

Northern Region Water Board and Partners Launch Transformative Water and Sanitation Project in Rumphi, Malawi

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The Northern Region Water Board (NRWB), with significant financing from the African Development Bank and the Government of Malawi, has commenced implementation of the Rumphi Water and Sanitation Services Project. This critical initiative aims to address a severe water scarcity and sanitation crisis impacting the rapidly growing Rumphi district, including its newly established Technical College.

Rumphi Technical College, a beacon of opportunity with a student body of 534, has faced significant operational challenges due to unreliable water supply. Akuzike Nkhoma, the college's principal, highlighted the urgency, stating, "Sometimes, we're left with no choice but to send students to fetch water from unprotected sources... It's neither safe nor sustainable." This issue was underscored by a recent cholera scare, which led to 100 students requiring hospitalization due to reliance on unsafe water sources.

The water scarcity at the college mirrors a district-wide problem. Francis Munthali, CEO for NRW, acknowledged the strain on the aging infrastructure. "The existing 200,000-liter tank is no longer sufficient for Rumphi's expanding population," Munthali explained. "To sustain supply to the college, we often have to ration water in town, impacting essential facilities like the main hospital. We are facing a real crisis."

The Rumphi Water Supply Scheme, last upgraded in 2003, was designed for a 2010 demand of 1.5 million liters per day. Current demand has surged to over 10 million liters daily, yet the system serves only 23% of the town's population with intermittent supply.

The new project is designed to fundamentally transform the region's water infrastructure. Catherine Mwafurirwa, Director of Infrastructure Development at NRW, detailed the comprehensive scope: "Under

this project, we are upgrading both water and sanitation facilities. The treatment plant's daily production capacity will increase from 1.5 million liters to 19 million liters to meet projected demand for 2045. For the first time, Rumphi town will have a proper sewer system. We are also extending water supply to new areas such as Bolero, Phwezi, Bwengu, and Erukweni."

Beyond infrastructure, the project prioritizes environmental sustainability. It includes extensive forest landscape restoration and ecosystem-based adaptation initiatives, with a target of planting and nurturing 700,000 trees for catchment management. This reforestation effort has already generated hundreds of short-term jobs for local communities, particularly women, involved in nursery operations and planting activities.

Rumphi District Commissioner Emmanuel Bulukutu emphasized the project's pivotal role in regional development. "Rumphi is growing, but without water and improved sanitation, development stalls. This project is critical as it will not only support the thriving Technical College but also improve the quality of life for all residents, fostering a healthier, more prosperous community."

The African Development Bank Group is providing a \$32.2 million grant, complemented by a \$3.67 million contribution from the Government of Malawi. The four-year project, initiated in December 2023, is slated for completion by December 2027. Upon completion, the project will ensure access to safely managed drinking water for all communities along the 83-kilometer Mzuzu-Erukweni-Erukweni-Bwengu-Phwezi stretch, positioning Rumphi to become a vibrant hub of human capital and economic activity in northern Malawi.