

Water Supply Service Delivery Dynamics in Mabvuku, Zimbabwe: A Review

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Abstract

This systematic review synthesizes evidence on the dynamics of water supply service delivery in Mabvuku, a high-density suburb of Harare, Zimbabwe. The study identifies a triad of interconnected barriers crippling the water sector: pervasive institutional fragmentation and weak governance, catastrophic infrastructure decay and technical incapacity, and profound socio-economic inequities which disproportionately burden the most vulnerable. The review demonstrates that these factors create a self-reinforcing cycle of failure, leading to unreliable supply, public health crises and community distress. Conversely, the analysis reveals that pathways to improvement are evident. These include fostering genuine community participation in water governance, strategic investment in climate-resilient and adaptive infrastructure, and the implementation of supportive policies that create a stable institutional environment. The central conclusion is that technical or financial interventions alone are insufficient. Achieving sustainable water security in Mabvuku and similar contexts requires an integrated, multi-sectoral approach that simultaneously addresses the political, technical, economic and social dimensions of the crisis. This review consolidates existing

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knowledge to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers and researchers.

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INTRODUCTION

Urban water supply is widely recognised as a fundamental pillar of public health, human dignity and socioeconomic development. Access to clean, reliable water is not only a basic human right, but also a critical enabler for educational attainment, economic productivity and gender equality. In Zimbabwe, however, this essential pillar has been severely compromised for over two decades, particularly in the high-density suburbs that ring the capital city, Harare. Among these, Mabvuku stands as a stark example of chronic urban water insecurity. Here, the theoretical promise of a modern, piped municipal water supply has given way to a grinding daily struggle for survival. Households consistently report spending a significant portion of their day, often four to six hours, searching, queuing and transporting water from mostly unsafe and unregulated sources. This reality not only exposes the community to recurrent outbreaks of waterborne diseases like cholera and typhoid, but also actively perpetuates cycles of intergenerational poverty. The immense opportunity cost, where time that could be spent on income-generating activities, education or rest, is diverted to water collection, falling most heavily on women and girls, thereby reinforcing existing gender inequalities.

The profound deterioration of this essential service stems from a complex and deeply entrenched interplay of challenges. These include the relentless physical decay of water and sanitation infrastructure, severe fiscal and resource constraints at the

municipal level and, most critically, significant governance fragmentation and institutional inertia. This fragmentation is characterised by overlapping and often conflicting mandates between key institutions like the Harare City Council (HCC) and the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA). This dysfunctional arrangement results in bureaucratic paralysis, blurred accountability and a systemic inability to plan, fund and execute essential maintenance and upgrades. The case of Mabvuku thus serves as a potent and poignant microcosm of how systemic institutional weaknesses, when combined with decades of inconsistent maintenance and deep-seated socioeconomic disparities, can systematically dismantle reliable water provision. The implications of this failure extend far beyond mere inconvenience: effective and equitable water provision is intrinsically linked to reducing child mortality, empowering women and girls and unlocking local economic potential. Given the complexity, persistence and severe human cost of these challenges, a systematic and rigorous synthesis of existing evidence is urgently needed to cut through the complexity and inform effective, sustainable and equitable solutions.

The study provides a systematic review of the current dynamics shaping water supply service delivery in Mabvuku. It is guided by two central research questions: first, “What are the principal institutional, technical and socio-political barriers to sustainable water service delivery in Mabvuku?” and, second, “Based on the available evidence, what strategies, interventions and emerging trends hold the most promise for improving water security and equity in this and similar high-density urban settings?” The ultimate aim is to consolidate fragmented and often siloed knowledge, identify critical gaps in both research and practice and highlight actionable, evidence-based pathways toward resilient and sustainable water management for the benefit of the residents of Mabvuku and for urban policy in

Zimbabwe more broadly. The study is organised as follows: after presenting a conceptual framework to visualise the problem and a theoretical framework to explain its underpinnings, an extensive synthesis of the global, regional, national and local literature follows. Then comes a detailed outline of the systematic research methodology. The findings are then detailed across key thematic areas, rigorously discussed in relation to existing theories and studies and concluded with targeted, actionable recommendations for specific stakeholders.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To effectively analyse the water crisis in Mabvuku, it is crucial to move beyond a siloed view of its symptoms and, instead conceptualise it as a complex, adaptive system where dysfunctions are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. This review employs a systems thinking approach that posits that the core challenges can be categorised into four dynamic and interdependent thematic domains: (1) Institutional-Governance; (2) Infrastructural-Technical; (3) Socio-Economic and (4) Environmental-Health. These domains do not operate in isolation, rather, they form a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle of failure. The cycle can be visualised as follows: It begins with Institutional-Governance failures, such as the fragmentation between HCC and ZINWA, political interference and weak revenue collection. This leads to poor strategic planning and a chronic lack of investment in maintenance. Consequently, this triggers Infrastructural-Technical decay: aging pipes burst, pumping stations fail and treatment plants operate below capacity, resulting in high physical water losses (non-revenue water) and low system pressure. The direct outcome of this technical failure is an Environmental-Health crisis: low pressure allows for sewage ingress into water pipes and burst sewers contaminate groundwater, while the lack of tap water forces reliance on shallow, unprotected wells. This contamination is the direct

cause of recurrent disease outbreaks like typhoid and cholera. Finally, these health and service failures exacerbate Socio-Economic inequities. Households, particularly women and girls, spend more time and a larger share of their income on seeking water, leading to time poverty, financial strain and diminished opportunities which, in turn, weakens the community's collective capacity to engage in civic action and hold institutions accountable, thereby reinforcing the original Institutional-Governance failure.

This conceptual framework, illustrated in Figure 1, is vital for understanding why isolated interventions have consistently failed. It underscores the absolute necessity of integrated, multi-pronged strategies that simultaneously target multiple points within this cycle to break it and establish a virtuous cycle of improvement.

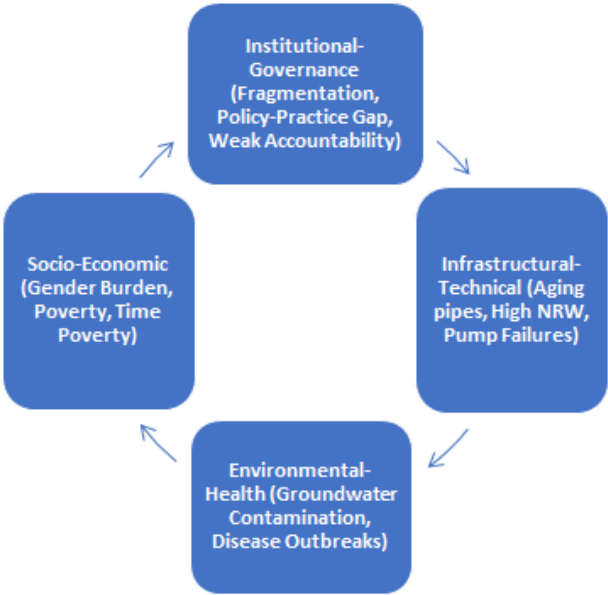


Figure 1: *Why isolated interventions have consistently failed*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To dissect the dynamics outlined in the conceptual framework, this study is underpinned by two complementary theoretical perspectives that provide depth and explanatory power.

The Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) Framework, pioneered by Elinor Ostrom (2011), provides a robust lens for dissecting the "rules of the game" that structure human interaction within the water governance system. The IAD framework allows the research to analyse the *action arena* where actors like HCC, ZINWA, community groups and residents operate. It focuses on how the formal and informal *rules* (e.g., the Urban Councils Act, the ZINWA Act, internal procedures, social norms), the physical and community *attributes* of the resource (e.g., Mabvuku's location in the supply network, population density) and the *broader context* (e.g., Zimbabwe's economic situation) interact to shape the incentives and behaviours of these actors. This framework helps explain how the overlapping mandates create confusion over property rights and responsibilities, how the lack of effective monitoring and sanctioning rules leads to poor performance and how the collective action problem of maintaining a shared infrastructure results in its tragic decline.

The IAD framework can also be used to develop effective and efficient policies and interventions that can promote sustainable water supply service delivery. Understanding of the institutional arrangements governing water supply, this framework reveals the underlying power dynamics, social norms and institutional constraints that shape the water service delivery outcomes. In addition, the framework places more attention to the institutional design and governance, highlighting the importance of promoting accountability, transparency and stakeholder participation in water service delivery.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The water crisis in Zimbabwe's urban areas is a deeply researched phenomenon, with the Mabvuku high density area frequently emerging as a critical and illustrative case study. To contextualise the findings of this review, it is essential to situate Mabvuku's plight within the broader global, regional, national and local literature.

At a global level, the challenges faced by Mabvuku mirror those of many rapidly urbanising cities across the Global South (UN-Habitat, 2022). The United Nations World Water Development reports consistently highlight the pressures of population growth, aging infrastructure and inadequate governance as primary drivers of urban water insecurity (UN-Water, 2021). The global discourse has progressively shifted towards Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and the ambitious targets of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 that aims to "ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" (United Nations, 2015). However, as numerous studies attest, the implementation gap between these global policy ideals and on-the-ground reality remains particularly wide in contexts characterised by weak institutions, political volatility and limited fiscal space, such as Zimbabwe (Furlong and Bakker, 2010; Moyo *et al.*, 2020). The global literature emphasises that technical solutions are insufficient without parallel strengthening of water governance, accountability mechanisms and regulatory frameworks (Rogers and Hall, 2003; Tortajada, 2010).

On a regional scale, Southern African cities face a convergent set of pressures. Climate variability, manifesting as prolonged droughts and intense flooding, poses a significant threat to water security, stressing already vulnerable supply systems (Masipa, 2017; Nhamo and Mabhaudhi, 2019). Economic instability and high levels of urban poverty further constrain the

ability of municipalities to invest in and maintain water infrastructure (Hope, 2022). Scholarly work on cities like Lusaka (Zambia) (Simatele and Etambakonga, 2015), Maputo (Mozambique) (Faldi and Rosati, 2016) and even Johannesburg (South Africa) (Smith and Hanson, 2003) highlights common themes of governance fragmentation, financial unsustainability of utilities and the proliferation of informal water vending markets (Njoh, 2012; Monstadt and Schramm, 2017). However, Zimbabwe's unique post-2000 political and economic trajectory marked by hyperinflation, international isolation and a deeply contentious relationship between central and local government (Kamete, 2013), has intensified these challenges, rendering its urban water crisis among the most severe in the region (Derman and Hellum, 2020; Mutondwa and Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2023).

At the national level, a substantial body of literature points to a persistent and profound disconnect between progressive policy frameworks and their practical implementation (Manzungu, 2015). The National Water Policy of 2012, for instance, outlines principles of equity, efficiency and sustainability, yet its execution has been crippled by a lack of political will and financial backing (Nhapi, 2009; Matamanda *et al.*, 2025). Historians like Musemwa (2010) have meticulously documented the roots of the crisis, tracing it to post-colonial political conflicts where the central government, led by ZANU-PF, systematically sought to destabilise opposition-led urban councils like Harare. This politicisation of water has resulted in chronic under-investment (Moyo, 2021), a culture of non-payment fostered by political promises (Kamete, 2006) and direct interference in technically sound tariff-setting processes (Marongwe, 2008), thereby crippling the financial viability of urban utilities. This body of work establishes that the water problem in Zimbabwe is, at its core, a governance and political problem (Tembo, 2022; Matamanda *et al.*, 2025). The legacy of

colonial water law and its inadequate reform in the post-independence era have also been identified as a foundational institutional weakness (Hellum and Derman, 2004; Derman and Hellum, 2007).

Locally, within Harare and specifically Mabvuku, research has focused on the granular, human-scale impacts of these macro-level failures. Studies have extensively documented community coping mechanisms, revealing a complex economy of water access involving boreholes, wells and a vibrant but exploitative informal vending sector (Mazingi and Kamete, 2020; Tibaijuka, 2005). Manzungu and Chioreso (2012) powerfully describe how households "internalise the crisis", developing costly and time-consuming strategies that divert resources from other essential needs. Research by Mazhazhate *et al.* (2021) and Pahwaringira (2021) explicitly highlights the gendered burdens, quantifying the time poverty and increased vulnerability experienced by women and girls. Public health studies consistently draw a direct line between the failure of the piped system and recurrent outbreaks of water-borne diseases in the area (ZIMCODD, 2012; CORE, 2017; van Dijk *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, the literature consistently identifies Mabvuku's geographical and topological location at the hydraulic periphery of Harare's network as a critical vulnerability, making it the "first to be cut off" when system pressure drops due to power outages, pump failures, or sheer demand overload (Ndedzu *et al.*, 2012; *Global Press Journal*, 2020). This rich local-level research provides the essential empirical evidence of how national political failures and regional pressures manifest in the daily lived experiences of citizens. However, a comprehensive, systematic synthesis that explicitly links these interconnected dynamics from national politics to local gender relations within a single analytical frame has been notably lacking, a gap this review seeks to fill.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic review methodology, drawing on the rigor, transparency and replicability afforded by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to identify, evaluate and synthesize existing research on water supply dynamics in Mabvuku. A precise research question was defined using a PICO (Population, Issue, Context, Outcome) approach: the population comprised residents and water users in Mabvuku; the issue centred on water service delivery (governance, infrastructure, access, management); the context was the high-density urban environment of Mabvuku within Harare; and the outcomes of interest were water availability (regularity), accessibility (physical/economic), quality (potability) and reliability. Between February and May 2024, a comprehensive search was executed across international electronic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest Central) and grey literature (e.g., Google Scholar, University of Zimbabwe repositories, Harare City Council reports, ZINWA publications, UNICEF, CHRA) to capture both peer-reviewed and context-specific local data. A structured Boolean search string was adapted per source, combining terms such as “Mabvuku AND water AND governance”, “water infrastructure”, “Harare AND high-density”, “ZINWA,” “water access,” and “community coping.” The review focuses on studies published between 2000 and 2024 to cover the evolution of the crisis, with particular attention to the more recent period (2010-2024). Studies were included if they addressed Mabvuku (or Harare with disaggregated data), dealt with water delivery, governance, infrastructure, or socio-economic/community responses and were empirical (e.g., academic articles, theses, NGOs, government). Excluded were rural or purely technical hydrological studies, opinion pieces and non-English publications. Two independent reviewers conducted the screening and data abstraction in two stages: first by title and abstract, then full-text review. Discrepancies

were resolved through discussion and consensus. Data were extracted into a standardised form (recording authorship, year, methods, objectives, key findings, conclusions), then thematically analysed. Themes were coded, categorised and synthesized into major dimensions that structure the findings.

FINDINGS

The systematic review of the literature identified a complex, self-reinforcing cycle of failure in Mabvuku's water supply, driven by four deeply interconnected thematic areas. The evidence reveals that interventions targeting only one of these areas are likely to be overwhelmed by the countervailing pressures from others.

INSTITUTIONAL AND GOVERNANCE FRAGMENTATION

The governance landscape governing Mabvuku's water is fundamentally crippled by institutional fragmentation and a lack of clear accountability. The system is jointly managed by the HCC which is legally mandated for urban water supply and ZINWA, a parastatal with a national water resources management mandate. This overlap creates a persistent state of confusion over roles and responsibilities for critical functions such as bulk water abstraction and treatment, distribution network maintenance, revenue collection and long-term planning. A resident's report of a pipe burst can trigger a protracted bureaucratic debate between the HCC and ZINWA over whose budget and responsibility it is to repair, leading to prolonged service disruptions. Matamanda *et al.* (2025) maintain the urge for the governments to acknowledge water governance as a holistic process that covers social, economic, environmental and political domains inherent in water governance.

This fragmentation is exacerbated by a critical gap between de jure policy and de facto practice. As Matamanda *et al.* (*ibid.*)

argue, Zimbabwe has a progressive National Water Policy on paper, advocating for decentralisation, stakeholder participation and cost-reflective pricing. However, its execution is hamstrung by contradictory directives from different ministries, weak institutional linkages and chronic underfunding. Tembo (2022) posits that the underlying issue is the absence of effective administrative systems and processes to give life to these policies, rendering them largely inert. This institutional failure is the primary reason technological solutions often underperform. As Nkosi and Dube (2023) observe, innovation can provide a thrust for reform, but its success is entirely contingent on a capable, coherent and responsive institutional environment to operate and maintain it. A new water treatment plant or a digital monitoring system is of limited long-term value if the governing body lacks the skilled personnel, coordinated processes and sustainable budget to support it.

INFRASTRUCTURAL DECAY AND TECHNICAL INCAPACITY

The physical state of Mabvuku's water infrastructure is a direct and tangible manifestation of decades of institutional neglect and financial starvation. The system is plagued by aged and deteriorating asbestos-cement and steel pipes, many of which were installed during the colonial era and have far exceeded their intended 50-year lifespan. The system was originally designed for a population of approximately 1.5 million, but the Harare metropolitan area now supports a population estimated to be over 3 million. This catastrophic overloading leads to chronically low water pressure and dry taps, especially in elevated areas of Mabvuku, located at the end of the supply line. This decay results in immense physical water losses. Studies, including one by Hove and Tirimboi (2011), report non-revenue water (NRW) levels for Harare, ranging between 35% and a staggering 60%. This means that a large proportion of the treated, pumped and chemically purified water never reaches a paying customer, instead leaking from thousands of cracks and

joint failures in the dilapidated network. This represents not only a colossal waste of a scarce resource, but also a massive financial drain on the utility, undermining its already precarious viability.

The technical challenges are further intensified by a critical data and capacity gap. Utility managers often operate in an information vacuum, lacking timely, accurate and reliable data on water production, consumption patterns and real-time network performance. This lack of information paralyses effective planning, proactive leak detection and rational resource allocation, creating a "flying blind" scenario where critical decisions about supply, rationing and infrastructure investment are based on estimates and anecdotal evidence rather than hard data. The widespread lack of functional water meters also directly undermines revenue collection, creating a vicious cycle: low revenue leads to poor maintenance which causes more leaks and lower pressure which, in turn, leads to further revenue loss and service deterioration.

Table 1: *Comparative Water Supply Frequency in Selected Harare Suburbs* (Synthesised Data, 2023-2024)

Suburb	Average Supply Hours/Day	Reported Interruptions/Week	Primary Water Source(s)
Borrowdale (Low-Density)	10-12	1-2	Municipal Pipeline
Mbare (High-Density)	4-6	3-4	Municipal + Communal Boreholes
Highfield (High-Density)	6-8	3-4	Municipal + Borehole
Mabvuku (High-Density)	1-3	5-6	Borehole + Vendors + Shallow Wells

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUITY AND COMMUNITY COPING MECHANISMS

The burden of the water crisis is not borne equally; it falls disproportionately on the most vulnerable segments of Mabvuku's community, with distinct and severe gendered implications. The daily struggle for water is primarily shouldered by women and girls, who are traditionally responsible for domestic water collection. When taps are dry, they are forced to spend hours each day travelling to distant boreholes, wells, or vendor queues. This arduous task not only exposes them to physical safety risks, but also represents a significant opportunity cost, depriving them of time that could be spent on income-generating activities, education or rest, thereby actively perpetuating cycles of gender inequality and poverty. Households opt to internalise the crisis in the face of unchanging water governance with the poor urban people failing to cope as compared to the wealthy households, of which internalisation is highly unsustainable (Manzungu and Chioreso, 2012).

Economically, a stark paradox exists. On one hand, the municipal utility is financially insolvent, unable to fund essential chemicals, spare parts, or salaries, partly due to the high NRW and low collection rates. On the other hand, specific studies of Mabvuku, such as that by Ndedzu *et al.* (2012), have utilised the Contingent Valuation Method to demonstrate a clear and significant Willingness to Pay (WTP) among residents for a reliable, improved water service. This indicates that a viable economic market exists, but the utility has failed to provide a service of sufficient quality and reliability to unlock this revenue potential. Instead, hyperinflation and widespread poverty lock many households into a vicious trade-off, forcing them to use cheaper, often contaminated alternative sources. As Mutandwa and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2023) highlight, this economic reality means low-income households are "more prone to suffering from a wide range of water-related health diseases".

In response, a complex ecosystem of community coping mechanisms has emerged. These include heavy reliance on donor-funded or council-managed boreholes, the digging of private shallow wells (which are highly vulnerable to contamination from nearby pit latrines) and the purchase of water from an extensive network of informal vendors who sell water at prices significantly higher than the official municipal tariff. While these strategies provide a critical short-term lifeline, they are financially draining, environmentally unsustainable due to groundwater over-abstraction and pose significant long-term health risks.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

The convergence of infrastructural failure and institutional neglect culminates in a severe and recurrent environmental and public health crisis. The frequent failure of sewage systems, a parallel infrastructure also in a state of disrepair, leads to raw sewage flowing in streets and seeping into the ground. This, combined with the widespread reliance on shallow wells in a high-density area with inadequate sanitation, creates a perfect storm for groundwater contamination. Pathogens from human waste easily migrate into the aquifers that supply these wells. This direct and causal link between service failure and disease is empirically evidenced by the recurrent outbreaks of cholera and typhoid that have plagued Mabvuku and similar suburbs. Reports from organisations like ZIMCODD (2012) and studies published in health journals have consistently documented Mabvuku-Tafara as an epicentre of such outbreaks. The environmental dynamics are further worsened by climate variability that introduces additional stress through more frequent and intense droughts that lower water tables and concentrate pollutants and by haphazard urban development that degrades natural water catchments and wetlands, reducing their natural filtration capacity.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review present a compelling and sobering narrative: the water crisis in Mabvuku is a prototypical case of systemic urban service failure, the complexity of which is fully illuminated only when viewed through the complementary lenses of Institutional Economics and Urban Political Ecology. The evidence unequivocally demonstrates that the core of the problem is not an absolute lack of water resources, but a profound failure of the institutional, political and economic systems mandated to manage this resource equitably and efficiently. The institutional fragmentation between the HCC and ZINWA, when analysed through the IAD framework, creates a textbook collective action problem. The absence of clearly defined property rights and responsibilities, coupled with weak monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms, leads to a situation where both entities can deflect blame and avoid costly maintenance, resulting in the "tragedy of the commons" played out on the urban water grid. The documented policy-practice gap is a symptom of this deeper institutional malaise, where formal rules exist but are not backed by functional action arenas or effective incentive structures.

From an Urban Political Ecology perspective, Mabvuku's plight is not a matter of bad luck but a direct consequence of historically produced and politically sustained spatial injustice. Its geographical and hydraulic location as the "last in line" is a physical inscription of political and economic marginalisation, a pattern entrenched during the colonial era and, critically, perpetuated by the post-colonial state (Musemwa, 2021). The review found evidence of water being used as a tool for political patronage, where service improvements or the allocation of water tankers can be manipulated for political gain. This politicisation erodes public trust, undermines the social contract and fragments community cohesion, making it difficult

for residents to collectively advocate for their universal right to water.

The socio-economic findings reveal a critical and actionable disconnect: the community's documented willingness to pay for improved services remains a vast, untapped resource due to a fundamental failure of fiduciary governance and service reliability. This aligns with global literature which emphasises that citizens' willingness to pay is highly correlated with their trust in the service provider. The starkly gendered impact of the crisis, meticulously detailed in local studies, underscores how environmental burdens are disproportionately borne by women, thereby reinforcing and intensifying pre-existing social inequalities. Any proposed solution that is not explicitly gender-responsive will, therefore, fail to address a core dimension of the injustice.

The analysis of infrastructure and technical capacity reveals that the high Non-Revenue Water is not merely a technical metric of leakage, but a powerful symbol of the broader institutional and political neglect. It represents the literal evaporation of public finance and a vital resource due to a failure of governance. Ultimately, the discussion leads to the inescapable conclusion that has been validated by decades of failed interventions: isolated technical fixes, such as drilling new boreholes without strengthening the institutions to maintain them, are merely palliative. They may provide temporary relief but are doomed to long-term failure. Without concurrent, decisive and sustained institutional reform, genuine community engagement and the political will to dismantle entrenched inequities, such interventions will be overwhelmed and the vicious cycle of failure in Mabvuku will continue unabated.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This systematic review conclusively demonstrates that the water supply crisis in Mabvuku is not a simple problem of drought or broken pumps, but a profound systemic failure driven by an interlocking and self-reinforcing set of institutional, infrastructural, socio-economic and environmental dynamics. The crisis is perpetuated by a vicious cycle where governance fragmentation and political neglect lead to catastrophic infrastructure decay and financial insolvency which, in turn, triggers public health emergencies and deepens social and gender inequities, thereby further weakening the community's ability to demand accountability. The evidence synthesized in this review makes it clear that there is no single-cause, magic-bullet solution. Achieving sustainable and equitable water security in Mabvuku requires a fundamental and decisive break from the status quo through integrated, multi-pronged and collaboratively implemented interventions.

Therefore, this review concludes with the following targeted recommendations for specific stakeholder groups:

1. For Policymakers (Central Government of Zimbabwe):

- **Legislate Institutional Clarity:** Urgently enact clear legislation to definitively clarify the roles, responsibilities and accountability mechanisms for the Harare City Council and ZINWA in urban water supply, eliminating the current overlap and confusion.
- **Create Ring-Fenced Funding:** Establish statutory, ring-fenced funding mechanisms for urban water infrastructure maintenance and rehabilitation, such as a national water development levy, to ensure stable financing shielded from political interference and ad hoc budget cuts.
- **Depoliticize Tariffs:** Support independent regulatory bodies to set technically sound, cost-reflective water tariffs while simultaneously mandating and funding

robust, transparent pro-poor tariff schemes (e.g., block tariffs) to protect the most vulnerable households.

2. For Urban Planners and Engineers (Harare City Council and Development Partners):

- **Prioritise Network Rehabilitation:** Shift investment focus from new, prestige projects to the systematic and phased rehabilitation of the core distribution network, prioritising the reduction of Non-Revenue Water through modern leak detection technologies and pipe replacement programs.
- **Invest in Data and Resilience:** Implement integrated urban water management plans that link water supply with sanitation and solid waste management to mitigate contamination. Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure and robust data collection systems (e.g., smart metering, GIS) to enable evidence-based decision-making.
- **Formalise Coping Mechanisms:** Work to formalise and regulate safe alternative water sources, such as by supporting professionally managed community borehole schemes with proper water quality monitoring, rather than allowing an unregulated informal market to dominate.

3. For Donors and International Development Partners:

- **Fund Governance, Not Just Hardware:** Move beyond funding stand-alone infrastructure projects (e.g., boreholes) toward long-term programmes that support institutional capacity-building, governance reform, financial management systems and community-led management models.
- **Support Pro-Poor Financing:** Provide technical and financial support for the design and implementation of pro-poor tariff structures and cross-subsidisation models to ensure that financial sustainability does not come at the cost of excluding the poor.

4. For Community Representatives and Civil Society Organisations (e.g., CHRA):

- **Empower Community Structures:** Formalise and legally empower community water committees, ensuring legislation mandates their inclusion in planning and monitoring processes, with specific quotas for women's representation to ensure their voices are heard.
- **Strengthen Citizen Oversight:** Build capacity for citizen science (e.g., simple water quality testing) and social accountability tools (e.g., community scorecards, social audits) to monitor service provider performance and advocate transparently for rights and entitlements.

The story of Mabvuku is a stark warning of how political neglect and institutional failure can deprive citizens of a most basic human right. It is also a clear and urgent call for a holistic, collaborative and politically courageous approach to urban water management that places equity, sustainability and good governance at its very centre.

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