

| 4 March - 9 March 2024 |
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| **A Chief's Ride or a Mother's Life: A Matter of Priorities in Zimbabwe Thabiso Sibanda**    On February 29th, 2024, President Mnangagwa ignited controversy by handing out 100 vehicles to chiefs, touting it as a way to restore their dignity. Speaking during the handover the president highlighted that the initiative was part of the government's ongoing program to support traditional leaders by providing vehicles to ensure their mobility and restore their dignity. “Given the role of our traditional leaders as custodians of our culture, traditions, history and heritage, among other responsibilities, it is necessary that their dignity and conditions be of acceptable standards,” he said. Critics, however, slammed the decision as extravagant, arguing the resources could have addressed the critical shortage of ambulances. Zimbabwe's maternal mortality rate is alarmingly high, and timely access to healthcare is crucial. This debate highlights the government's struggle to balance support for traditional authorities with the urgent needs of a nation facing healthcare and economic crises.  The allocation of prestigious vehicles to chiefs during a period of notable economic and social difficulties in Zimbabwe has sparked a contentious debate. Critics, including advocates for democracy, have criticized the decision as extravagant and poorly timed. They contend that the resources expended on this could have been more wisely utilized to tackle the immediate needs of the broader population, like enhancing healthcare services and addressing food insecurity. This discussion underscores the enduring challenge of reconciling the backing of traditional authority figures with the urgent requirements of a nation grappling with various crises. This gesture has been interpreted by some as a reward for political support rather than a genuine effort to enhance traditional governance.  Defenders of the move, like Chief Mtshane, chairman of the national chief's council, downplayed the controversy, claiming this was a routine practice. Yet, the emphasis on "restoration of dignity" rings hollow when juxtaposed with the plight of pregnant women in rural areas who sometimes resort to ox-drawn carts to reach health facilities. As Fadzai Mahere, a former legislator, pointed out, Masvingo, a city with over 90,000 residents, has only one ambulance, while chiefs receive regular car upgrades.  Zimbabwe has a maternal mortality rate of [363 per 100,000 live births](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.STA.MMRT?locations=ZW), which is significantly higher than the global target of less than 70. This means many women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Notably, one of the major causes of such a high maternal mortality rate as defined by the 3 delays model is the delay in reaching a health facility. This speaks to limited or unreliable public transport, poor road conditions, and lack of readily available ambulances all contribute to this delay.  This misplaced priority has deadly consequences. A 2022 incident where the sole ambulance serving Nkayi district crashed highlights the dangers. It was reported that a wheel had come off in an extremely bad part of the road causing the ambulance to overturn. Patricia Nyoni, 35, was a referral from Mateme Clinic to Nkayi District Hospital after developing complications during childbirth. The accident not only claimed the life of a mother and her unborn child but also left the entire district without emergency transport. Shockingly, Chief Sikhobokhobo of Nkayi dismissed concerns about healthcare challenges in Nkayi, stating, "The country belongs to the chiefs."  The allocation of luxury vehicles to chiefs while mothers die due to a lack of ambulances is a symptom of misplaced priorities. Zimbabweans deserve better. To safeguard the lives of mothers and newborns, the government must urgently address the critical shortage of ambulances, invest in healthcare infrastructure, and prioritize accessible emergency obstetric care. Only then can women receive timely, life-saving interventions during childbirth.  The choice is clear: a mother's life or a symbolic gesture!  **Walking in their Shoes: The Plight of Women and Girls in Zimbabwe's Water Crisis. Loraine Phiri**    In Zimbabwe, a nation grappling with a severe water crisis, the absence of clean and readily available water goes beyond mere inconvenience. For women and girls, it's a constant struggle, a daily test that demands resilience and resourcefulness. This lack of water creates a complex web of challenges, impacting their health, education, and overall well-being.  **The Burden of Period Poverty:**  Imagine navigating your menstrual cycle with limited access to clean water. This is the grim reality for many girls and women who must resort to unhygienic alternatives, putting them at risk of infections and health complications. Without water managing their menstrual cycles with dignity and maintaining basic hygiene becomes an additional layer of stress and anxiety amidst limited resources.    "The lack of clean water compounds the existing challenges of accessing sanitary pads for many women and girls. Without clean water, maintaining hygiene during menstruation becomes incredibly difficult. This makes attending school during my period incredibly stressful, as I struggle to feel comfortable" said Sibonginkosi Mpofu.  **Motherhood without Water:**  Beyond personal needs, the burden falls heavily on women as the primary caregivers. Without water caring for children takes on a whole new dimension. Tasks as basic as washing hands after diaper changes, cleaning feeding bottles, and maintaining overall hygiene become near-impossible feats. This not only compromises the health of the child but also creates an immense emotional and physical strain on the mother.  "Without water, even the simplest tasks become overwhelming. Keeping things clean is a constant battle. My new-born needs clean bottles, but water is scarce. The hardest part? Watching my children. They love to play, but with limited water, every muddy puddle or dusty adventure means clothes I can't wash. Their playtime becomes restricted. I cannot allow them to freely play, and it breaks my heart. Having enough water isn't a luxury, it's the foundation for a healthy childhood,” said Ms. Susan Mhlanga  **A Sterile Home: A Distant Dream:**  Maintaining a clean and sanitary home environment becomes an impossible task without readily available water. Washing dishes, cleaning floors, and disinfecting surfaces become luxuries, increasing the risk of disease and infection for the entire family. Laundry piles up, adding another layer of stress and frustration.  **Protecting the Vulnerable:**  With the recent cholera outbreak in Zimbabwe, the lack of water poses an even greater threat, particularly to children. Proper hand hygiene, a crucial defense against the spread of the disease, becomes virtually impossible without access to clean water. Mothers bear the brunt of this responsibility, constantly worried about their children's health and safety.  **Stolen Dreams:**  The time spent fetching water, often hours each day, comes at a significant cost. A disproportionate burden falls on girls when it comes to securing water for their families. This daily chore, often requiring them to walk long distances and wait in lengthy queues, can consume hours of their time. This has a significant impact on their education, as the time spent fetching water translates to less time available for attending school, completing homework, and studying. As a result, girls often fall behind in their studies, limiting their educational opportunities and perpetuating the cycle of gender inequality. Women, too, face the dilemma of sacrificing income-generating activities or household responsibilities in their quest for water, further impacting their livelihood and well-being.  The water crisis in Zimbabwe is a stark reminder of the interconnectedness of basic needs. While thirst may be the most immediate consequence, the true impact is far-reaching, disproportionately affecting women and girls. Until access to clean water becomes a reality, their struggles will continue, highlighting the urgent need for solutions that prioritize their basic human rights and ensure their dignity and well-being.  **A Perennial water crisis we are failing to address… Where to from now? Jabulile Siwela**  Bulawayo residents face yet another year of water woes, with dam levels at a critical low and long-term solutions lagging behind.Barely two months into 2024, the city battles itsworst water crisis which Bulawayo City Council Director of Engineering Sikhumbuzo Ncube has described as the worst drought in post Zimbabwe independence**,** forcing residents to purchase water and endure long queues at boreholes. Some have claimed the much talked about 1982 drought which left taps dry is nowhere near the EL Nino induced drought that has left Bulawayo dam levels at just 43% and one being decommissioned due to low levels.    Bulawayo is constantly battling a water shortage crisis, the residents are guaranteed to face water challenges at least once a year. The city fathers have been failing to address this perennial challenge that has left Bulawayo an extremely thirst city, forcing them to lobby the central government to declare Bulawayo a water shortage area with the view of unlocking external funding to address the scourge. Long- medium term plans to address the perennial water crisis have been tabled but they are falling short of permanently addressing and eradicating the problems faced by the former industrial hub of Zimbabwe.  In the past the government has proposed the Zambezi- Matabeleland Water Project as the long lasting solution for Bulawayo’s water woes but the project has since been shelved as little to no progress was made. The Gwayi-Shangani dam touted as another solution set to clamp the water challenges faced by the city is beginning to gain traction but residents are in the dark as to when this project will be completed. The Glassblock dam project, touted as a potential solution, also lacks a concrete completion date.Nyamandlovu Aquifer still needs over 20 boreholes to go through the process of rehabilitation, vandalism of infrastructure has been cited as the challenge. Bulawayo residents in the midst of this devastating water crisis, probably the worst in the history of the city are asking this multi-million dollar question, “Where to from now?”  Bulawayo mayor, David Coltart on Tuesday quoted by CITE urged residents not to panic as the council was crafting strategies to make sure that the taps don’t run out of water completely. Coltart said that Mtshabezi dam is holding over 70% of water and the council is moving to construct a 2km pipeline to ensure that more water is pumped from the dam. The underlying point of emphasis was the need for the city to be declared a water shortage area and the current water crisis declared as a state of emergency.  In western suburbs of the city the situation is dire, residents in high lying areas have endured four weeks without water. The council announced the suspension of the 148-hour water shedding program and said the residents will get water only when it is available. This has resulted in long queues in community boreholes, residents getting water from unprotected sources as the demand surge. In this dire situation, some have seen an opportunity to make money through selling the precious commodity to stranded residents. In high density areas like Pumula, Nkulumane, Nketa and Tshabalala.  “The situation is bad my brother, this is the third week for us without water and our borehole is now faulty as it was overwhelmed in the past weeks. We are now buying water because we don’t have a choice. It’s so unfortunate that we now have to buy water for as much as $25 for 2500ltrs. Vendors don’t sell anything below that and it means you have to look for people near you to share the water,” said Moreblessing Tshuma  **Matabeleland's Silent Crisis: Women and Children Bear the Burden of a Parched Land Jacqueline Ndlovu**  The once vibrant fields of Matabeleland, known for their rich red soil and abundant crops, now lie cracked and barren under the relentless sun. The region, grappling with the harsh reality of another drought, faces a humanitarian crisis with women and children bearing the brunt of its impact.  For consecutive seasons, erratic rainfall and rising temperatures have devastated agricultural production. Crops wither before reaching maturity, leaving families with dwindling food stocks and uncertain futures.  The burden of securing water and food often falls disproportionately on women. Traditionally responsible for unpaid care work, they now spend longer hours walking long distances to fetch water for their families, often returning with just enough to meet basic needs. This not only takes a toll on their health and well-being but also limits their time for economic, political and social activities.    Children are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of drought. Malnutrition rates are rising, with reports of increasing cases of stunting and wasting, especially among children under five. The lack of adequate food and clean water weakens their immune systems, making them more susceptible to diseases.  "Njengoba kukunje ngoMarch, siyazibuza ukuthi uDecember sizamfika njani" says MaDlamini, a mother of three from a remote village in Lupane. "There is not enough food to go around, and the water we collect is not always clean. We fear for their health and their future."  The drought's impact extends beyond immediate physical needs. It disrupts education as children are forced to stay home to help collect water or work in informal sectors to supplement family income making it worse for girls who will be forced to drop out of school, this can lead to increased unwanted pregnancies and child marriages hindering their long-term prospects.  Local communities are striving to find solutions. Women's groups are organizing water harvesting initiatives and advocating for access to drought-resistant seeds and agricultural training including the government Pfumvudza/ Intwasa farming model. However, the scale of the challenge requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders.  "Urgent action is needed to address this crisis," says a local NGO representative. "We need increased humanitarian assistance, long-term investments in climate-resilient agriculture, and support for women-led initiatives to build stronger and more sustainable communities."  The parched lands of Matabeleland serve as a stark reminder of the urgency of addressing climate change and its disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations. As the region battles the drought, the plight of women and children shines a light on the need for immediate action and long-term solutions to ensure their well-being and build a more resilient future.  **Ministry of Health and Child Care Weekly Disease Surveillance Report for the week ending 18 February**  I**nfluenza Cases**  Despite a decrease in the number of reported cases of influenza, the Zimbabwe Ministry of Health and Child Car advises people to wear warm clothes and take extra precautions, as the virus is still active. The symptoms of influenza include fever, cough, headache, muscle pain, fatigue, sore throat, and runny nose. Influenza vaccination is the best way to prevent the infection. Washing your hands frequently, staying home when sick, and covering your mouth when coughing.  **Snake Bites**  Disease Surveillance Report for the week ending 18 February 2024, 141 snake bite cases and no deaths were reported on the week. The cumulative figures for snake bites are 1 042 cases and 7 deaths. Despite the decrease, the ministry alerts people to be careful when spending time outdoors.    **Cholera Analysis**  As of 3 March 2024, Zimbabwe had 27 055 suspected Cholera cases, 2 734 confirmed cases, 26 334 recoveries, 71 confirmed deaths and 501 suspected deaths.    **Status of Bills as at February 29. 2024**  Wondering which bills have been gazetted by Parliament?  Find out below the list of bills that have been gazetted and that are waiting to be gazetted by the 10th Parliament    **Opportunities**  Are you ready to embark on an exciting journey towards new opportunities and personal growth? Listed below are interesting opportunities you could apply for. Do not hesitate - Seize the opportunities and apply today!  **Click Opportunity to Appl**y   1. [She Code Africa](https://shecodeafrica.org/initiatives) 2. [Master of Leadership and Governance](https://www.mstcdc.ac.tz) 3. [GIZ Advisor- Women, Peace and Security](https://lnkd.in/dVYReRwk) 4. [Expert in project supervision in the field of Peace, Security and Gender](https://lnkd.in/dAbJVtjU) 5. [AAI Young Professional Programme on Climate Finance](https://opportunitiesandcareers.com/2024/02/23/aai-young-professional-programme/?expand_article=1) 6. [Government of Ireland Fully Funded Scholarships 2024 for Bachelors, Masters, and PhD!](https://t.co/16ae6NqhAf) 7. [Internet Society Early Career Fellowship](https://t.co/H3LFdUblYD) 8. 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