

WATER SECURITY AT STAKE

# Critical to protect water infrastructure

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THE right to water and sanitation is a fundamental human right that is provided for in the Bill of Rights.

The Constitution contains a Bill of Rights which forms part of the cornerstone of our democracy. It enshrines the rights of all people and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality, and freedom.

Furthermore, the Constitution places a legal obligation on the government to ensure that this right becomes a reality for all people living in the country.

Successive governments have prioritised the provision of water, and the current administration continues to upgrade water infrastructure.

Today, South Africa faces critical challenges in respect of vandalism and the theft of water infrastructure, as well as the theft of electrical copper cables.

Energy and water generation are

an integral part of ensuring the sustainable management of water supply and demand. Therefore, the result is that there is a heavy price to pay for achieving equity and redistribution of water resources.

As this continues unabated, water security for the future and the country's economic prosperity and development priorities is uncertain.

Besides trampling on other people's rights, we are plunging the goals of our developmental state into disarray from which we may take decades to recover.

The root cause of the problem includes the inability of politicians to deliver on their promises, which results in protests.

Also, the fact there is a market for goods like cables and valves, and related to this are business opportunities, such as water carting, means that vandalised infrastructure is good for some businesses.

Our water resources are under

immense pressure; there is a need to deal decisively with the destruction of water infrastructure. Any strategies to plan, manage, protect and control the use of water resources will not yield positive results if we do not work together to deal with the malicious destruction of infrastructure.

The vandalising of water infrastructure is a huge setback for service delivery. It disrupts water supply to communities and affects the financial well-being of the department, as well as the relevant stakeholders in the water sector, particularly municipalities.

Infrastructure comes with a hefty price tag. It takes years and years of committing financial resources to restoring it to its original state.

Additionally, these criminal activities generally result in reduced access to a suitable quantity and quality of water to users. This in turn affects sanitation services, with associated impacts

on public health and personal dignity.

Some initiatives that can help us deal with this rising pandemic are that municipalities should institute protection measures to eliminate theft and vandalism, including collaborating with law enforcement agencies.

This can be done by installing CCTVs, and concrete manholes that cannot be stolen. Also, a delegation of powers to municipal law enforcement agencies, robust community engagement, naming and shaming, working with scrap metal buyers, and conducting research and measurement of theft and vandalism are necessary.

Hence, the Department of Water and Sanitation calls on communities to refrain from destroying water infrastructure, and to protect it. This will result in improved water and sanitation services.

*Ngcobo is a senior communicator at the Department of Water and Sanitation.*



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