

## **The Source of Our Water**

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Sao Domingos, Cape Verde Islands

The Republic of Cape Verde consists of nine inhabited islands located 460 kilometers off the coast of West Africa in a region known as the Sahel. The encroachment of the Sahara has affected this country for years. Cape Verde's history has been shaped by a scarcity of natural resources, especially water. Aggravated by recurrent drought, including a 17-year drought during the 1970s and 1980s, agricultural production has consistently fallen below local consumption needs. As late as 1947, 20 percent of the country's population died of starvation during a period of drought.

Water conservation is extremely important. The local government supplies most water by truck. The water is delivered to a *chafariz* (a water tank), where women wait in line with buckets. They are charged five *escudos* (five cents) per bucket, with a limit of five buckets. The water trucks obtain water from the desalination plant or from pumps that extract groundwater. Pumps are regulated closely, with strict limitations on the amounts anyone can take from the ground.

My water is brought to my house by the water truck and pumped into a tank on the roof. Drinking water must be boiled, filtered, and bleached. I have discovered how to wash large loads of laundry effectively in less than 15 liters of water. My entire morning shower takes less than one bucket of cold water, and washing dishes takes less than two liters. I've also discovered that used shower water makes great mop water!

## **Transportation**

Cape Verde has limited natural resources, with the ocean as probably the largest. Cape Verdeans rely on the ocean for food, drinking water, salt, and transportation. Family members who have emigrated to other countries in search of work send remittances to relatives remaining behind. Most food and goods in markets are shipped to Cape Verde from abroad.

Since the country is made up of islands, travel between islands is very important. Close islands have ferry service, which helps spread goods throughout the islands.