

## From our water correspondent

*Our water correspondent, Sharon Murinda from Harare, reports on burst pipes and how a poorly repaired water supply infrastructure is having an impact on public health.*

It was a lovely sunny afternoon that I had to go to the bank so that I could get some cash to buy lunch. Getting to the bank, I discovered that the maximum withdrawal allowed was Z\$100 billion (US\$1.3) and a basic lunch was costing Z\$350billion (US\$5). I had no option but to go to the nearest bakery so that I could get two fresh buns and return to work. On my way to the bakery, I saw people jumping haphazardly across the road and I wondered what was happening. As I drove closer, water was running all over the road and people had to jump over it because there was only one way into the bakery. The sight of so much flowing as well as stagnant water set me thinking about the issue of water-related diseases.

After I bought my buns I went to the nearby clinic just to get an idea of the incidence of water-related diseases. All the doctors were on strike because they were being underpaid and also there was no medication at the clinics and in the country

due to a shortage of foreign currency to purchase the drugs. I went round the clinic premises and I saw a student nurse who was lecturing to a group of mothers who had children below the age of five. She was talking about health and hygiene. I sat with the mothers and it was a really interesting discussion. At the end I found myself educating the mothers and the student nurse as well. I was talking to them about the importance of treating water, especially with low-cost technologies like SODIS, which don't require them to have firewood to boil the water. I also talked about developing habits within their families of always washing hands before handling food and after using the toilet. We also talked about the mother always having to be smart because some diseases which these children have are caused by the poor hygienic practices of the mother.

We all departed and everyone was impressed by how worthwhile and educative an event it was. I walked out with the student nurse and she was telling me the reasons why she had called for such an event. The problems, she stated, were that people were using water from the burst pipes for drinking and

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doi: 10.3362/1756-3488.2008.037, ISSN: 0262-8104 (print) 1756-3488 (online)

October 2008

Waterlines Vol. 27 No. 4

other domestic uses because water hasn't been running in their taps for weeks and sometimes for months and when it is available from the standpipes there are long queues.

Water is available from the standpipes all over the city; but although it has been treated it may not be completely safe due to insufficient treatment and a shortage of chlorine in the country. Burst pipes are due to the poor maintenance by the Municipality. The water engineers who should be carrying out the maintenance operations

are leaving the country to go to more developed countries where they can get better jobs. At the moment in Zimbabwe those working for the Municipality are getting not more than US\$5/month. Also the equipment required to maintain the pipes is not available in the country. This has had the result that the incidences of diarrhoeal cases are quite high especially amongst the under fives.

It was only 1620hrs but I realized that I had to rush to my workplace and knock off for the day.



Services in settlements like this are not being maintained due to shortage of staff and of supplies. Credit: Practical Action