

## LINE OF SIGHT

August 2020

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## LINE OF SIGHT

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December 2019 will be remembered for the appearance of a new type of coronavirus in China. It was subsequently identified as the SARS-CoV-2 by the World Health Organisation and soon became known as Covid-19. The virus quickly spread around the world with the first case of Covid-19 infection in South Africa being registered on March 5th 2020 in Kwa-Zulu Natal. A mere eleven days later, it had reached the Limpopo Province.

Recognising the potential for the spread of the coronavirus in rural South Africa, with its lack of infrastructure and a legacy of municipal ineptitude, the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) had to make a plan - and quick. As one of the key means to fight the spread of the disease is washing hands regularly, the area was immediately identified as particularly vulnerable.

Despite some bulk infrastructure deployed in the various municipalities by the DWS, many communities were still without potable water at the start of 2020. Such communities mostly rely on boreholes as their main water resource.

People in the Sekhukhune district have become used to not receiving these municipal services. The problem seems to be more demanding than the day-to-day failure of maintenance of the area: The challenges stem from historic mismanagement and inadequate town planning for areas which seem to be growing exponentially.

In rural South Africa, the process for acquiring a piece of land seems to start when the potential homeowners apply for a P.T.O (Permission To Occupy) from the local tribal authority. The tribal authority of a specific area grants permission to the potential homeowner and allocates a stand which is typically about 150m2 to 200m2. Usually, these P.T.O's are haphazardly awarded with none of the basic services in place or catered for. This results in the communities having to source some of their water from unreliable rainfall or by making use of water from the Lepelle River. For those who are close to its banks, frequent droughts and sporadic floodingadd to the water woes of the area.

Water reticulation systems fall under the mandate of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA). Establishing the networks to the communities has proven troublesome, since the P.T.O system, proximity to job opportunities and an irregular terrain dictates that communities are scattered.

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With the Covid-19 pandemic forcing the hand of many governing bodies, the DWS and the local municipalities requested the assistance of Lebalelo Water User Association (LWUA) to urgently provide water services to the communities in Sekhukhune.

The host district of Lebalelo Water User Association (LWUA) is Sekhukhune, one of the five districts of the Limpopo Province. Sekhukhune is a hot, semi-arid area, which receives relatively low rainfall. The valuable Olifants River also referred to as the Lepelle or Obalule River, brings with it much needed water for irrigation capacity to several farmers on its banks - from subsistence to commercial farmers. Even with the availability of year-round water and a reliable water table, at first sight, it is clear that communities are struggling with general infrastructure. Services such as water and sanitation, road maintenance, refuge removal all seem to be forgotten line items in a spreadsheet that has never been implemented in this forgotten Limpopo region.

LWUA, with the permission and financial assistance of its members from the mining industry, subsequently funded the acquisition and installation of 72 water tanks, each with a 10 000 litre capacity, as well as the stands on which the tanks would be erected.

The Sekhukhune District Municipality and DWS identified the Makhuduthamaga and Fetakgomo / Tubatse Local Municipalities to benefit. Thirty-two tanks were allocated to the Praktiseeer Region, 29 to the Makhuduthamaga Region and 11 to the Fetakgomo Region.

The project commenced on March 31st with the first 70 tanks purchased from Roto Tank in Polokwane. After completion, each 10 000-litre tank would be installed on a reinforced concrete base-slab with a 1.6m sturdy steel tank stand and equipped with ten taps each complete with the necessary pipework. According to the Secom report, the total cost, including professional fees, totalled R 3 527 334.94, or R48 990.80 per tank.

Pamodia and Mohau Mulutsi were appointed as contractors for the tank installation. During the slab construction phase, local people from within the Sekhukhune district were selected as far as possible as supervisors and labourers to create some jobs in the immediate area. In addition to the employment of local labour the contractors also called in help from the local delivery trucks to collect and transport the empty tanks to the various locations, thus bringing valuable income to the local communities.





The 70 tanks were divided between the Makhuduthamaga and Fetakgomo / Tubatse Local Municipalities. A list of the villages that needed water tanks was compiled by DWS, who also determined the distribution of the tanks to the villages. The municipalities could determine the exact locations for placement. The GPS coordinates provided by the municipalities indicated these points for the contractors. In two instances the coordinates provided by the municipalities were wrong and the tanks were thus installed at the incorrect locations. Reacting to this oversight, Thembane Makhubele, operations manager for Lebalelo Water User Association says the community was told, "we are not going to take (the tanks) back. You (the community) need it, so you can keep it." Lebalelo graciously purchased two extra tanks to be installed in the correct locations.

On a visit to the area, inspectors from various working groups from the DWS and other stakeholders commented on the exceptional quality of the installations and the extraordinary effort that had been made by Lebalelo to provide tanks that would be strong, safe and user-friendly.

Arriving in Fetakgomo Local Municipality to hear from the municipal officials how the intervention has been functioning, one could easily forget that the country is under national lockdown. The doors of the local hairdresser and traditional muti shop are open to the waiting clientele and a beer truck is waiting to deliver its (illicit) load at the bottle store. Life goes on as usual, despite Covid-19.

Mr Moses Sekgobela, a municipal official, is positive about the LWUA assistance, "The initiative is helping quite a lot. We are just experiencing some hick-ups, but generally, it is working good." The hick-ups he refers to are caused by the breakdown of the municipal trucks. This leaves only the Lebalelo truck to pick up the water load. Another obstacle has been the flow of diesel: According to Mr Sekgobela, there is a payment arrangement made between LWUA and Global Fuel. According to Mr Sekgobela, Global Fuel does not purchase local diesel and the company has been struggling to acquire their international supply. This problem is affecting the sustainable supply of diesel to the Lebalelo trucks

The municipality of Fetakgomo has drawn up a tanking schedule, "We are using our own two trucks, and the two Lebalelo trucks have been added to the schedule. As long as everything is working, we are supplying more people than before," Mr Sekgobela says.

The eleven tanks donated by LWUA are supplementing the storing capacities within the communities, helping to sustain 2340 households in 21 villages.

According to Mr Sekgobela, "there are some areas where the installed systems are adequate and the LWAU intervention is supplementing the storage capacity." In other areas, it is clear that the installed system is not functioning as it should, running dry at times. A minor additional problem is the fact that the municipal trucks are quite old and do not have the appropriate fittings to decant water from the truck to the tank. This means that the community tanks can only be filled with the Lebalelo supplied tankers.

An interesting element that presents itself is the rural community psychology concerning the belief in a 'me-first' entitlement. And wherever this phenomenon raises its ugly face the beautiful bird of ubuntu flies away! There is a harsh defence and a hoarding of resources. Perceived local inequality in the distribution of donations and an insistence on the preferential distribution of employment opportunities, monetary investment and private sector discretionary goodwill become a way of life. It is this communal Zeitgeist that adds to the challenges of discretionary social investment.

According to Mr Sekgobela, there were such adamant demands and threats received from the host communities that service delivery became near impossible.

He notes that even those villages that have had sufficient water from existing boreholes or alternative water sources were demanding tanks and services, feeling entitled to these benefits bestowed on the struggling communities. Apart from the community insistence on hoarding of resources, they also insisted that community trucks be employed under contract from Lebalelo - thus ensuring income into the area. At one point this viewpoint led to work standstill. Luckily Lebalelo has a well-developed relationship of responsible citizenry in the area and this relationship facilitated the speedy resolution of misunderstandings.

In Mantjakane, three tanks were installed to help alleviate the plight of a community with no system infrastructure, completely reliant on the weekly delivery of water, but four weeks after installation, only one water point is functional after villagers vandalised the 20 taps of two of the tanks. The taps have been broken off and thrown over the neighbouring fence, to show the community's anger at the tanks not being filled regularly.

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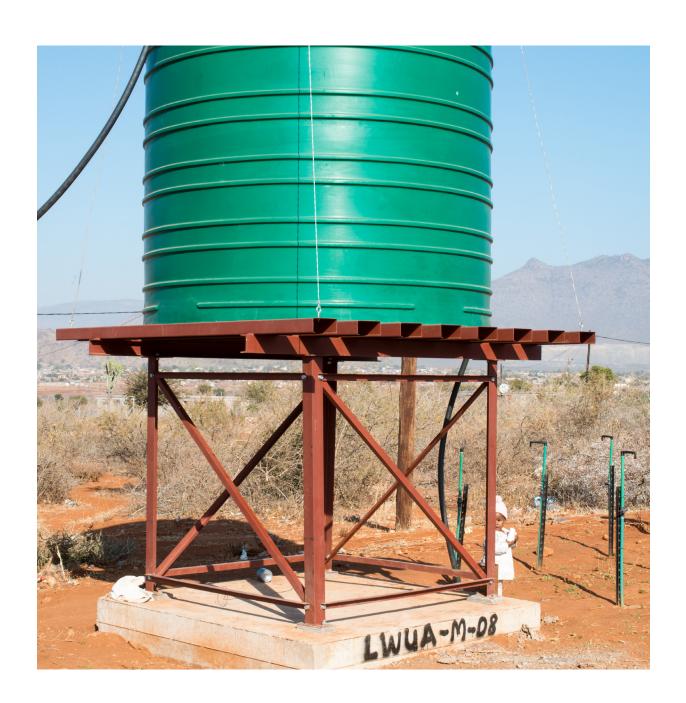
Their anger was directed at Lebalelo until the role that LWUA plays was clarified: The 72 tanks were installed and handed over to the municipality. The municipality functioning under its mandate of potable water delivery is solely responsible for the delivery of water to these tanks. According to one of the 1304 inhabitants of the village, Christina Magoba, the tanks were filled three weeks previously and then, a week later when the tanks were empty, the taps were torn off. Destroying the infrastructure that was meant to help in crises rendered the installed tanks useless. For now, the taps remain broken.

The 326 households are thus reliant on a single tank and sporadic water delivery to the individual homes until the taps can be repaired or re-installed.

Christina's household consists of eight people who are reliant on the delivery of potable water from the municipalities. On this specific morning, she was too late to have her 110l drum filled and had to go home empty-handed. In the absence of municipal water, the Magoba household would have to buy water from local community suppliers at a rate of R80 per 110l drum. While the lucky few who were in time to place their drums were decanting the valuable litres into smaller 25l containers, the plea to share the water that was delivered fell on deaf ears.







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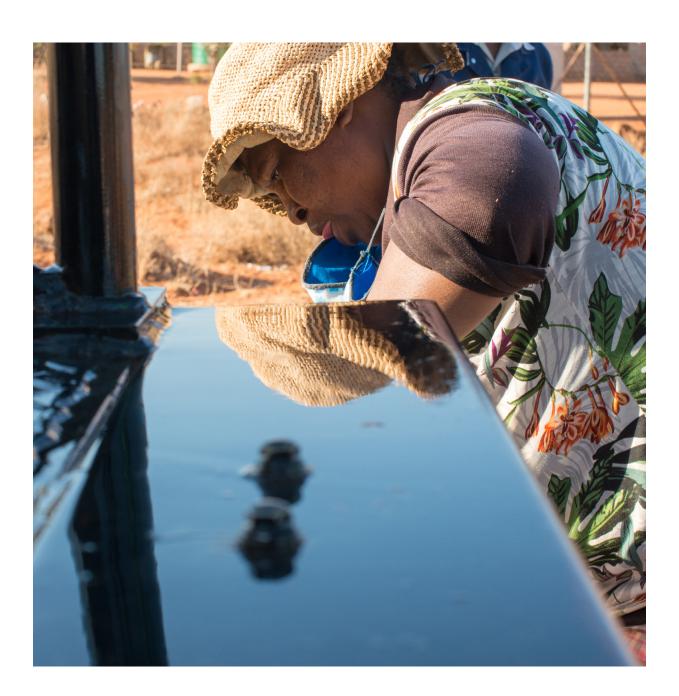








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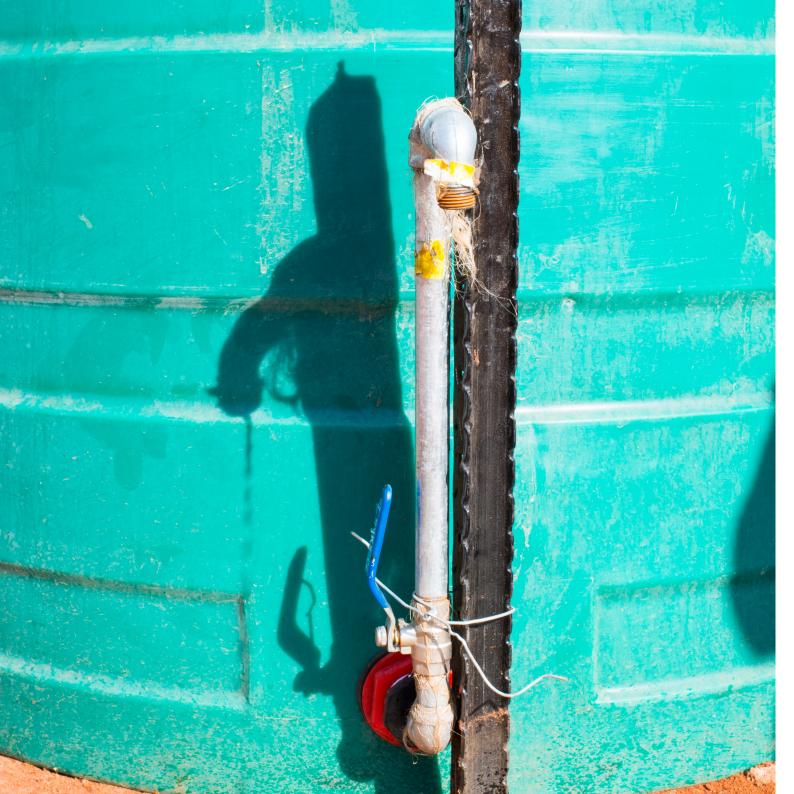




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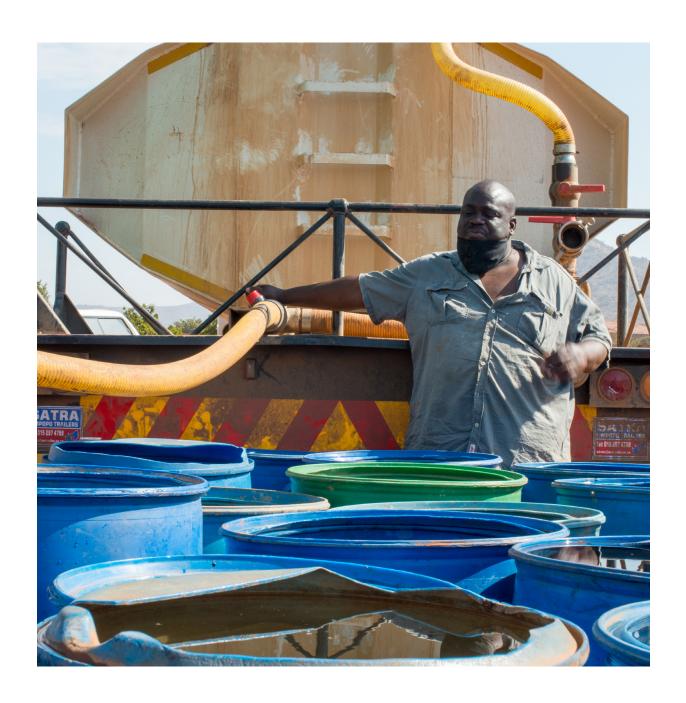






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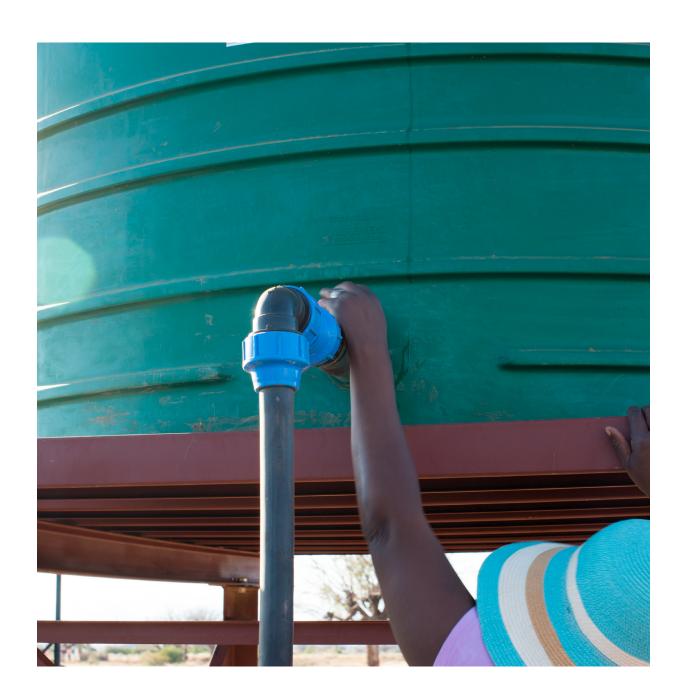


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One of the major challenges in delivering water to the villages in the Sekhukhune district is the significant distances between the communities. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the local municipalities had been struggling to reach and provide water or other services to every village, since not all of the communities possess water tanks or water reservoirs.

In these villages, the trucks may spend an entire day out in the village street where the families can bring their household containers to be filled directly from the trucks. If circumstances demand it preferential treatment is given to villagers where there has been a death in the family, where a funeral is held, in order to assist the family with the ceremony and tending to all the guests. This is a commendable gesture and is seen as an act that is socially much appreciated, but – especially when there is more than one funeral – a logistical calamity for the trucks arises.

As Thembane Makhubele, operations manager of Lebalelo Water User Association (LWUA) explains, "The tankers can only do so much." Although there is more than one drawing point, the vastness of the area dictates huge distances between the water collection points and the receiving community. In all cases the trucks travel on the R37 road.

The R37 is a provincial or regional road under maintenance from the local municipalities.

It carries heavy loads in and out of the heavily mined area and is in severe disrepair. The road-surface condition leads to great delays for all the road users. With the water tanks traveling great distances - even as far as 120km from drawing point to community tank - the best that can be hoped for is that one tanker may be able to fill four community tanks and some incidental smaller tanks along the way.

It takes approximately 11 minutes to fill up a tank before it can leave for the next community tank on the list. The way these tankers are welcomed in the various communities vary significantly: In some communities the arrival of the water truck down the dusty road is eagerly anticipated: Bigeyed toddlers at gaping windows scurry down the grapevine to let everyone know that the water truck is coming. An army of blue 110l containers, expertly balanced on well-trained heads, make their way to the big green tank.

In another community a herd of 25I containers start to gather in rows before the bowed heads of the small taps that would fill them. In yet another community, nobody cares and the tanks stay full for days.

The drivers of the Lebalelo trucks take safety very seriously and are adamant that none of the curious youngsters play around the equipment. The decanting of the precious water lasts a full hour: 11 minutes to fill up... 58 minutes to decant. The main reason for the slow process is the size of the pipe that goes into the receiving tank. While the truck idles away precious diesel reserves, the tank fills through a small 30mm feeder pipe. If this pipe could have a greater diameter and be a separate length of pipe that could travel with the truck and be put into the inlet of the tank, time and diesel could be used more productively. To assist the municipalities, LWUA rented three water delivery tankers from service providers in the Sekhukhune area and also purchased six new Toyota Hino Trucks from Limpopo Hino in Polokwane.

Three of the new trucks were each fitted with three 5000-liter Polyethylene horizontal tanks on a flat deck. They were delivered to the Sekhukhune District Municipality (SDM) on 30 April 2020. The remaining three trucks were fitted with 14 000-liter stainless steel tanks. These stainless steel tank trucks were delivered on the 12 May 2020.

According to Makhubele, an agreement was made with the municipalities according to which LWUA will remain responsible for the maintenance of the trucks, for providing drivers, as well as fuel. The municipalities would be responsible for the day-to-day running of the trucks and the logistics of delivering water to the tanks that were installed.

Initially, there was some friction between the community and the truck drivers. The community felt that since there are trucks available in the community, these trucks should have been commissioned to provide the water delivery services.

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Makhubele believes that the conflict could have been prevented if the message taken to the communities by the various municipal social engagement officers was clear. LWUA needed the municipality to endorse their action in the community, in order to "pave the way, before the trucks could arrive inside the community. The way it happened, it was a shock, with the trucks arriving without proper introduction to the community," he says.

As it were, "the first sight of the Lebalelo trucks created immediate tension." The Lebalelo trucks were asked to leave the route, and hand over the job to be done to a community truck. The message slowly filtered through to the community and tribal leaders from the municipality and its councillors that the trucks were in support of the municipal effort and not a commercial venture. As the situation refined over time, the message became clearer, "Eventually the communities understood that the trucks are there to help the people to get water.

Lebalelo was helping the municipalities to deliver water during crises, specifically the Covid-19 pandemic," Makhubele explains.

The trucks are not just delivering water to be used in the fight against Covid-19, but has been absorbed in the municipalities' existing mandate of providing potable water. But, as Makhubele says, "we cannot ask the municipality to only use the trucks to service the gifted tanks. There is a shortage of water." The result of an extended history of poor planning, and a lack of infrastructure is that some government projects, such as pipelines, had not been completed. The districts are becoming more populated. According to Makhubele, the poor planning continues as the tribal authorities allow people to build close to main roads, without considering the future expansion of the areas. This will further impact the municipalities' ability to serve the communities in the future.

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It is a sad fact that the sense one gets from the general community is not an affirmation of the spirit of ubuntu. Instead, those communities with access to healthy and strong boreholes are refusing access to the boreholes for use by the wider area.

The nine trucks (six purchased and three rented) are on loan to the SDM up to 30 September 2020. This came at a considerable cost: The water tankers are rented from service providers and provided to the SDM on a loan basis from 14 April 2020 until 30 September 2020. The total cost for the procurement of the new trucks was R6 747 534.00. The estimated cost for the rental trucks over this period is R2 140 000.00.

The future of these trucks will be decided at a later stage. Unless the municipalities start planning for local reservoirs or purification plants, the tankers may have to continue to draw water from the heavily burdened drawing points.

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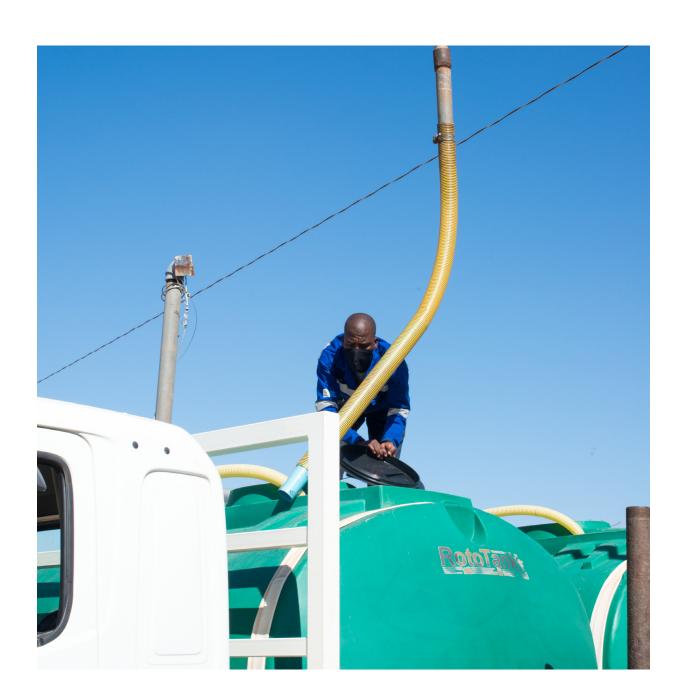


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range a meeting with councilors monthly and mit minutes to immediate supervisor within five king days



## SEKHUKHUNE

District Municipality

Private Bag x 8611 Groblersdal 0470, 3 West Street Groblersdal0470

Tel: (013) 262 7300, Fax (013) 262 3688 E-Mail: sekinfo@sekhukhune.coza

## **FETAKGOMO REGION**

## **APEL MAINTENANCE STAFF**

ne	Persal No	Rank Maintenance Team	Station	\$
oahla M.	N 0912013	Principal Foreman	Apel	
elo L.	N 1512042	Artisan Plumber	Apel	
B	N 0905004	Canaral Warker	Anel	















































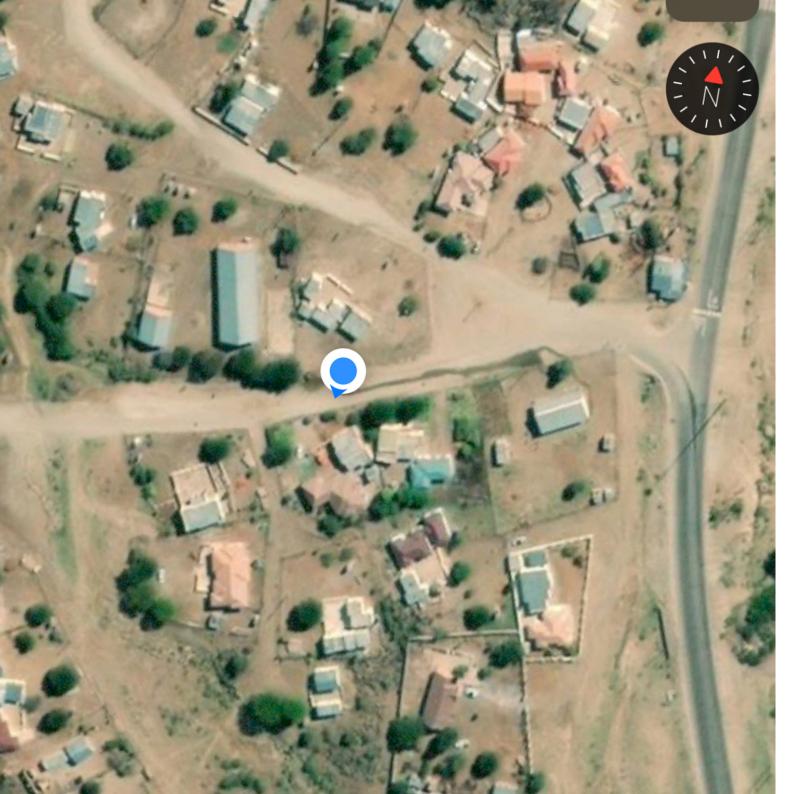


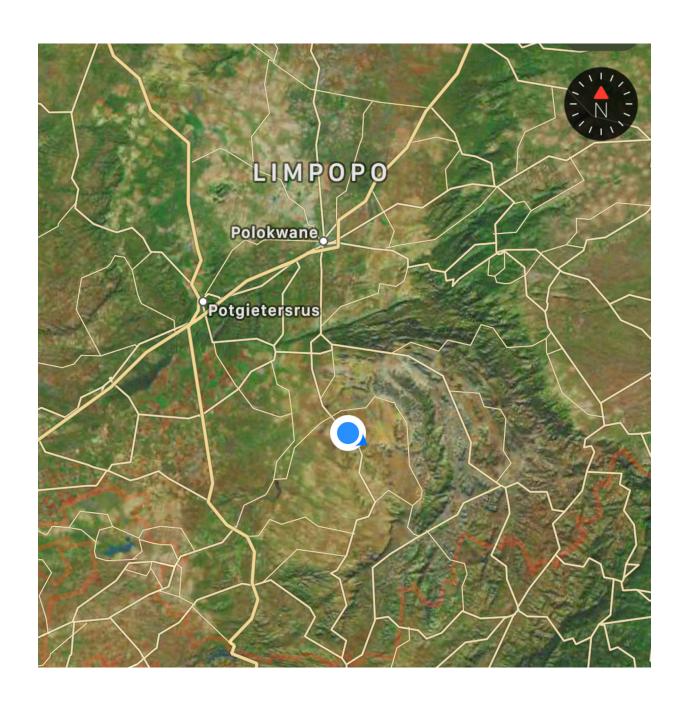




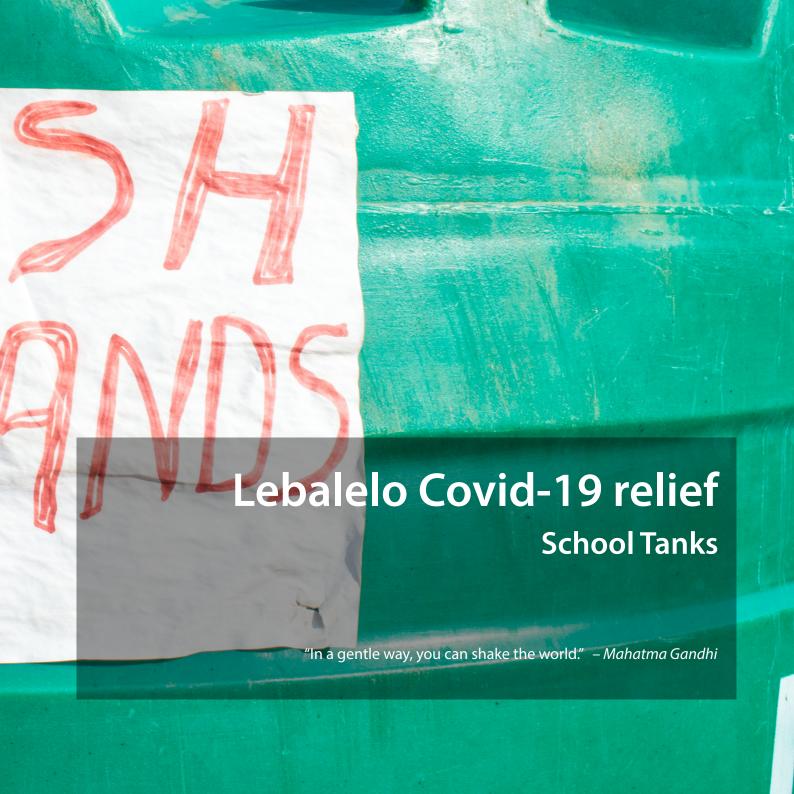












Wash, wash, wash your hands
Wash them nice and clean.
Scrub them here, scrub them there
And scrub them in between.

On 15 March, the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, declared a national state of disaster, and announced measures such as immediate travel restrictions and the closure of schools from 18 March. While schools across South Africa rallied with plans for digital classrooms and remote schooling plans, the rural scholars were sadly left out in the cold. Amidst extreme poverty and an unemployment rate of 94.2% during the initial stages of Covid-19 according to Stats SA, hundreds of children across Limpopo stayed at home.

Apart from the 72 water tanks installed in the communities, a request was received from the Department of Education to assist the schools in the district of Fetagomo/Thubase and Makhuduthamaga. Governmental regulations in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic for the reopening of schools for Grade 7 and 12 learners demanded that learners must have access to water, to wash their hands frequently.

When the call came on Wednesday, the 27th of May, for assistance to open schools on the 1st of June, Lebalelo Water Users Association (LWUA) responded with a sense of urgency. The Lebalelo team understood the importance of children returning to school, but first, the necessary resources needed to be in place to ensure their safety from the Covid-19 pandemic. "The quickest and easiest way to deliver water to the schools would be the smaller 1000-liter tanks." Thembane Makhubele, operations manager, LWUA, says.

At 11:00 on Saturday morning on the 30th of June, 47 tanks were delivered to the LWUA operational headquarters in Modubeng, Limpopo. After two months of national lockdown, there was much to be done in the next 48 hours to facilitate the highly anticipated school re-opening. The LWUA teams stepped up and finished installing 22 tanks by 8 o'clock that evening. With the tanks for the closer schools installed, the teams moved further afield to install the remaining 25 tanks. The furthest schools were two hours away from the delivery point.

Teams started before sunrise and only returned well after dark that evening, some only leaving for home at 8 o'clock that evening. Makhubele describes the admirable teamwork he witnessed. The Lebalelo team made the experience a "vibe" to be part of, "there was no negativity, and no one said '47 schools? That is not possible!' There were no complaints." The project was completed within two days, at a total cost of R1 705.83 per tank installation.

Speaking to the team members afterwards, none of them minded working so hard on their Saturday and Sunday. They describe it as a hectic and extremely busy two days, with the schools waiting for tanks to open. "I didn't mind working on the weekend. It was for a good cause," Maria Moalala (a Lebalelo Artisan), says. "We were helping the children to get water in this time of Covid-19 so that they will be able to wash their hands. They really appreciated what we did for them."

One of the tanks was unfortunately damaged during the delivery. This would have left one of the schools without water. Unexpectedly, another school whose name appeared on the list of beneficiary schools, indicated that they had sufficient water at their disposal and did not require the Lebalelo tank.

The school therefore graciously made it available to the school that was left without a tank. Edward Moloto (Social Development Officer for Lebalelo) explains that the schools to benefit from the tanks were allocated by the Department of Education, although in some instances the names of schools that already had sufficient water, also appeared on the list of beneficiaries.

The Lebalelo team completed the project within the short time limit of 48 hours that they had available, installing not 47 but 48 tanks. The tanks also had to be filled and the water trucks were running a relay race to fill the 1000l tanks before the sun went down.

Unfortunately, a short six weeks after the installation of the tanks, the excitement and gratitude had been tainted by the lack of municipal service delivery. The agreement for relief donation of the 1000l tanks was that these tanks would be donated and installed by Lebalelo but that it would be the responsibility of the municipality, functioning under their mandate to provide potable water to these tanks. The municipality, however, did not keep to their part of the agreement.





Speaking to a despondent principal of Marishane Primary in Mooifontein - one of the beneficiary schools, Mr E. M. Mathabatha - commented: "You gave us the 1000l tank, but the water was only filled once. Now, there is no water." Mr Mathabatha says that they have had to mitigate this by buying water from a source. According to him, it costs the school R1850 to fill their existing 12 000l tanks, which they are using for cooking and general cleaning, and the water lasts for two weeks. Mr Mathabatha is clear about the matter: "I think Lebalelo did well (to install the tanks), only the problem lies with the municipality." His experience is that engaging with the municipality is not efficient, enquiries are referred to this and that side, without being resolved.

In Moshira village at Makuane Secondary School, Mr J Mogale also expressed his gratitude, "It is appreciated very much", although the water level was also lying precariously low at the time of the visit. At Magobanye High School, the principal Mr P. Moholola exclaims, "Thobela! We are waterless!" Here also the tank has not been filled for quite a while. Mr Moholola is the principal at Mogabanye Secondary School in Mogabading Village. He recounts that the tank was only filled upon installation and never again thereafter.

With the water in a 1000l tank lasting approximately 2 weeks, it means that for the last 4 weeks this tank had been standing around idly watching the Covid-19 pandemic go by.

Most of the headmasters that Mr Edward Moloto spoke to were under the impression that LWUA agreed to fill the tanks weekly or fortnightly. He had to assure them, "That was not our promise. It is the responsibility of the Local District Municipality as water providing authority to make sure all these tanks that we donated to the different schools remain filled - not Labalelo's" "I was about to give you a phone call to complain about it," Mr Moholola laughs... "So you are not giving us anything...," he asks incredulously as Mr Moloto leaves.

To some of the people interviewed about the Covid-19 relief intervention by Labalelo, it seems a shame that the various expenses incurred to assist the struggling communities does not have the optimal pay-off. After a day of visiting schools where most of the tanks stand empty, this view appears justified. The Municipality feels that they are not able to reach all the tanks across the various communities, they are unable to serve the 121 locations with the 9 trucks they have been given.

At some schools, the appreciation for Lebalelo's intervention is more visible. Mr P. J. Mmatabane from Masebudi Primary shows Mr Moloto how they have safeguarded the gifted tank against theft, because "we know the level of crime, the tank is a valuable asset ... a lifelong property. Even if 'Corona' is away, we will still have it, so we need to protect it." The tank is filled to the brim, ready to be used by the returning grade 11 learners. The school is also in the process of installing a small septic tank to catch any spilt water, for reuse in the garden.

Some schools have accepted the gift of the tanks and are making plans to keep it filled with water and to make optimum use of their gift. Mrs Letswalo, Head of Department at Kwata Primary School agrees that the installation has made a big difference to the pupils. The staff frequently fills the tank by using a hosepipe connected to a borehole. "We use a lot of water, the learners count the 20 seconds while washing their hands" she laughs, "We need to fill it up every morning." Used water is caught in a bucket and used to water the plants and the garden. The school also adds soap to the tank to make the process as user-friendly as possible.

Thembane Makhubele relates how the last tank was installed at one of the more distant schools on that Sunday night, weeks ago. It was getting late and the winter sun was setting fast. At 18:00 it was already dark in the mountains and the team had to navigate the gravel roads without the luxury of GPS reception. On their way to Kgaruthuthu Primary school in the Weltevreden district, Makhubele phoned Mr Madihlaba, the principal, to clarify directions. "Look up at the mountain. Do you see the lights? " And indeed the light was there! "We are guiding you. We will be here when you get here." When the Lebalelo team arrived, the teachers and principal were there to receive the tank, anxious to fill it before the children's arrival in less than 12 hours.

Follow the Light...

















































































