



Equitable access to water in Southern Africa

KEY QUESTIONS

- What barriers prevent equitable access to water?
- How can water infrastructure help provide equitable access to all?

Access to water is a fundamental human right and is embedded in Sustainable Development Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. In Southern Africa, as the effects of climate change begin to be felt across many aspects of life – from agriculture to industry and education – ensuring that everyone has access to safe drinking water and sanitation becomes critically important. Investing in infrastructure is a vital part of the strategy. Although billions of people have gained access to clean, safe drinking water since 1990, huge inequalities remain.

CRIDF, together with private and public organisations, is working to overcome the challenges of providing water for all, challenges that are exacerbated by climate

change. Some efforts tackle water infrastructure, some build capacity for managing water but underlying all the work is the principle of equitable access. In this **Water for All** series we flag some of the barriers that prevent equitable access and point to some of the ways these could be tackled in programmes and projects that CRIDF is supporting.

BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS

Encouraging and promoting equitable access means first understanding why marginalised groups such as people with disabilities, women, and households headed by young people encounter difficulties in accessing water. The barriers to equitable access to water can be grouped into the five categories of the sustainable livelihoods approach: natural, physical, economic, social and human barriers. Rarely do the barriers occur in isolation, with common overlaps between these categories. CRIDF recognises these complexities and works with stakeholders to leave no one behind and to find holistic solutions to the identified challenges.



159 million people use surface water as their main water supply. **Two-thirds** of people using surface water live in sub-Saharan Africa

The Water Trust. 2015. Progress on sanitation and drinking water 2015 update. The Water Trust: New York, USA. Available at: <https://watertrust.org/progress-on-sanitation-and-drinking-water-2015-update/>



Natural, economic and physical barriers to water access mean many people in sub-Saharan Africa have to walk a long way to collect water for their families
Image: CRIDF

Figure 1. Barriers to equitable access to water

Type of barrier	Description of barrier	Ways CRIDF is working to overcome barrier
Natural	The abundance or scarcity of water varies from area to area. Some areas have dry and wet seasons where water may be unavailable in dry seasons and unusable in wet seasons. Communities that rely on seasonal rainfall are particularly vulnerable.	CRIDF works to assist institutions, organisations and communities to make strategic decisions which will build on existing climate-resilient strategies or deepen their understanding of climate-resilient approaches to improve adaptive capacity. This might involve developing longer term strategies to better manage water and facilitating projects that lessen dependence on seasonal rainfall.
Physical	Inadequate or poorly maintained infrastructure limits people's access to clean water and water-related services.	CRIDF assesses, designs and pilots ways to develop replicable, inclusive, accessible and climate-resilient water infrastructure.
Economic	Supplying water is a capital-hungry undertaking. Access to water is often limited by economic policies, regulations, informal rules and power relations. Often, only those who can afford to pay for water have access.	CRIDF assists organisations responsible for supplying water to secure funds to maintain existing and develop new, accessible infrastructure. We also pilot innovative financial mechanisms for funding infrastructure. CRIDF encourages communities to recognise that water is a valuable resource and to understand that water needs to be priced to prevent wastage. We demonstrate that investing resources in water infrastructure can widen access and bring down costs.
Social	Decisions on access to water are often made by those in power, who may not be aware of the need for social inclusion and the impact of exclusion.	CRIDF encourages institutions, organisations and communities to take account of the socially excluded including the disabled, women, and households headed by children – when making decisions about water supplies.
Human	A lack of understanding leads to inappropriate use and waste of water.	CRIDF encourages individuals, communities, institutions and organisations to seek relevant, up-to-date information when making decisions. We work with institutions to strengthen their ability to help water users understand issues around the demand and supply of water.

ABOUT CRIDF

The Climate Resilient Infrastructure Development Facility (CRIDF) is a DFID (UK Aid) supported programme working to provide long-term solutions to water issues that affect the lives of the poor in Southern Africa. Our focus is to work together with organisations to show them how they can better build and manage their own water infrastructure to improve people's lives. Because rivers, lakes and river basins cross borders, CRIDF is working with 12 different countries in Southern Africa that share water resources. In so doing, CRIDF aims to improve the lives of over 200 million people, many of them extremely poor.



The CRIDF **Water for All** series highlights cross-cutting themes related to water infrastructure that CRIDF would like to explore with partners and interested parties.

Contact us
If you are interested in the services CRIDF offers, please email: enquiries@cridf.com