

Grace Jenkins Zane Trace
Highschool Chillicothe,
OH, USA Zimbabwe,
Water Scarcity

Zimbabwe: A drought-stricken country in need of water

Zimbabwe is a country located in Eastern Africa with a population of about 14.6 million people. It is surrounded by Mozambique, Botswana, and Zambia. Two of the largest cities are Harare and Bulawayo. The country is approximately 150,872 square miles, which is about 25 times smaller than the United States. Around 32.2% of the country is urban and the other 67.8% is rural. An estimated 41.88% of the land is currently cultivated and used for agricultural purposes. The major crops and exports include maize, cotton, soybeans, wheat, and tobacco. In Zimbabwe, the average farm consists of 90 acres of land. Compared to Ohio, that's about 150 acres less. Farmers in Zimbabwe need to produce around 1.8 million tonnes of corn each year to support the citizens and livestock living in the country. Each year, however, it seems to become more and more of a struggle.

There are three seasons in Zimbabwe throughout the course of the year. Towards the start of the year, there is a rainy humid season that lasts until March. From about March to May, there is a cool and sunny season. The rest of the year is full of intense heat and dry seasons. This climate helps to produce savannah landscapes over most of the land. With a long dry season, there isn't very much rainfall. In America the average rainfall per year is about 32.1 inches, but in Zimbabwe it's typically 21.5 inches.

Government in Zimbabwe

The country of Zimbabwe is a republic with a president as their leader. Just like American, the President is elected by the public and leads the executive branch. The Presidency terms last for 5 years and can only be repeated twice. Previously, a president could serve 6-year terms for however long they were re-elected. This was the case for Robert Mugabe, who served from 1987 to 2017. After he resigned, Emmerson Mnangagwa was elected and still serves as President to this day. Zimbabwe is divided into eight provinces and a governor is appointed to each province. The eight provinces are further divided into 63 districts. Even with all these smaller districts and leaders, the President holds most of the power and makes a majority of the large decisions.

Family and Food

Traditional families in Zimbabwe tend to be larger with five or more children plus parents and grandparents. There are sometimes more children if a man has more than one wife, which is very common in Zimbabwe. Families typically expand through a kinship, which means past immediate family and into extended family. They also do not refer to cousins as "cousins", but rather brothers and sisters. It is

common for friends to also be considered brothers and sisters. The lower class usually live in hut-like houses with brick walls and metal roofs. The middle and upper class tend to live in homes that are very similar to your typical home in the United States. Their everyday diet is made up of meat, porridge, beans, maize and squash. Food is either purchased from the market or grown and cooked in their homes. Money is earned by working in a field such as engineering, healthcare, or education. The average wage is \$17,283, if the family is fortunate to have employment. Typical families face poverty and very few employment options exist, making it hard for citizens to find access to money and nutritious food.

Healthcare and Hospitals

Healthcare is also something else that isn't guaranteed for everyone in Zimbabwe. Millions go without healthcare every year. Over the years, the costs have increased immensely making it hard for those living in the poverty-stricken country. It has also become a struggle for doctors to find access to surgical tools and equipment needed to perform operations. *AP News* reports "At home, everyday Zimbabweans seeking health care have had to bring their own drugs, syringes, bandages and, at times, water." Many doctors went on strike because of these issues, which caused the health system to decline even farther. Patients were left with little choice but to suffer, and many died because they were unable to get the medical attention they needed. Hospitals were empty due to lack of staff. In the past their health systems were great and almost everyone had access to doctors and hospitals for reasonable costs; however, with Mugabe as President, everything went downhill. It was said that he abused basic human rights to keep his power. He denied the fact that thousands of people were dying from disease and pretended like everything was fine. To this day, his actions have a lasting negative impact on the country.

Water Scarcity Crisis

One of the major problems Zimbabwe families face is finding clean drinking water. The lack of water has affected approximately 4.5 million residents in the country. *We Magazine* states, "Over 2 million people there are suffering from acute water shortage," in Harare alone. Many people only have running water once a week, if they're lucky. Others must wait in line for hours at communal wells to get their water. Drought and bad water management has caused this disaster. Dams run dry for up to 96 hours, leaving families without water. The rainfall has been around 25% less this year than years past. This problem not only affects the people, but the plant and animal life surrounding them. Without water to drink Zimbabwe people cannot survive, and the lack of water also greatly affects what the people have to eat. Due to the water shortage, food production decreased greatly, and the country announced a state of disaster. The weather isn't improving, and climate change is greatly affecting the farmers who rely on the rain to water their crops.

Lack of water not only hurts their food, but it hurts their health. Millions suffer from waterborne illnesses because citizens have resorted to drinking dirty water from wells to satisfy their thirst. Cholera outbreaks have become common in many areas that go without water for months like Chitungwiza, Epworth, and Ruwa. When these areas do have water, it is often poorly sanitized and unclean. Without running water, most people have to resort to using the restroom outdoors in public areas. Many people describe raw

sewage lying in the streets where children play. Thousands of cases of cholera have been reported recently, and it continues to worsen as time goes on. "Waterborne illnesses caused by pathogens can be a serious health risk for the elderly, infants, chemotherapy patients, and other individuals with a delicate or weakened immune system" states the Texas Commission on Environmental Equality article. Many humanitarians have volunteered to help vaccinate those with the disease, but without addressing the water crisis, this assistance does little to improve the situation.

Most days Zimbabweans spend their time waiting in lines for a chance to get clean water. Even after waiting for hours, those who are able to receive water only receive a small amount. Children often wait in the lines, while their parents work or tend to the chores. These children lose valuable time while waiting in the queues, time that should have been spent studying. A lot of the time, children arrive at school tired and exhausted from waiting all night for water. It affects their grades and their productivity. In addition they are hanging around people much older than them, who try to cause trouble. Men try to "persuade" young women into giving up their places in line, and fights often break out. Vandalism of the boreholes, where the water is accessed, also occurs. When people did not have access to water, they would contaminate other communities' water sources as revenge. It becomes quite dangerous waiting for water at night, yet that is usually the only time people can get access to it.

Causes of Water Scarcity

Although drought is one of the major causes, lack of money to pay for purification is another reason water is scarce. Harare pays nearly \$2.7 million dollars each month to cover the cost of the chemicals necessary to clean the water; yet, the country's government doesn't seem to be any help. Tiseke Kasambala, Southern Africa director at Human Rights Watch, says, "Harare's water and sanitation system is broken and the government isn't fixing it.". Residents are forced to pay for water that isn't guaranteed to be available and may be unsafe to drink. Oftentimes, the citizens' money doesn't go towards getting clean water but towards other projects. Before 1980, there wasn't any problem with providing clean water to the citizens, but poor management by the government and corruption has changed that. Pipes and sewage systems have not been maintained the way they need to be, so now lots of water becomes contaminated. The multiple issues and neglect makes it hard for new government officials to fix the water crisis. They have to undo years of bad management to make progress with the situation.

What is Being Done Now

In Zimbabwe's constitution, they promised to protect the right to clean water access. It acknowledges how important water is not only to health, but the education and economy of the country. It is important that the government takes multiple steps to keep this promise and the right that has been done with providing their people with clean water.

Many humanitarian groups are currently working on solutions to help improve the water situation in Zimbabwe. In Harare, the people are trying to build a dam; however, the money and resources are not available to do so. *The Standard* explains how many cities including Durban, South Africa are using an integrated approach to provide water. "The city managed to supply an additional 600,000 households without having to build a dam." The solution was a plastic water tank which operates at night during low water usage hours. This would be a much cheaper option for Zimbabwe. In addition, other issues that plague Zimbabwe such as vandalism and limited water for agriculture, would improve because of the increase of public water access.

Africa has now become more desperate to protect their lands and keep their country clean. Locals help by removing tons of plastic and scraps from local streams and streets. One of their main focuses was the Cleveland Dam. They wish to make it a healthy ecosystem that can be enjoyed by the public and used whenever necessary. The plan is for them to host yearly clean-ups to keep in good condition. This past year, Zimbabweans worked on cleaning up Mukuvisi River.

These steps are reasonable ways to get closer to safe water access for everybody. Although water sanitation plants and dams are a great idea to help out Zimbabwe, it isn't something that is reasonable with the resources they have available. It would be pricey and more work to manage, which the country may not be able to maintain. There are many less ambitious and less expensive ideas that would be an easy and affordable way to get closer to their goal!

Solutions

One simple solution to help improve the water crisis would be to build wells. Although the country has wells and boreholes, the water tends to be contaminated and dangerous to drink. It also tends to be dangerous to wait in lines at the boreholes, especially at night. If we could build more wells, we would help to decrease the wait times for water, and people wouldn't have to wait in line after hours. As has been seen in other African cities, more public access to drinking water would decrease the amount of vandalism to private water sources. Wells could be made by volunteers and managed by local officials to keep the water clean and any crime around it low. The wells need to be kept up to date, otherwise, history will repeat itself and the water crisis will not go away.

Harvesting rainwater is another way for Zimbabwe to get more clean water. By setting out buckets, families could get water each time it rains. It would be inexpensive for them to do, and the water would be safe to drink. The government wouldn't have to pay large amounts of money for this to become a reality. The problem with this, however, would be you could only get water when it rains. With Zimbabwe's droughts, the rain wouldn't be as reliable of a source as wells or boreholes. There are methods by which the government could collect larger amounts of rain water and, if treated and stored correctly, could help extend the amount of rainwater storage. Even if not potable, it could be used for bathing, sewing and agriculture. During the dry seasons, citizens could use the newly built wells and boreholes as their main water source. During the wet seasons, they could use the rainwater buckets. This would provide Zimbabweans two secure and reliable sources for clean water throughout the year.

Another option that would help improve the situation in Zimbabwe is developing cheap sanitation practices. Building and providing community restrooms and places to bathe would decrease the amount of sewage in public areas. This is a simple way to make sure that sewage stays out of the streets and away from the boreholes. It would also help to decrease the number of waterborne illnesses and Cholera cases.

An easy way for anyone to help out is by raising awareness. If nobody is aware of this issue, they have no way of helping out. Through social media, people can spread awareness through posts and direct messages. News channels can speak out about this issue. You do not have to be an expert to help out. Ordinary people can make a difference with just a touch of their phones. More awareness and people reading about this crisis will lead to more discoveries and ideas. They may have different solutions that could be big steps towards safer drinking water. Another way for people to help is by creating petitions. By gathering signatures, they could garner more widespread support for this cause. It will help to show how important this issue is. Water is a basic human necessity that everyone should have access to, yet they don't. The signatures will help back up this idea and spread the word. Donations are another way to let people help out. This task cannot be complete without financial support. In a country filled with poverty, it may be hard to find the resources necessary to get clean water. However, with donations, we would be able to make the idea of clean water a reality with support.

These projects could be led by a non-profit organization and be funded by philanthropy. The community could help by keeping the water clean and not misusing their privileges. The government could help by providing suitable land to build the wells and law enforcement resources to protect them. Certain policies would need to be put into action to make this project successful. Maintenance would need to be performed to keep the wells in good-working order. Guards or volunteers can make sure everyone stays safe while using the wells and that the water doesn't get vandalized.

With charitable help and financial assistance, the people of Zimbabwe can be provided with water that is clean and sanitary. Something as important as water should be guaranteed, not optional. Everyone should have access to this necessity and most of us take access to clean drinking water for granted; yet, in Zimbabwe this basic life requirement isn't available to the majority. By building clean wells, collecting rainwater in buckets and providing sanitary bathing and toilet facilities, we could provide hope to a country struck by drought, unsanitary living conditions and limited sources of clean drinking water. A few simple solutions and a supportive national government is all the country of Zimbabwe needs to save countless people's lives and provide a much improved quality of life.

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