

CONSTITUTION PLACES A LEGAL OBLIGATION ON GOVERNMENT

Right to water is fundamental to all South Africans

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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, regarded as one of the world's most progressive, 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, over the past 27 years, prioritised the provision of water, especially to communities that were deliberately excluded by apartheid, and the current administration continues to upgrade water infrastructure.

Today, South Africa faces critical challenges in respect of vandalism and theft of water infrastructure, as well as 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 that may take us decades to recover.

It is true that vandalism and theft happen throughout the country. In rural areas, because the infrastructure is in close proximity, the chances of vandalism are high.

In an urban context, crime is more organised and easy access to infrastructure.

From an ordinary perspective, the root cause of the problem includes the inability of politicians to deliver on promises, which results in the rise of 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 – vandalised infrastructure is good for some businesses. Some of the forms of theft and vandalism include illegal connections, in response to frustration at the level of service delivery.

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 any positive results if we do not work together to

deal with the malicious destruction of infrastructure.

Vandalising of water infrastructure is a huge setback for service delivery. This does not only disrupt water supply to communities but also affects the financial well-being of the department as well as the relevant stakeholders in the water sector, particularly municipalities.

The reality that escapes the vandals who destroy and steal from water infrastructure is the cost of putting in place this infrastructure – it comes with a hefty price tag. It literally takes years and years of committing financial resources to restore them to their original state.

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

Some initiatives which can assist us to 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.

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

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