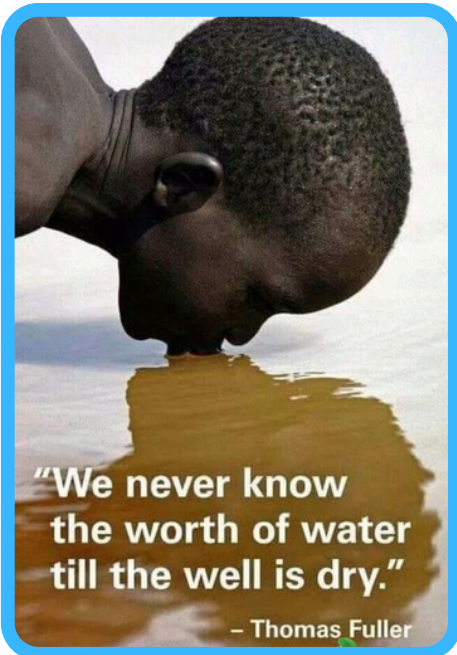


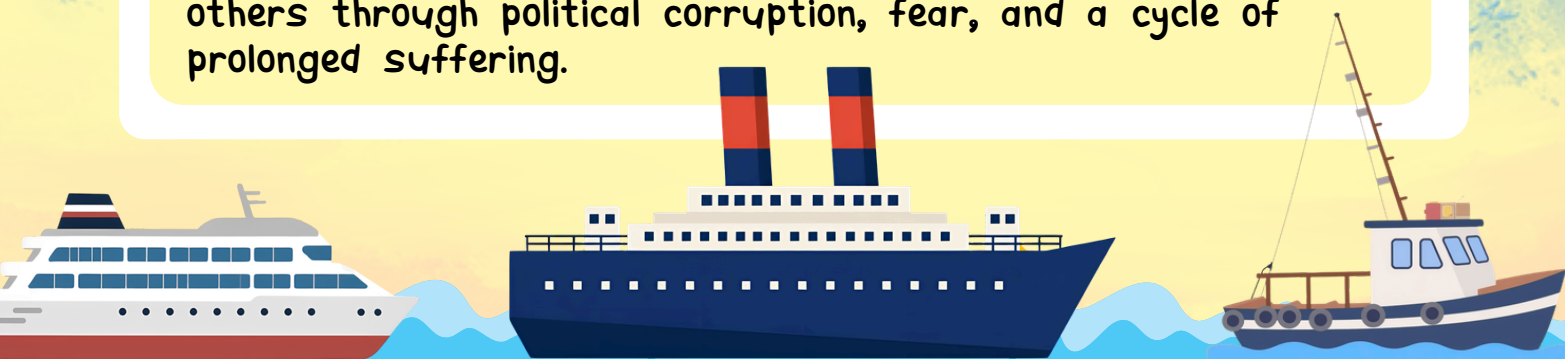


SOUTH AFRICAN WATER CRISIS: A MANUFACTURED DISASTER?



Africa is the second most populated continent in the world, harboring around 1.6 billion people, and is considered to contain roughly 19% of the world's population. South Africa alone has a GDP higher than that of many flourishing nations such as Qatar, New Zealand, Hungary, and Greece, at 480 billion USD.

Nevertheless, when we look deeper into its GDP per capita - the average wealth per person - stands at a measly \$7,503 USD, accordingly leaving the average citizen far less wealthy than those of smaller flourishing countries like Greece (\$29,696), New Zealand (\$52,023), or Qatar (\$68,138). Additionally, research from AfricaCheck.org states that 66.7% of Africans live in poverty, which only drops to around 50% in South Africa. To many, mere access to water is a luxury. This problem is a collection of neglect and causes, including extreme floods from climate change, infrastructure collapse, a weakened economy, remiss management, and much more. Many join criminal syndicates for survival, which ultimately leads to further problems for others through political corruption, fear, and a cycle of prolonged suffering.





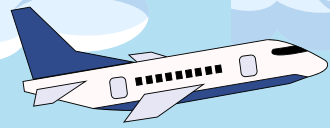
THE SCARS OF EXPLOITATION ON AFRICAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Many of South Africa's pipes and other water-related infrastructure are massively damaged due to decisions from the apartheid era of the 1950s and by local governments ignoring these problems in many parts of impoverished parts of South Africa, which prevents basic water access. To put this into perspective, approximately \$1.55 billion of water is lost per year due to leaky systems, pipe damage from floods and heatwaves, and government negligence.



The Apartheid Era lasted from 1948 to 1994 and is characterized by massive segregation, where white urban cores received premium access to water, electricity, dams, etc. These lands were primarily owned by white individuals who used them as commercial farms, mines, and white neighborhoods. Water in homes was a luxury given only to the white minority. At the time, black urban townships such as Soweto and Khayelitsha - initially housing and dormitories for black African laborers - had the bare minimum water access. Specifically, situations where a single tap served hundreds of laborers were far from uncommon. Their homes lacked plumbing, and the laborers and families often had to empty their waste in shared outdoor standpipes - they had zero access to sanitation. Even worse were those living in Bantustans. These people were neither workers nor the privileged whites. They were African citizens who were forcefully relocated into barren, crowded territories without access to any form of help, piping, or sanitation. Consequently, to survive, they had to travel long distances to fetch contaminated water from rivers and streams. Segregated councils would later be formed into the municipalities of South Africa we see today after dismantling apartheid in the 1990s. Due to the lack of a proper taxation system and a crippled economy, the expansion of basics like water pipes and electricity was not possible; infrastructure maintenance was never addressed because many parts of South Africa lacked the money or power to do so; and much of the country was in a dire state where it could not keep up with the technological boom of the 20th century, leading to the issues we see here today.





CLIMATE IMPACT AND WATER SCANDALS

Climate change has only increased the challenges faced by the residents living in South Africa. Due to unpredictable droughts and extreme floods, the infrastructure problem is only worsening. Most homes in poorer areas are old and degraded, and the materials for repairs are expensive. Citizens face constant threats of home collapse, which are only intensified by rapid, unpredictable heat and floods. With 1.6 million homes living without even electricity, it is easy to see how these problems create major hurdles for these citizens, as they cannot access necessities such as clean water, sanitation, food preservation, and proper housing. Due to these problems, a staggering 8% of South Africans, or 5 million people, live in informal dwellings, such as shacks, for basic shelter. Consequently, such damage and extreme weather have led to many cases of contamination, with the outbreak of diseases such as malaria and cholera.

Lastly, since the government is failing to act and help those in poverty in need of assistance, criminal syndicates have taken over and have sabotaged the water delivery systems; they charge citizens for access to water (a government service provided to them for free) and also damage infrastructure, systematically break pipes, and other supply lines to maximize their control. As 62-year-old Hammanskraal resident Eric Sebotsane perfectly sums it up, "There are criminals everywhere. Some of the truck drivers sell the water. When you say you want water, they say you must buy. Because everything here is money, when you don't have money you can't do anything." Locals are far too afraid to report such issues to the police because they fear that criminal syndicates may permanently cut off their water supply and lead to many other consequences.



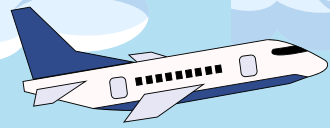


INEQUAL WEALTH DISTRIBUTION: THE CAUSE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S POVERTY

South Africa is among the wealthiest and most democratic nations in the whole of Africa, yet over 50% of its population is covered in poverty. This is because, by many, it is the most economically unequal society in the world. Research from the World Inequality Database shows that the top 10% of its earners own roughly 70% of all income and 85% of the country's wealth. This wealth inequality leaves the rest of the population with virtually nothing. As a direct result, you get a brutal contrast where wealthy, booming business districts sit right next to impoverished neighborhoods where people can't even get basic water or electricity.



To add on, the job crisis in South Africa is critical. More than a third of the country is unemployed, which increases to 60% for those under 25. This is a direct result of the Apartheid Era spatial segregation policies, such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 (which forced Black South Africans to live outside of cities in remote townships) and the Bantu Education Act of 1953 (which stripped funding from Black schools to limit education and curriculum to the bare minimum for low-skilled labor). These policies are the reason why poor families live miles away from their jobs in city centers. For many, this commute is too expensive. Because of this and due to underdeveloped infrastructure and education in poorer neighborhoods, individuals are left out of the skills and knowledge required for high paying jobs.



HOW CAPE TOWN AND JOHANNESBURG ARE FIGHTING BACK

Even in such a desperate situation, facing the evils of corruption while fighting back waves of climate change, the South African people have been pioneering solutions to fix their problems. In the densely populated city of Johannesburg, they are using help from the World Health Institute's SUNCASA project, where locals and foreigners are cleaning up the Jukskei River, replanting indigenous trees and bushes to create usable land and riverbanks, implementing debris and waste filtration systems along the river, improving urban heat management, cleaning up the city, and removing traditional gender and cultural barriers through providing universal childcare and important female roles in climate change - ultimately aiming to improve the lives of over a million residents while also reducing the chances of floods.



In Cape Town, similar efforts to fight back against the lack of water are seen through the Cape Town Water Fund. The Cape Town Water Fund is a water conservation program that removes invasive plant species, which are ultimately draining billions of liters of annual water loss. Moreover, Invasive trees like pine, eucalyptus, and Australian acacias have been draining Cape Town of up to 150 million liters of water a day. The removal program has created 722 specialized jobs - such as high-altitude rope technicians - targeting younger individuals and women from impoverished and underserved areas, ultimately creating jobs and a better environment for them. Lastly, by removing invasive species, diverse native plant species of the fynbos habitat are allowed to recover and grow. The Cape Town Water Fund accelerates this ecological renewal by replanting and restoring these plant species.

