

Play Pump: Post-Instillation : Boitshireletso Primary School, Northern Cape

Anyone can tell you how valuable water is, but few can describe life without it. Until I lived in a rural desert village, I didn't understand the full weight of the word 'drought' either. Upon returning to Washington village from a training session last December, I found a broken municipal water pump, hundreds of dead livestock, and pick-up trucks making regular trips to nearby villages to collect water. I soon came to realize this was not an uncommon state.

With the majority of the water coming from a diesel-pump well installed by the municipality over 20 years ago, it was no wonder this was the case. Learners from the local primary school were often drafted to carry buckets and wheelbarrows of water around the village, even during school hours.

Since the installation of the Play Pump, these states of emergency have come to a grinding halt. Almost two months after its arrival, the Play Pump remains the most popular place to be. Not only children from the primary school, but parents and grandparents are often seen chatting at spigot's end, exchanging gossip while collecting water. After school there is – quite literally – standing room only. Lines form for a chance to hop on and take a spin. Any able-bodied person cannot walk past without a throng of learners demanding a push.

The municipality pump still runs occasionally, but its outages are growing ever-more frequent. Many families pass up the convenience of the closer municipality taps and head straight for the Play Pump, claiming, "The water tastes better!" And it does!

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