

# Conflicting perceptions over water distribution in Sibasa-Thohoyandou area: interpreting local narratives

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## *Abstract*

The state perceives water as an economic commodity, even if its existing policy treats it as a national resource that should be freely accessed for basic usage. Research suggests many residents of the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area in the Limpopo Province, perceive water as a free natural resource that should not be paid for. As a result of this perception, most of the local residents are not paying for water services. In response to that, the municipality is faced with a cost-recovery problem – hence they restrict water reticulation. Residents concede that paying is a last resort because they are in need of water. Research was conducted on this issue after it surfaced as an apparent problem in the local media. The article explores and attempts to interpret the conflicting narratives on water procurement and distribution in the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area.

## *Introduction*

Water supplies are not adequate for all residents of Sibasa-Thohoyandou area. There is a conflict of perceptions on water procurement and distribution between the state<sup>1</sup> and the residents of Sibasa-Thohoyandou, especially with the current introduction of the idea of free basic water. Recent narratives of the state send a message that the shortage of water in Sibasa-Thohoyandou, to borrow Sithole *et al*'s expression, is that “the government acts in the interest” of the residents by restricting water distribution. On the contrary, the residents’ reaction and perception of the ‘free basic water’ idea send a message that there is a totally different way of seeing things between the state and them – hence there is shortage of water. The state is failing to deliver ‘water for all

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<sup>1</sup> The term “state” in this article refers to the bureaucratic sections of the government, the Thulamela Local Municipality.

and always' as has been the implication of the state's rhetoric and slogan on water. This leaves residents – as in Sithole *et al*<sup>2</sup> “state-peasant relations” on fast track land reforms in Zimbabwe – questioning “their relations with the state and experiencing a sense of disenfranchisement” under conditions such as: shortage of water, ineffective implementation of pronounced policy on water and lack of formal communication with residents.

Narratives are “first order representations of lived experience”<sup>3</sup> aimed at creating and maintaining meaning that will influence people's thinking and validation of action in their contemporary situations.<sup>4</sup> Rankin holds that a narrative is:

A cultural artefact, a work or text or product that can take many forms but which has the ultimate purpose of telling or unfolding a story. ... [It] is an ongoing temporal process, from which can emerge other processes, of dialogue, intentionality, consciousness of the world and of other, conceptions of temporality beyond that of lived experience, and ultimately personal identity. ... [It] shapes and informs our knowledge – of ourselves as temporal and social beings, and of the world. ... [Its] function and intention [is] to communicate meaning and possibilities.<sup>5</sup>

Ontologically, narratives create necessary conditions for the possibility of socio-cultural interaction or interpersonal experiences between two partners involved – in this case the residents and the state in its bureaucratic representation or sector (in this case, Thulamela Local Municipality) over the shortage of water. In that way narratives are a channel through which this article tries to understand the relationship between two sides.

Narratives on water by the state and the Sibasa-Thohoyandou residents are an under-explored area of study. So this article closely explores the state's narratives of free basic water nationally and at municipal level, especially in the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area of Thulamela Local Municipality on the basis of the question: What is the current situation of water in Sibasa-Thohoyandou?

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2 B. Sithole, B. Campbell, D. Doré, and W. Kosayi, “Narratives on land: State-peasant relations over fast track land reform in Zimbabwe”, *African Studies Quarterly*, 7(2 & 3) at <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7v7i2a4.htm> [Jun. 29, 2005].

3 Anonymous, “What is a narrative?” at <http://www.luc.edu/depts/philosophy/tec/eac7/TW-WhatisaNarrative.ppt> [Jun. 29, 2005].

4 Sithole, B., B. Campbell, D. Doré, and W. Kosayi, “Narratives on land: State-peasant relations over fast track land reform in Zimbabwe”, *African Studies Quarterly*, 7(2 & 3) at <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7v7i2a4.htm> [Jun.29, 2005].

5 J. Rankin, “What is narrative? Recouer, Bakhtin, and Process Approaches”, *Conrescence: The Australian Journal of Process Thought*, 3, 1-9 at [http://farleighcom.ozstaging.com/aipt\\_papers/vol03/03\\_rankin.doc](http://farleighcom.ozstaging.com/aipt_papers/vol03/03_rankin.doc) [Jun. 27, 2005].

At the same time residents' narratives on water will also be analysed and evaluated within the realm of the state versus resident conflict of perceptions over the free basic water idea. Following Sithole *et al*<sup>6</sup> I make use of narrative analysis and evaluation<sup>7</sup> that will help to reveal the multiplicity of factors behind the current water situation.

In the period May-June, 2005 I had an opportunity to visit and observe the water situation as well as interviewing residents and officials of the local municipality as part of the research methodology. There was a linguistic limitation to such an extent that the residents were not free to share their experiences of water in fear of being victimised because they are not prepared to pay for water – hence most of them refused to give me their names and addresses. However, many of them agreed to give me information provided I do not mention their names. In keeping with that I shall make reference to these narratives as cases.

### ***Socio-Political-Historical Background: An Assessment***

The *socio-political*-historical background intends to show a trend of imbalanced relations between state and residents in the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area that prevailed prior to and after the 1994 democratic transition. On the one hand it shows a facet of state-initiated relations where the state dictates habitat by legislative-authoritative means that perpetuate exclusion in the distribution of resources including that of water. On the other hand it shows a resident-initiated relation where residents seek an inclusion in management of resources in the post-democratic transition era within a context of freedom to choose and define how to relate to the government of the day.

In the state-initiated relation context, Sibasa, Thohoyandou, and Makwarela townships were part of the group of places used to be called the R293 towns.<sup>8</sup>

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6 Sithole, B., B. Campbell, D. Doré, and W. Kosayi, "Narratives on land: State-peasant relations over fast track land reform in Zimbabwe", *African Studies Quarterly*, 7(2 & 3) at <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/v7i2a4.htm> [June 29, 2005].

7 This article will follow Bevyne Sithole, Bruce Campbell, Dale Dore, and Witness Kozanayi's method of narrative analysis and evaluation they used in their article, "Narratives on Land: State-Peasant Relations over Fast Track Land Reform in Zimbabwe" that appeared in the *African Studies Quarterly* (The Online Journal of African Studies), Volume 7(2-3), 2003. I acknowledge this approach as an acceptable research methodology that can be applied interdisciplinary and especially to this article.

8 These were "local authorities who operated in former homeland areas" (South African Government, 1999. *Constitutional Development: National Expenditure Survey*. [Website: [http://www.finance.gov.za/documents/budget/1999/nes/vote\\_04.pdf](http://www.finance.gov.za/documents/budget/1999/nes/vote_04.pdf)]. [May 06, 2005].

These were places of limited populace while most people were living in the countryside or rural areas. They were mostly government workers. The relationship between the then South African government and the people – especially the indigenous people – during the apartheid era was that of the state “manipulating traditional and social mechanisms as the main basis of social control ... through the creation of Bantu Authorities” (that gave recognition to tribal authorities).<sup>9</sup> Thus there was no mutual and spontaneous stakeholder convergence for a participatory development or even simple inclusion in the whole process of governance or services delivery. This also led the then South African government to indulge itself into enacting a series of legislations on segregation and practices under the principle of separate development.

Beinart and Dubow hold that segregation – that later led to complete and successive social exclusions of indigenous Africans – developed from a context of conquest with the Europeans taking over control of the resources such as land.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, according to Beinart and Dubow through “a series of legislative Acts,”<sup>11</sup> Europeans “removed and restricted rights of ‘non-whites’ in every possible sphere”<sup>12</sup> – ranging from the right to property ownership to the freedom of movement. The *Group Areas Act* Number 41 of 1950 institutionalised racial segregation – enforcing “separate racial residential areas on a comprehensive and compulsory basis”. It was followed by the *Bantu Authorities Act* Number 68 of 1951 that was a subtle approach of moving all African people to the rural parts of the country where the government established self-rule areas under a “government-approved chief” who did not have any “provision for African representation in the towns”<sup>13</sup> – thus creating “homelands” or “Bantustans”. This was to “lend legitimacy to the state’s policy of exclusion”.<sup>14</sup> These exclusions were not only political, but also economic in nature and as a result affecting such important and basic service delivery like water procurement and distribution.

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9 PB Rich, *White power and the liberal conscience: Racial segregation and South African liberalism* (Braamfontein, Ravan, 1984), p. 60.

10 W Beinart and S Dubow, “Introduction: The historiography of segregation and apartheid”, W. Beinart and S. Dubow (Eds.), *Segregation and apartheid in the twentieth-century South Africa* (London, Routledge, 1995), pp. 1-4. Cf. N. Worden, *The making of modern South Africa: Conquest, segregation and apartheid* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1994), pp. 5-33.

11 The most notorious ones were Mines and Works Act of 1911 (that segregated non-whites in employment), the Natives Land Act of 1913 ( that segregated Africans to the countryside and also prohibited them from purchasing land) and the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 (that elaborated the 1913 Land Act). See W. Beinart and S. W. Beinart and S. Dubow, “Introduction: The historiography of segregation and apartheid”, *Segregation and apartheid ...*, pp. 3-4.

12 W Beinart and S. Dubow, “Introduction: The historiography of segregation and apartheid”, p. 3.

13 H Deegan, *The new South Africa: Apartheid and after*, p. 24.

14 W Beinart quoted in H. Deegan, *The new South Africa: Apartheid and after*, p. 35.

The *Bantu Authorities Act* Number 68 of 1951 was followed by the 1959 (Bantu) *Self-governing Territories Act* Number 46 that “provided for the transformation of reserves into fully-fledged independent bantustans, dividing blacks into ethnically discrete groups”.<sup>15</sup> According to Fokwang, the Act saw the formation of Thohoyandou Territorial Authority taking shape in 1962 under the leadership of Chief Patrick Mphephu.<sup>16</sup> In 1970 and 1971 the then South African government passed two acts (that facilitated the realisation of the above ones), namely *Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act* (National States Citizenship Act) Number 26 and the *Bantu Homelands Constitution Act* (National States Constitutional Act) Number 21 - respectively. The former required “all black persons to become citizens of a self-governing territorial authority” for they were not going to be South African citizens – thus they were denied “South African nationality” or even to work in South Africa. This Act was “repealed by the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act no 200 of 1993”.<sup>17</sup> The latter facilitated the eventual ‘independence of homelands. The two Acts (1970 and 1971 respectively), gave birth to the creation of the homeland republics of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (famously known as ‘TBVC states’ whose sovereignty was not recognised outside South Africa). Under the *Bantu Homelands Constitution Act* Number 21 of 1971, Venda became a self-governing territory with Sibasa as its administrative centre. In 1979, the ‘independence’ of the Republic of Venda with Thohoyandou as its capital was proclaimed and its president was Chief Patrick Mphephu (who held on to power with his Venda National Party until his death in 1988). The legislative assembly of the new ‘republic’ was composed of sixty members of which forty-two were traditional leaders, and the other eighteen were elected by citizens.<sup>18</sup>

After ‘independence’ the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) of the then South African government “had no jurisdiction in the homelands”.<sup>19</sup> However, Venda and other homeland authorities “generally adopted the *Water*

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15 Anonymous, “Chronology of Apartheid Legislation, Vol. One, Chapter Thirteen”, *News24*, (2005a) at [http://www.news24.com/Content\\_Display/TRC\\_Report/1chap13.htm](http://www.news24.com/Content_Display/TRC_Report/1chap13.htm) [Jun. 24, 2005].

16 JTD Fokwang, “Chiefs and democratic transition in Africa: An ethnographic study in the chiefdoms of Tshivasa and Bali”, MA thesis, University of Pretoria, 2003, p.39

17 Anonymous (a), “Chronology of Apartheid Legislation, Vol. One, Chapter Thirteen”.

18 JTD Fokwang, “Chiefs and democratic transition in Africa: An ethnographic study in the chiefdoms of Tshivasa and Bali”, p. 39.

19 DWAF, “Water supply and sanitation policy – White paper: Water – an indivisible national asset”, (1994), at <http://www.dwaf.pwv.gov.za/Documents/Policies/WSSPpdf> [July 19, 2005]; E. Lahiff, “Land, water and local governance in South Africa: A Case Study of the Mutale River Valley”, (Manchester, Institute for Development Policy and Management, 1997), at [http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/publications/wp/tr/tr\\_wp07.htm](http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/publications/wp/tr/tr_wp07.htm) [Jul. 15, 2005].

*Act* [Number 54] of 1956”, with the exception of “Bophuthatswana that developed its own Water Act”.<sup>20</sup> The *Act* of 1956 “which was based largely on the riparian system of water” did not benefit the majority of the indigenous population banished to the rural areas.<sup>21</sup> Although most of these homelands including Venda adopted the *Act*, “because of the lack of political legitimacy ... it was impossible to enforce any tariff policy and so the homeland budgets became increasingly absorbed into payments of operating subsidies” - rendering the water scheme in Venda out of order.<sup>22</sup> This is echoed by Lahiff’s study that examines “the use and management of natural resources” in the former homeland of Venda. He argues that,

The political isolation of the homelands under apartheid meant that many institutions, including those associated with environmental management, were very different to those found in the rest of South Africa, or simply did not exist at all. Very little is known about environmental issues within the former homelands, especially those of the northern Transvaal, and although problems associated with over-crowding and over-grazing are widely referred to, little empirical information is available on such questions. The general lack of information on environmental matters obviously poses considerable problems for the new government’s wide-ranging programme of reforms, which has included land redistribution and environmental protection amongst its priorities for the development of the rural areas. ... [and] the processes by which users gain access to key resources of land and water.<sup>23</sup>

The question of access to water continues emerging prominently in the former homeland of Venda’s capital of Thohoyandou that now “embraces the older administrative centre of Sibasa and the townships of Shayandima and Makwarela”. As a result of this state-initiated relation, there were no secure private water rights – hence the then South African government and homeland authorities were, according to Lahiff, were able, “in practice, to determine the allocation and use of water resources without public consultation or regard to the rights of existing users.” Traditional leadership took a prominent role in the then ‘independent state’ of Venda. Consequently,

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20 DWAF, “Water supply and sanitation policy – White paper: Water – an indivisible national asset”.

21 DWAF, “Review of technologies for controlling water consumption”, (2002) at <http://www.dwaf.gov.za/FreeBasicWater/doc/Controld.pdf> [Jul. 18, 2005].

22 DWAF, “Water supply and sanitation policy – White paper: Water – an indivisible national asset”, (1994), at <http://www.dwaf.pwv.gov.za/Documents/Policies/WSSP.pdf> [Jul. 19, 2005].

23 E Lahiff, “Land, water and local governance in South Africa: A Case Study of the Mutale River Valley”, (Manchester, Institute for Development Policy and Management, 1997), at [http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/publications/wp/rr/rr\\_wp07.htm](http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/publications/wp/rr/rr_wp07.htm) [Jul. 15, 2005].

Customary law as it exists in the homelands entitles people to a share in available natural resources, but provides little protection in the face of determined action by the state or local elites.<sup>24</sup>

This made it very difficult for those on the periphery who did not have mechanisms to defend themselves in the event of such determination. It also kept the rural folk with no access to clean water and sanitation on the margins of the development scenario.

The turn of the new democratic era in 1994 saw the residents-initiated relation with the state elite conceding to the pressure of the new political horizon in advent – with all homeland states being dissolved and reincorporated into provinces demarcated by the new South African government. The area in focus found itself in the Limpopo Province<sup>25</sup> which is South Africa's northern part that borders with Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. Limpopo Province also borders with the internationally famous Kruger National Park as well as one of the World Heritage Sites – Mapungubwe<sup>26</sup>. Historically, Limpopo carries one of South Africa's weighty portions of royal and military legendry – such as the great warrior kings Dimbanyika, Sekhukhune, Mphephu,<sup>27</sup> and many others.

Like most of the provinces of South Africa, Limpopo Province has always been, and is increasingly becoming a destination for many holiday makers or tourists. In 2002 it was an international focal point in media circles because of the solar eclipse<sup>28</sup> that attracted over 60 000 tourists – local and from outside South Africa and the continent.<sup>29</sup> Many tourists thronged to the town of Musina – where the actual full eclipse took place, and their visit also spilled over to the towns of Sibasa, Thohoyandou, and Makhado for accommodation. Reports of tourists and locals experiencing shortages of water continued to feature in the media during this eventful time and many others that took place before and later. Just to name a few print media sources: the *Mail&Guardian*

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24 E Lahiff, "Land, water and local governance in South Africa: A Case Study of the Mutale River Valley", (Manchester, Institute for Development Policy and Management, 1997), at [http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/publications/wp/tr/tr\\_wp07.htm](http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/publications/wp/tr/tr_wp07.htm) [Jul. 15, 2005].

25 Former Northern Province of South Africa, which was later renamed Limpopo after the Limpopo River.

26 Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape was inscribed as World Heritage Site in 2003 by the World Heritage of UNESCO [Website: [http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id\\_site=1099](http://whc.unesco.org/pg.cfm?cid=31&id_site=1099)] [Jun. 08, 2005].

27 G. Mandiwana, "Award to Thovhela Mphephu", *Thulamela Mirror* at <http://www.emirror.co.za/news/details.asp?StoNum=3238> [Jun. 08, 2005].

28 B. Phillips, "Eyewitness: Southern Africa's second dawn." *BBCNews*. (Wednesday 4 Dec. 2002, 11:14GMT) at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/2542373.stm> [Jun. 08, 2005].

29 Anonymous (b), "Drum beats and bubbly for eclipse safari", *IOL*, (Dec. 04, 2002, 10:30AM) at [http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set\\_id=1&click\\_id=13&art\\_id=qw1038987901324 B224](http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=qw1038987901324 B224) [Jun. 08, 2005].

also contained an article, “Tanks give children hope for the future”<sup>30</sup>; the *Zoutpansberger* contained an article, “No water: residents without water for several days.”<sup>31</sup> Later during the course of the year, the problem resurfaced on the air – on the SAFM Radio News.<sup>32</sup> It is in this historical place where the case study area of this article – Sibasa-Thohoyandou – is situated.

The town of Thohoyandou and the conurbation centre of Sibasa fall under Thulamela Local Municipality (one of the four local municipalities of Vhembe District Municipality<sup>33</sup>). The local municipality was established in the year 2000 under “the provision of the Local Government Municipality Structures Act, 117 of 1998 Section 12”.<sup>34</sup> Thohoyandou is situated 70 kilometres east of Makhado and 180 kilometres north east of Polokwane, the capital of Limpopo Province. During the 2001 census there were 584,469 people living in Thohoyandou.<sup>35</sup>

The above historical background gives an indication that the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area remained basically a rural-turned-semi-urban area under its traditional leadership without any serious industrial developments from anywhere outside South Africa, let alone tapped water for the rural folk outside the perimeter of homeland government’s capital Thohoyandou. It is against this backdrop that residents of this area narrate their problem of water shortage with a comparative knowledge that things must be different for the better if the previous era was bad for human life.

### ***Problematic Ideas Underpinning the State’s Narratives on Water***

The state’s narrative is based on human-rights, value-fact laden argument that water is a national resource that belongs to all the people of South Africa whose right to access has been denied to the majority of the citizens. It follows

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30 Anonymous (c), “Tanks give hope for the future”, *Mail&Guardian Online*, (May 25, 2005), at <http://www.mg.co.za/Content/13.asp?o=21311> [Jun. 06, 2005].

31 Anonymous (d), “No Water. Residents without water for several days”, *Zoutpansberger*, (Jun. 03, 2004), at <http://www.zoutnet.co.za/News/detail.asp?stoNum=3281> [Jun. 08, 2005].

32 The discussion on water shortage in one of the villages around Sibasa-Thohoyandou, Limpopo Province came under spot on radio, especially the SAFM Radio News at 08:00, Jun. 7, 2005.

33 Limpopo Province is divided into six District Municipalities, namely, Vhembe, Waterberg, Capricorn, Mopani, Bohlabela, and the Greater Sekhukhune. Vhembe District Municipality is also divided into four local municipalities namely, Thulamela, Makhado, Musina, and Mutale.

34 Limpopo Provincial Government, “Thulamela local municipality”, (2004), at [http://thulamela.limpopo.gov.za/about\\_the\\_council/introduction.htm](http://thulamela.limpopo.gov.za/about_the_council/introduction.htm) [Jun. 06, 2005].

35 Wikipedia, “Demographics of South Africa”, *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, (2005), at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_South\\_Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_South_Africa) [Aug. 17, 2005].



that as a national resource it falls under a national participatory management to ensure the realisation of the right to access water. Those who cannot afford to pay water supply services or provisions should get free basic water. Therefore, it is the duty of the state to see to it that water as a national resource is well managed for equitable distribution among all the citizens. Certainly this is a noble cause for the citizens. However, it leaves a lot of problems on what it means and how it will take place about which the state needs to educate citizens. Not all citizens have taken a deliberate interest into looking at the intentions of the government's policies. It is worthwhile to look at the notions that underpin the state's perception on water.

**Idea 1:** *The right to access basic water.*

The state perceives water as right.<sup>36</sup> The coming of 1994's democratic transition brought with it a new national constitution that repealed all skewed apartheid laws that banned Africans from urban settlements from owning urban property, and banished them to their chieftainship rural areas. Come 1994, many Africans flocked to urban centres – in this case Sibasa-Thohoyandou – in search of job opportunities, education and better health facilities which were previously denied them by successive governments. In the process since 1994 there has been a fast, sometimes chaotic and haphazard settlement of African people in and around the Sibasa and Thohoyandou urban areas causing a rise in demand for services such as water, electricity and many others.

After transition the new provincial government inherited a semi-urban infrastructure whose capacity was meant to cater for a small population under the homeland government dictates of the day. The advent of a new democratic era opened up urban habitat to the majority of the rural folk previously banished into various pockets of the countryside. They moved into Sibasa and Thohoyandou towns in search of formal employment and urban residence. Consequently, the semi-urban housing infrastructure inflated and raised water demand. This was the case in many places of the province and nation-wide – hence the move to put together a National Water Policy.

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<sup>36</sup> Government of South Africa, "*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act No. 108 of 1996*", Chapter 2, Section 27(b).

The National Water Policy is based on the *National Water Act* (NWA) Number 36 of 1998 which in turn, according to Hamann and O’Riordan, is guided by the fundamental principle,

that water is a national resource, owned by the people of South Africa and held in custodianship by the state (section 3). This principle allows the state to have total control over the utilisation of the resource. It allows for mechanisms to be put in place to manage water resources using a more holistic, ecologically based approach, taking into account the entire water.<sup>37</sup>

At the centre of the National Water Policy is “the right to access clean water” for basic use – thus assuring “water security for all” and always.<sup>38</sup> This is because of the perception that water pervades all spheres of human life and environments and it is a pre-condition for the inherent right to self-preservation and serves as the most basic “appropriate means of subsistence necessary to life”.<sup>39</sup> It is common knowledge that it carries with it both physical and symbolic essence in cultural and religious aspects of human life in Africa. With such fundamental properties, water is a basic human right in South Africa and many parts of the world – hence its entrenchment as a right in the South African Constitution (*Constitution of South Africa* Number 108 of 1996, Bill of Rights, Section 27 (1) (b)). Any deliberate or negligent shortfall in water distribution has serious implications on human life and is therefore a violation of human rights for life preservation and disregard of human dignity.

The *National Water Act* of 1998 (which is the National Water Policy’s basis), the *Water Services Act* of 1997, and the *National Water Resource Strategy* serve as tools to realise the National Water Policy. According to DWAF (2004), on the one hand, “the [National Water] Act of 1998 is the principal legal instrument relating to water resource management in South Africa.”<sup>40</sup> De Coning and Sherwill further elaborate that the aim of the *National Water*

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37 R Hamann and T O’Riordan, “South Africa’s policy transition to sustainability: Environment and water law”, *The Water Page*, (2000/1), at [http://www.thewaterpage.com/SA PolicyEny\\_and\\_water.htm](http://www.thewaterpage.com/SA PolicyEny_and_water.htm) [May 03, 2005].

38 E Lahiff, “Land, water and local governance in South Africa: A Case Study of the Mutale River Valley”, (Manchester, Institute for Development Policy and Management, 1997), at [http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/publications/wp/rr/rr\\_wp07.htm](http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/publications/wp/rr/rr_wp07.htm) [Jul. 15, 2005].

39 P Gleick, “The human right to water”, *The Water Page* (1999) at <http://www.thewaterpage.com/Human%20Right.pdf> [Apr. 13, 2005]; Cf. J. Scanlon, A. Cassar and N. Nemes, “Water as a human right?”, IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper No. 51 (Gland and Cambridge, International Union of Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources – The World Conservation Union, 2004), pp. 27-32, at <http://www.iucn.org/themes/law/pdffdocuments/EPLP51EN.pdf> [March 30, 2006].

40 DWAF, “Integrated strategic perspective: Luvuvhu/Letaba water management area”, (2004) at <http://www.dwaf.gov.za/Documents/other/WMA/2/optimised/LUVUVHU%20LETABA%20REPORT.pdf> [Jun. 18, 2005].

*Act* is “to control the use of all water resources, to protect them from being abused and polluted, and ensure that every person has equitable access to water resources”.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand and closely related to the *National Water Act*, is the *Water Services Act* whose aim is

to ensure and define the rights of access to basic water supply and sanitation services, to set out the rights and duties of consumers and those who are responsible for providing services and allow the Minister to set national standards (including norms and standards for tariffs) to ensure efficient, continuous, affordable and fair water services.<sup>42</sup>

The state has limited implementation capacity to respect and affirm the right to access water as stipulated in the *National Water Act* of 1998 – hence the idea of participatory management of the scarce resource.<sup>43</sup> The National Water Resource Strategy is the “implementation strategy for the [*National Water Act* of 1998 that provides the framework within which water resources in South Africa” should be managed to achieve “an equitable access to water ..., sustainable use of water ..., [and] efficient and effective water use to achieve the optimum social and economic benefit”.<sup>44</sup>

The idea of the right to access basic water is understood in government circles as redressing the imbalances of yester-era. De Visser *et al.* rightly argue that the idea of the right of access to basic water is not something without problems to the state and the people – thus the idea can be viewed as placing two obligations on the state:

1. It must ensure that all people have physical access to water. This means that the facilities that give access to water must be within safe physical reach for all sections of the population, especially for vulnerable and marginalised groups.
2. It must ensure that all people have economic access to water. This implies that the cost of accessing water should be pegged at a level that would ensure that all people are able to gain access to water without having to forgo access to other basic needs.

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41 C de Coning and T Sherwill, “An assessment of the water policy process in South Africa (1994 to 2003), *Report to the Water Research Commission* (WRC Report No. TT232/04), Johannesburg, University of Witwatersrand, 2004), p. 26.

42 DWAF, “Integrated strategic perspective: Luvuvhu/Letaba water management area”, (2004) at <http://www.dwaf.gov.za/Documents/other/WMA/2/optimised/LUVUVHU%20LETABA%20REPORT.pdf> [Jun. 18, 2005].

43 R Hamann and T O’Riordan, “South Africa’s policy transition to sustainability: Environment and water law”,

44 DWAF, “Integrated strategic perspective: Luvuvhu/Letaba water management area”, (2004) at <http://www.dwaf.gov.za/Documents/other/WMA/2/optimised/LUVUVHU%20LETABA%20REPORT.pdf> [Jun. 18, 2005].

Furthermore, De Visser *et al.* argue that the state must make sure that it has all functioning facilities that make it possible to distribute water to all the people. But at the moment “water infrastructure does not exist and water delivery of any kind is not possible” in most places of South Africa, including the case at hand.<sup>45</sup> Hence the construction of Mndoti Dam (on the Luvuvhu River) is seen as a move to boost this lack of infrastructure. The idea of the right to access water makes a good ideal for equitable distribution of water, but it does not agree with practical realities on the ground especially in the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area. The rising demand against the limited facilities to bring water to residents has caused the state to resort to restricting water availability. In 1995, DWAF sent a notice for the people in Thohoyandou:

In their own interest, water consumers in the Thohoyandou region, who are supplied from the Phiphidi purification plant, are requested by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry to save water as the drought cycle is still prevailing. The water level of the Vondo Dam is presently at 12%. A reduction of at least 30% of water consumption per day will ensure enough water for another dry season.

The reason given by DWAF was that demand for water has increased because of inflating “urban development”, and therefore, restrictions were put in place for the Thohoyandou region.<sup>46</sup> As a result of this call residents of Thohoyandou region are experiencing periodic water reticulations – resulting in water shortages. In his 1999 speech for the renaming of Albasini Dam to Luvuvhu Dam, the then Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Prof. Asmal, implicitly confirmed the shortage of water distribution facilities. He indicated that he was “aware that dozens of communities remain without water in other parts of the [then] Northern Province [Limpopo Province]” and that “the existing dams Albasini, Vondo and Damani can no longer meet the ... increased demands of water”.<sup>47</sup> For Asmal the purpose of the Luvuvhu River Government Water Scheme was “to supply water for domestic use in the urban areas of Thohoyandou and Louis Trichardt” and the surrounding rural communities.<sup>48</sup> The shortage of facilities was confirmed by three senior officials of the municipality who were interviewed during the research visit

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45 J de Visser, E. Cottle, and J. Mettler, “The free basic water supply policy: How effective is it in realizing the right?” *Socio-Economic Rights Newsletter*, Volume 3(1), (2002), at [http://www.communitylawcentre.org.za/ser/esr2002/2002july\\_water.php](http://www.communitylawcentre.org.za/ser/esr2002/2002july_water.php) [Jul. 19, 2005].

46 DWAF, “Call for water restrictions in Thohoyandou region”, *ANC Daily News Briefings*, October 24, 2005), at <http://www.anc.org.za/anc/newsbrief/1995/news1025> [Jul 15, 2005].

47 K Asmal, “Speech on the renaming ceremony of the Luvuvhu Dam on 17 Apr. 1999”, (1999), at <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/a999/990603410p1001.htm> [Jun. 18, 2005].

48 K Asmal, “Speech on the renaming ceremony of the Luvuvhu Dam on 17 Apr. 1999”

Sibasa-Thohoyandou – hence the construction of the Mndoti Dam on the Luvuvhu River. Mr. Mathelemuse concedes that it is a good dam that can solve the problems of water but he disapproves of the way it is going to function. He argues that “if you can hear the way it is envisaged to work, it is likely that a person that lives next to it may not get a drop of water – there is poor planning. You hear them talking about taking a big pipe to some place in Polokwane.”<sup>49</sup>

**Idea 2:** *Water has an economic value.*

Besides being a human right, the state holds that water should be managed in a sustainable manner to ensure equitable, efficient and affordable distribution.<sup>50</sup> The 1994 white paper on “Water Supply and Sanitation Policy” of the South African government was drawn within “a context of universal human rights and equality of all persons,” and is based on a number of Reconstruction and Development Programme principles, of which one of them has a specific reference to water as having an “economic value”.<sup>51</sup> The argument put forward here is that

The way in which water and sanitation services are provided must reflect the growing scarcity of good quality water in South Africa in a manner which reflects their value and does not undermine long term sustainability and economic growth. *The user pays*. This is a central principle to ensure sustainable and equitable development, as well as efficient and effective management.<sup>52</sup>

That is to say *water has an economic value*. It is thus in order that residents must *pay for services* brought home to them. The idea echoes the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development (1992) Principle 4: “Water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognised as an economic good.”<sup>53</sup> This leads to two issues: water as a public good or water as a private good. As already indicated above, the South African law on water declares water as a public good – a national resource. That makes, according

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49 Interview: Rabson Wuriga – Mukhunyela Mathelemuse, May 31, 2005.

50 DWAF, “National water resource strategy” (First edition), (Pretoria, 2004), pp. 1-4, 7 at <http://www.dwaf.gov.za/docs/NWRS> [Jun. 18, 2005].

51 DWAF, “Water supply and sanitation policy – White paper: Water – an indivisible national asset”, (1994), at <http://www.dwaf.pwv.gov.za/Documents/Policies/WSSP.pdf> [Jul. 19, 2005].

52 DWAF, “Water supply and sanitation policy – White paper: Water – an indivisible national asset”, (1994), at <http://www.dwaf.pwv.gov.za/Documents/Policies/WSSP.pdf> [Jul. 19, 2005].

53 International Conference on Water and the Environment (ICWE), “The Dublin statement on water and sustainable development”, (Dublin, 1992), at [http://files.inpim.org/Document/Dublin Statmt](http://files.inpim.org/Document/Dublin%20Statmt) [Jun. 10, 2005].

to the *National Water Act* of 1998, the South African government to be a trustee managing the distribution of water. In the case at hand, the state does so through Vhembe District Municipality as a Water Supply Authority and Thulamela Local Municipality as Water Services Provider to the residents of Sibasa-Thohoyandou Area.

For Perry *at al.* the relevant question is not whether water is an economic good or not, “rather the question is whether it is a purely *private* good that can reasonably be left to free market, or a *public* good that requires some amount of extra-market management to effectively and efficiently serve social objectives” (as should be seen in the case of the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area). Furthermore, any perception of water is bound by “value judgments and specific conditions of time and place”.<sup>54</sup> The Sibasa-Thohoyandou area is bound by its socio-political-economic conditions and historical dynamics that prevailed before 1994 transition. The state’s policies are geared towards distribution of water to benefit the greater society as a whole by providing free basic and safe drinking water to poverty-stricken villages in the countryside. The question is, is this realisable? Are people really receiving this water every day? In the case in point, they are not receiving sufficient water as expected. Free basic water is yet to be received by most of the residents.

**Idea 3: Free basic water.**

Does a human right to water refer to an unlimited supply of water to residents? In his discussion on this subject, Gleick argues that, “a human right to water should only apply to basic needs for drinking, cooking, and fundamental domestic uses.”<sup>55</sup> Considering resource limitations, ecological constraints, and economic and political factors that limit water availability for human use, Gleick’s argument can lay a basis for responding to such a fundamental question as to “how much water is necessary to satisfy this right?” In a bid to ensure that no one is denied the right to access water supply, the South African government (Thulamela Local Municipality) defines water as

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<sup>54</sup> C Perry, M Rock, and D Seckler, “Water as an economic good: A solution or a problem?”, *Research Report 14*, (Colombo, International Irrigation Management Institute, 1997), at <http://www.cgjar.org/iiml> [Jul. 15, 2005].

<sup>55</sup> P Gleick, “The human right to water”, *The Water Page* (1999) at <http://www.thewaterpage.com/Human%20Right.pdf> [Apr. 13, 2005]; Cf. J. Scanlon, A. Cassar and N. Nemes, “Water as a human right?”, IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper No. 51 (Gland and Cambridge, International Union of Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources – The World Conservation Union, 2004), pp. 27-32, at <http://www.iucn.org/themes/law/pdfdocuments/EPLP51EN.pdf> [March 30, 2006]; United Nations, “Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Substantive issues arising in the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – General Comment No. 15(2002): The rights to water”, (2002), at <http://193.194.138.190/htm/menu2/6/gc15.doc> [Nov. 28, 2005].

a public good whose cost-effective allocation and methods include free basic water to those who cannot pay for the delivery services. The approval of “an implementation plan of 6000 litres of free water per household per month as part of [its] integrated rural development strategy and urban renewal programme”<sup>56</sup> does not match the situation on the ground. This amount of water, De Visser rightly argues, it is too little “for the urban poor” who have been exposed to the usage of more water than allocated. The notion of free basic water also frequently quickens the emergence of a number of questions – the most obvious ones relate to a ‘who’, ‘what’, and ‘how’ nature. Thus: Who should receive free basic water? How is it going to be supplied? Who pays the expenses for bringing water to the people? The WSA of 1997 stipulates a set of laws “to give effect to the policy of the right of access to basic water services to all”<sup>57</sup> which should be seen as answers to the above questions.

De Visser *et al.* point out some problems with the idea of free basic water in connection with “the principle of cost recovery” that will force the municipality to disconnect water if the user fails to pay for the services. Surely in situations where a household over-uses the allocated six kilolitres they will have to pay for the extra usage. If it does not pay, disconnection will have to take place. This has already taken place in some places of the area, especially in the Makwarela area where people have vowed not to pay until they get the free basic water. As a response to this demand, the Thulamela Local Municipality resorted to introducing a prepaid metering system that uses a device with a currency-based programme able “to discharge 6000l on a monthly basis provided that meter is in positive credit, i.e. there is at least 1c credit available in the meter so that the 6000l can be issued free”. The meter can only start to “deduct available credit from the current balance” in the event of the exhaustion of “the monthly allocation of 6000 litres”. If there is no credit, the meter will simply close “until more credit has been installed”.<sup>58</sup> According to the Mayor Khosi Makhumbane of the local municipality of the study area, the prepaid metering system is aimed at both reticulating free basic water to the poor

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56 D Still, “Free water will lead to no water (2): Free water in rural areas – is it feasible? A perspective from KwaZulu-Natal”, *Groundwater Association of KwaZulu-Natal*, (2001), at <http://www.gakzn.co.za/press/freewaterwo.htm> [Jul. 1 22, 2005]; Cf. B. P. Sonjica, “Water services: A catalyst for change in South Africa”, *Optimist*, (South African Government Information, February 23, 2005), at <http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2005/05022410451002.htm> [Jul. 19, 2005].

57 J de Visser, E. Cottle, and J. Mettler, “The free basic water supply policy: How effective is it in realizing the right? *Socio-Economic Rights Newsletter*, Volume 3(1), (2002), at [http://www.communitylawcentre.org.za/set/esr2002/2002july\\_water.php](http://www.communitylawcentre.org.za/set/esr2002/2002july_water.php) [Jul. 19, 2005].

58 DWAF, “Review of technologies for controlling water consumption”, (2002) at <http://www.dwaf.gov.za/FreeBasicWater/doc/Controld.pdf> [Jul. 18, 2005].

households and cost recovery.<sup>59</sup> This sounds feasible, but in practice it has many implications in terms of putting together suitable water reticulating infrastructure and human resource to make sure that it works.

The Water Services Manager, Mr. T. Masakona in the Vhembe District Municipality argues that the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area has no shortage of water but they have inherited planning, financial, and administrative problems from the previous homeland government – that led people to develop a tendency of not wanting to pay. Masakona further elaborates: “Naturally people do not want to pay. There is misinterpretation of free basic water services. There is a continued feeling of dependence. They call for household connections but they are not prepared to pay.”<sup>60</sup> What he was simply saying is that free basic water, if not well explained to the public, will encourage people not to engage the process of adopting a culture of paying. Khosi Makhumbane argues that the culture of paying for services is a process which people will have to learn.<sup>61</sup> It is granted that it is a process, but one wonders what happens in the meantime. De Visser et al. rightly concludes that,

The cost recovery principle combined with a practice by many local authorities to cut off water supply to those who cannot pay, constitutes a severe impediment in the realisation of access to water for all.<sup>62</sup>

In my opinion, free basic water is a grand idea that should be pursued but proper preparation should take place so that residents can realise the intentions of the policy rather than realise its failure.

### ***Residents’ Experiences of Water Procurement and Distribution***

In this study, I interviewed twenty-seven people. They included teachers, self-employed people (those selling fruits and food outlets), hair saloon owners, taxi-drivers, store owners and keepers, university lecturers and students, pensioners, civil servants, domestic workers, rural and urban dwellers, and workers in agricultural sectors. Because of space, I cannot include all of them in the discussion below. A few that I will discuss below serve as representatives

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59 Interview: Rabson Wuriga – Khosi T. N. Makhumbane, May 26, 2005.

60 Interview: Rabson Wuriga – Tshipiwa Masakona, May 27, 2005.

61 Interview: Rabson Wuriga – Khosi T. N. Makhumbane, May 26, 2005.

62 J de Visser, E. Cottle, and J. Mettler, “The free basic water supply policy: How effective is it in realizing the right? *Socio-Economic Rights Newsletter*, Volume 3(1), (2002), at [http://www.communitylawcentre.org.za/ser/esr2002/2002july\\_water.php](http://www.communitylawcentre.org.za/ser/esr2002/2002july_water.php) [Jul. 19, 2005].



of various categories mentioned above. Interviews were based on a structured questionnaire. The following are a set of questions (in no random order) were asked to the residents:

- How long have you been staying in the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area?
- What is the water situation in your area?
- Do you have water all the times? If not, what is the explanation from the authorities?
- How long have you been paying for water service delivery?
- How much do you pay for water services? Do you think the charge is too much or too little for the services being given?
- If the charge is not affordable, how much are you prepared to pay for water services per month?
- Will it not benefit you as a community to pay so that your municipality can buy better equipment to distribute clean water to your house?
- Beside the service fees, do you think the municipality is delivering? If not what do you think?
- If the municipality were to improve its water services, would you be happy to pay? If no, why wouldn't you?
- Are you aware of the government's free basic water program? What do you think about it?
- What are your expectations about water distribution in the future?

Perception can be used as a means of interpreting one's world of experience – thus the situation unfolding itself in the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area explains the residents' experience of water. A common view that prevails among most of the residents show that water is a basic human need that should not be paid for; rather it should be free of charge. Interviews with residents show that the problem continues to feature in the daily experiences of the people.

CASE 1: The first interviewee has been a resident of the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area for the whole of his life up to date. He worked for the Department of Agriculture. He was forty one years at the time of interview. Asked whether he has water all the times, he told me that sometimes he goes without water for a week. In trying to get to know whether he received an explanation from the local municipality, the respondent said that there was no communication between residents and Water Affairs (Department of Thulamela Local Municipality). They tried to address the issue before and during election times, but after elections they disappeared. He told me that he is refusing to pay because the Water Affairs people do not know him. He asked them to install a water tap before 1994, which they did, but never sent any record of what he owed them. He accused Thulamela Local Municipality of not delivering and of not being clear on their charges. Asked how much he is paying and how much he is prepared to pay for water services, Resident 1 responded that he is not prepared to pay because water is a natural resource. Water is a

basic need. He is prepared to pay electricity and telephone. He argued that Thulamela Local Municipality gets its money from his tax returns and VAT he pays in shops. He held that the government is making lots of money, enough to pay children's grants. For Resident 1, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry must budget for it. If the Government can pay for girls making babies now and then, then they must pay for the demand of water. Resident 1 was aware of the government's free basic water policy. He demanded that the Local Municipality should give the people that water – and that is why he was not paying for water services. Asked if he was ready to pay in the event that the local municipality improves its water services, he remained defiant that he was not going to pay because there was free basic water for all residents.

CASE 2: He was a 78-year old pensioner who moved from Louis Trichardt in 1978 to come and live in the area of study. Resident 2 confirmed that water was only available in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon. Besides shortages, he continued to pay R100 per month for some time. However he thought it was too much for him as a pensioner. At a later stage, he stopped paying for water services because there was no adequate water being delivered to them as needed. Like Resident 1, Resident 2 was not satisfied with the water distribution of the Local Municipality. Asked whether he was aware of free basic water, he said that municipal officials mentioned it in passing as they were campaigning for elections. He said that there have always been water shortages since 1995/6.

CASE 3: By the time of the interview, she has been living in the study area for the past fourteen years since 1991. She was self-employed and also a single mother. The resident in case did not have water all the times. It was only available early in the morning and at seven o'clock in the evening it was finished. This sent them to go and fetch water from a distant place. When asked whether she received any explanation from the municipality why there was no water all the times, she responded that there was no explanation. She vowed not to pay until the municipality improved its water services because she was not satisfied with the services. The resident was not aware of the free basic water promised by the government. At the end of the interview, she said she was only going to pay when there were some improvements in water supply.

CASE 4: The interviewee has been staying in the area of study since birth. He is a taxi-driver. He experienced severe water shortages in his area. At the time of the interview, he had been without water for two weeks. In his village – next to the study area – they have been fetching water from the river using buckets. After fetching water from the river, they boil it as a health safety precaution. His people did laundry by the river banks. Sometimes they fetch water for some days in order to have enough water to do their laundry during weekends. The resident said that due to water shortages, they have resorted to traditional ways of procuring water. Asked whether he was paying for water services, he says he stopped paying when water began to be restricted. There

were shortages about three years ago. The resident said that the local authority wanted R700 per household for water services but people in his area refused to pay. Like in the other cases above, people mentioned that they were only prepared to pay if the local municipality improved its services.

CASE 5: She has been staying in the area of study since 1998, and there has never been sufficient water supply. Asked whether there was any explanation from the authorities, her response was that there was no serious explanation given to the people by the municipality, save that of saying there was a pipe-burst because it was old; and that there was no rain and the dams' water level was low. I also enquired whether she was paying for water services. Her response was that she was not paying and she was not going to pay because there was no water allocated to her. She was only going to do so if the municipality start supplying her with water. Like other residents, she was aware of the promised free basic water but had not yet received it.

CASE 6: She was a single mother and unemployed - living in the area of study since 1997. According to her, the problem had reached a bad stage because sometimes they go without water even during the day. The resident was not happy with the services of the local municipality. The respondent told me that the residents in her area wanted to know how much they are paying for water and for other services. But the local municipality simply sent a single statement for all service charges.

CASE 7: At the time of the interview, she was working as a domestic assistant and was also a single mother living in the nearby village of the study area. The resident had been living in the study area for the past ten years since 1995. In her area, there was no water, no taps, and she gets water from the neighbouring village. Officials from the local municipality came in 2004 and promised to render water and electricity delivery services. They never came again. At a later stage she only heard that they required residents to pay R1000 per household. She said that she did not have that amount of money. She was not aware of free basic water. At the time of the interview she was not prepared to pay any money until water was available.

CASE 8: He is a senior lecturer at the University of Venda. The resident has been staying in the area for the past twenty-three years since 1982. He narrated that there was no problem until the 1990s when many people flocked to the urban areas. There was water in the evening and during weekends resulting in some of the people's electrical appliances like geysers getting damaged if there is no water coming. He and other residents lodged complaints through their civic association to consult with the municipal authorities. Different explanations were given such as people misuse water by washing cars and watering vegetable and flower gardens. The problem was that when municipal officials close the main lines, they continue to charge according to the meter readings. Up to the time of the interview, there was no communication between the municipality and the resident in form of many options available

to them. He had been paying for water services of more than R200 even if there was no water. He was aware of free basic water but he said it was not yet distributed to the people.

The above recorded narratives indicate that the state, through the local municipality of the study area, has not yet taken upon itself to educate people about its policies on water procurement and distribution – hence people’s misinterpretation of free basic water policy. People seem to have been or still are unaware that water shortages they are experiencing are not totally natural but also a deliberate introduction of restrictions or periodical supply of water. Most of them chose not to pay for water services because they are not receiving water and above that they are demanding the promised free basic water. On the other hand, the local authority responds to this demand by calling for the residents to have prepaid metering system devices installed in their houses so that poor households can receive free basic water. By taking such a move, the local authority is trying to block residents from continuing accumulating debt and also to avoid the burden of allocating water to over-users.

### ***Conclusion***

The *socio-politico*-historical background of the study area suggests that surely a correction to the situation was overdue and very urgent. The coming of the *Water Services Act* of 1997, *National Water Act* of 1998, and the *National Water Resources Strategy* should certainly be seen as a relief to a nation that went through a monstrous time in African history. However these acts and policies are founded on notions that can fall prey to imperfect interpreters and unwilling implementers who can be perpetual impediments to the realisation of the intentions of these legislations and their good intentions.

An interaction with residents has shown that they are eager to see the end of water problems. They have the will to pay – contradicting the stereotyping perception that generally residents want everything for free. Residents are arguing that they cannot pay for unsatisfactory services. They are prepared to pay for services when they are brought to them. In response, some of the municipal officials are saying that the Mndoti Dam project will solve the water problem. This is disputed by some of the officials and residents who are very critical about the way water from this dam is going to be channelled.

One of the officials feels strongly that the new dam should specifically be for reticulating water to the Sibasa-Thohoyandou area.

Many residents complained of a lack of communication from the authorities' side. Therefore, the local municipality should have an updated residents' address database if they want to recover the accumulated debt on water services. There should be constant communication between the state and residents – in terms of what the state means by free basic water and what the residents understand by what the national water policy mean by free basic water. This demands a periodical circular that is sent to households rather than meeting only when it is time for elections.

There are so many implications that emerge ranging from councillors or leaders failing to effect communication between the two sides. Residents are willing to pay if services are done for them but at the moment they think not much has been done to their satisfaction.