you disconnecting? Where is the councillor, if you are here to disconnect?" Their response was, "We were sent by your councillor". They never wanted to hear anything from us. And then the community got angry. We started to make noise. We sang, I think that made them to be frustrated more. And then they started shooting at us. They wanted to scare us.

A!: And do they provide other services to you, like refuse and electricity?

NN: No, they don't. Nothing. We haven't got anything.

A!: How did you manage for all those months without water?

NN: To be honest, I don't know how. I don't know how to even explain. It's tough. It's hard. Yoh, I don't know what I would say. It's so, so painful. I don't have words to explain the feeling. My child, he's now eight. I'm working in a call centre. When he comes back from school, sometimes he even has to take a five-litre bucket to go fetch water, because there is no water in the house. And at the time, the tank was 2 km away.

A!: Have you tried to talk to Joburg water or to the city about getting the water reinstated?

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NN: Yes, we went several times to Joburg Water and even to the state. Their response was to ask for seven days, and then after that seven days, that's when they will come and sort this water crisis issue. But they didn't. After the seventh day, we went back again to Joburg Water, but no one showed up. We were there for eight hours, from seven in the morning until two in the afternoon. No one showed up. We went to Joburg Water in September 2023. We went again in January 2024. And again in March 2024. Then we went to Pretoria in August 2024, and then we had a meeting again last year, in February or March 2025. But the response is the same. They are coming to fix it. Even today, they are still coming.

AI: It must make you feel very desperate that they simply don't care.

NN: They don't. They actually don't care. It looks like it's going to continue to be like this because no one is talking about it, and no one is saying anything.

22 April 2026

Source: [Amandla!](#).

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[1] Featured image by Filiz Elaerts on [Unsplash](#).