Where the taps still run dry

Ufrieda Ho writes that Phiri, Soweto, residents feel short-changed by pre-paid meters

FED UP: Jennifer Makoatsane thinks the government is not thinking of citizens after 19 years of democracy. Makoatsane was among residents of Phiri who lost a case nine years ago about pre-paid water meters in Soweto.

COURT IS COMPLEX BUT EMPOWERING

RIGHTS are both yield and yard, says Kate Tsalmgan, researcher with the Socio-Economic Rights Institute. Paski, who was involved in the Phiri water case through the Centre for Applied Legal Services, says the case showed gaps in how citizens feel about their rights and how they access the court.

"People do feel alienated from the court and the constitution but when organised they are in a better position to use both to claim their rights," in the Phiri case, many people felt they were not properly consulted and they lost, Tsalmgan says.

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Tsalmgan says that the process is in a form of democratic engagement and that it is empowering. "We have to deemify basic rights. We have to think about balancing rights and responsibilities among our communities. Corporate entities, the government and the middle class are not taking responsibility or being held accountable," she says.

Today she still lives in Phiri. She is tall and thin and the day is fine. She is dressed in a white shirt and blue jeans. Her hair is long and black. She is holding a book in her hands. She is talking about the water crisis in Phiri. She is talking about the lack of water in the district. She is talking about the need for more water. She is talking about the need for better water infrastructure. She is talking about the need for better governance. She is talking about the need for better planning. She is talking about the need for better education. She is talking about the need for better health care. She is talking about the need for better jobs. She is talking about the need for better housing. She is talking about the need for better government. She is talking about the need for better democracy. She is talking about the need for better justice. She is talking about the need for better freedom. She is talking about the need for better equality. She is talking about the need for better human rights. She is talking about the need for better peace. She is talking about the need for better stability. She is talking about the need for better prosperity. She is talking about the need for better development. She is talking about the need for better innovation. She is talking about the need for better technology. She is talking about the need for better science. She is talking about the need for better research. She is talking about the need for better education. She is talking about the need for better training. She is talking about the need for better skills. She is talking about the need for better technology. She is talking about the need for better infrastructure. She is talking about the need for better communication. She is talking about the need for better electricity. She is talking about the need for better water. She is talking about the need for better food. She is talking about the need for better clothing. She is talking about the need for better housing. She is talking about the need for better health. She is talking about the need for better education. She is talking about the need for better...