



## Mid Illovo Primary School: Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa

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Mid Illovo is a tiny village that owes its existence to sugarcane. Surrounded by dramatic mountains and steep cliffs where one of the Lovu tributaries cuts a path to the Indian Ocean – it is an area marked by dramatic scenery and incredible beauty.

But whilst only an hour and a half's drive from the country's busiest port - Durban - urbanization and all its supporting infrastructure slip quickly away as the road winds through the farmlands and the conditions become more rural and poverty more evident.

August is the time of the sugarcane harvest and most of the men of the community are grateful to have work as casual labourers tasked with cutting down sugarcane and transporting it to the local sugar plant.

To the outsider, the location of this remote village would be a peaceful retreat were it not for the fact that the area still has no connection to the national electricity grid and no municipal supply of water. The people in the area are at the mercy of the erratic rivers that flow far below their homes built high on the grass plateaus. The area is in the heartland of the Zulu Kingdom where strong

patriarchal governing customs still play out in timeless fashion. For the women of the area on whom the burden of collecting water falls, theirs is long hard walk down the steep rocky slopes before making the climb back up with filled buckets. Because of the precarious pathways, the women often are unable to carry a full bucket – typically a 20 litre pail, and have to make several return journeys to gather enough for their household.

One resident who is now retired from a career in education says the walk to the riverbed would take over an hour and the return journey even longer because her back and her knees hurt on the steep uphill climb.

There are often times in winter when the river runs dry. Conditions worsen after the first storms hit as muddied water washes down the gorge making the people sick.

But a new harvest of opportunity has come to the area since a PlayPump® water system was installed next to the local primary school. Within just a few short months of its presence, the quality of life for this community has been transformed.

The school's dedicated principal has already noted improved attendance

by his 314 pupils. “We have a mobile clinic that visits the area once a week and there was always between 20 and 50 children that complained of stomach ailments” says Zwelisha Khanyile. For most of the immediate community known locally as “Kwasindingane” nobody needs to walk more than ten minutes to draw water from PlayPump system. The children love to play on the merry go round during their lunch-break, which usually results in the storage tank being filled in time for the adults collecting in the early evening.

Life has also been made considerably easier for the school which runs a feeding scheme for its pupils. Cooking 314 meals every day is no small feat, but now with the water just steps away, the ladies who are involved with the cooking can spend less time out of their day fulfilling their cooking duties.

The school still uses the old pit latrine system, but with the opportunity to wash hands throughout the day, hygiene is strengthening. There is an old tap inside the school grounds which has been dry for eight months, and with no free funds for repair and maintenance, the tap has been forgotten as an old relic.

Nonkululeke Chonco is a Grade 7 pupil aged 13 who has grown up in the area her whole life. She is finding it challenging catching up on all the classes she has missed over the years. Her primary chore in the family was always to collect water. This would take her away from her classes and from her dreams of finishing primary school at age 12 like other South African children. Her English is slowly improving and she is grateful that the PlayPump system has relieved her of her duties.

Mr. Shange – the community chairperson also voiced his delight at the new PlayPump system. “We all live on the top of the cliffs where the grasslands and the sugarcane grow and now the water is on the same level as us. We no longer have to march up and down the mountain to fetch water.”

While at the school, a community meeting was in session where sugarcane giant Illovo was hosting a skills workshop for the previously disadvantaged emerging farmers of

the area. Since the nearest village to Mid Illovo is a five kilometer walk away, the school has become a common meeting point for the community. The location of the PlayPump system could not have been better.

But there is more taking place than just classes for children and adults, already the community’s minds are churning on how to utilize the water in other enterprises. Already one woman who has been disabled by a stroke has been busying herself with a food garden. Her plot is just minutes from the PlayPump system and previously she would have to rely on the generosity of her neighbors to fetch her water. Now she has thriving spinach, cabbage and potatoes plants and her neighbour is following suit!

After the children had enjoyed their only playground toy, the elder women of the community gathered with their buckets. A lively discussion followed. Mrs. Eslinah Lembedi, a former school principal still defying retirement in her 66<sup>th</sup>

year, was talking about raising chickens.

“We have the water now to wash out their cages and provide for their drinking...The chatter continued long after the buckets were filled.

*Photos Courtesy MTV News and Docs and PlayPumps International*

