

**PROPOSED JOINT KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION  
SENZO MCHUNU**

**SESSION 3 ON “NAVIGATING UNCERTAIN WATERS – SHIFTING POWERS, SHARING VALUES”**

**Wednesday, 25 August 2021, 17:00-18:00 CEST/18:00-19:00 Dar es Salaam time**

**Theme: Step forward: building resilient institutions through spaces for adaptive and participatory decision-making.**

Moderator

Excellencies

Distinguished Panellists and Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the onset I would like to appeal for your honest and reflective analysis on the situation of water today. Let us reflect honestly on the decisions that we take as leaders, **and view them against the looming water crisis that we face today.** This crisis, can be attributed to the “*Politics of Water*”, which is fast becoming a make or break situation, impacting on the millions of our people, still without access to water.

We cannot detach ourselves from this situation, we are obligated as leaders to save this finite resource called water - for generations to come. We need to answer the difficult questions: **have we done what we’ve pledged to do? As we look back at the steps we have taken to address global water challenges, have we put in place the decision making processes that will ensure sustainable delivery of water and sanitation services for all?**

Moderator, if the current world pandemic, Covid-19, with the turbulence and shakeup that it brought upon nations, could not inspire change in our approach in dealing with the decisions we make on water, it will be interesting to know what else can bring change.

Covid-19 ravaged economies, lives, and livelihoods globally, without forewarning and left us with very little time to prepare our combat strategies. Water become the centre of convergence and stood as the first line of defence against the virus. **It remains evident that as we all washed our hands with water, we left the unserved to face the virus bare handed.**

This must be corrected! Let us use this crisis as an escalator for accelerated and enhanced water decision-making.

It is evident that ***building resilient institutions through spaces for adaptive and participatory decision-making*** is almost the last opportunity left for leaders to live up to the promise made at the adoption of SDGs, in particular SDG6 on water and sanitation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, we cannot continue in the same **trajectory of turning a blind eye to those who call out for basic rights**, as we agree that: **“Water is Life, Sanitation is Dignity”**. If we as leaders mean what we pronounce and engage openly on behalf of the millions in our countries who are denied these rights, the right to life and dignity that they deserve, we can await history to judge us harshly.

To those leaders who have not started providing this right to life: **“Step in”, and join other leaders**; to those leaders who are progressing in changing the lives of our people: **“Step up”** and to those leaders who are on course in striving to leave no one behind, **we applaud you and would like to invite you to “Step forward “and act on water with and by all.**

Despite the fact that water is ranked the third global risk of concern, most leaders do not take this early warning, and strive to elevate water in the Global Agenda. Peter Drucker pre-warned on the danger of not acting on time, when he said: **“The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence, it is to act with yesterday’s logic.”**, giving us much to reflect on when we consider the important and critical decisions on water that are not implemented.

Valuing water can play a critical role in changing the way we manage water. Building an appreciation across stakeholders of the value of water and creating mechanisms that allow us to maximize the value and productivity of water. We will in future, have no option **but the value of water will mainly be imposed by the increasing pressures on limited water resources.**

The worst that we are facing as the world is the **looming crisis posed by Climate Change**. The big question remains, **are leaders, and all in power, ready to act or to react?** I submit Excellencies, **that we choose to act, and not react, as we might be late!**

Moderator, allow me to cite South Africa, my country, where water law reforms were a direct result of the historic elections of 1994. The 1998 Water Act sought to implement the two key principles of the 1997 National Water Policy namely, "**sustainability**" and "**equity**". These principles found resonance in our Constitution, as the **right to water is enshrined in the Constitution**. What is left for us as leaders today, is to honour the commitments we made and inspire hope as we move forward.

Regional cooperation was enhanced when AU Heads of State adopted the Continental **Africa Water Investment Program** in February this year, a programme that seeks to pave the way for water security and job creation in Africa to accelerate investment climate-resilient water infrastructure, transboundary management in response to the urgent obstacles that Africa faces in meeting its obligations. A sustained high level political commitment to the water agenda in the region was **highlighted in the call for a High Level Panel on Water Investments for Africa**, a Call to Action, which was also one of the key outcomes of the 2021 African Regional Bonn Dialogues for Results.

I therefore believe that the outcomes of this seminar will change the words of **Charles Kettering when he said: "The world hates change, yet it is the only thing that has brought progress"**. We are therefore left with no option as leaders, but to effect change and focus on enhancing the resilience and capabilities of our water institutions if we are to succeed in the limited time left to salvage the fast diminishing water resources in our countries.

**I therefore would like to challenge my fellow leaders to embrace change and raise their hands and commit to step in, to step up and step forward in our respective spaces, as we leave this session.**

Moderator, I would like to conclude by saying, we are running against time. **We need to move and move with speed**, otherwise we will have only ourselves to blame, if we do not act against this looming water crisis. As I step off, I want us to remember the words of **Maude Barlow**, when he said: **“THERE IS SIMPLY NO WAY TO OVERSTATE THE WATER CRISIS OF THE PLANET TODAY”**. Real, long-lasting, change, comes through legal, policy, regulatory, and institutional reform. As government leaders we must make the hard decisions, and take the difficult path, of institutionalising change and making water a priority not just today, but forever.

**In conclusion, I call on all policy makers, decision-makers and LEADERS to STEP FORWARD!**

**I thank you.**