

AFRICA

A Fine for a Flush: Drought Leaves Southern Africa High and Dry

A worsening water crisis ravages crops, livestock and even the continent's biggest waterfall; Zimbabweans contend with a new weekly ritual

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Every Monday at 8 p.m. since November, Bulawayo residents have gathered next to their toilets to prepare for a ritual that has come to be known as the big flush—another sign of a water emergency across southern Africa.

For the 700,000 residents of Zimbabwe's second-largest city, flushing outside government-mandated times puts them at the risk of being fined.

Economies in the region are reeling from a second historic drought in three years, leaving 45 million people facing water and food crises, according to the United Nations. That marks a sharp rise in recent years, the U.N. and other aid agencies said.



Residents line up to fill containers with water at a communal tap in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. PHOTO: CYNTHIA R MATONHODZE/BLOOMBERG NEWS

In Zambia, a drought that has ravaged the corn harvest is forcing families to survive on wild plants and roots, while in Namibia, 30,000 drought-related cattle deaths have been recorded since April and some 200 elephants have starved to death in national parks along the Zambezi River.

Since December, the volume of water pouring from the Zambezi over the massive Victoria Falls, at the border where Zimbabwe meets Zambia, has fallen more than