

## Lower Olifants Community Health Risks and Opportunities

Learning how communities in the Lower Olifants catchment battle environmental pollution for a healthier tomorrow



Communities living near the Olifants River face environmental pollution risks and their health may be threatened.

### **FEEDBACK:**

We have spent some time with you talking about the problems you have with water and pollution in your community, and are now telling you some of the things we have found. Because science takes a long time to do we only have preliminary results but we will give you final results in April 2014. We are busy doing tests and analysis at the moment, but we wanted to give you some feedback so long, so that you know we are still working on the project!

### **Preliminary water findings in Lepele:**

Tests and analysis	Preliminary result	You need to worry	Do not worry, but keep-up your good practices
Testing for chemicals	Results so far show that there are no bad chemicals in the water that poses a health concern		
Testing for <i>E. coli</i>	The river water showed high counts of <i>E. coli</i> and untreated water may cause infections when consumed		

### **What should you do?**

People should not use the river water for domestic purposes unless they boil the water, add chlorine tablets, or use a filtration system before drinking it. We also tested water that was obtained from springs or small streams in the region. These sources seem to provide better quality water, with little risk of infection for those that drink it. It would be better to use these alternative sources for domestic purposes rather than the polluted river water.

### **Social research preliminary findings:**

The team was welcomed by Acting Chief, her Royal Highness Chief Sobore Nolha Kobeng. She noted that the village had numerous problems around water pollution and contamination which are beyond their ability to manage on their own. During our visit we were taken to the local sacred "wells" which are located outside the JG Strydom Tunnels at Tswenyane River. The wells are famous for their healing and purifying ability as some people believe that if you immerse and wash your body in the water you will be cured of disease and misfortune. As a result, villagers often find dead bodies of believers who came for purification in the river water, but who ended up dead – having either slipped or died because they were impure. These practices were identified as posing a health risk to the community as these sacred waters are also the same water the community uses for drinking water when they have no water in their municipal taps. More analysis and research will be done to seek a solution to this problem! In addition, the community and Chief Council are lobbying local government to reduce the risk these practices pose, by securing the sacred sites through fencing and signs warning visitors of the potential risks.



Chief Kobeng and Council members at Tswenyane River

## Project Timeline

Apr 2012-Jan 2013

- Project conceptualisation
- Case-study selection



Feb 2013

- Project introduction
- Data Collection



March 2013

- Data analysis on data from household surveys



**Currently (May 2013)**

- Community feedback
- Water samples



December 2013

- Water risk assessment
- Air quality check



April 2014

- Final report & feedback