



AMIT KALANTRI, AUTHOR.

"A river doesn't just carry water, it carries life."

# Water not a cheap resource

As a water-scarce country, we need to inculcate a culture of water conservation



## KHULEKANI NGCOBO

I have a Constitutional right to water and a responsibility to safeguard my water resources. The right to water and sanitation is a fundamental human right that is provided for in the bill of rights.

The Constitution, which is 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 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.

As a young professional who grew up in Mphahlele Township, KwaZulu-Natal I accept the call to responsibility that comes with the many rights and freedoms that I have been privileged to inherit from the sacrifice and suffering of those who came before me.

I appreciate that the rights enshrined in the Con-

stitution of the Republic of South Africa are inseparable from my duties and responsibilities to others. Therefore, I accept that with every right comes a set of responsibilities.

For example, the right to equality places on me the responsibility to treat every person equally and fairly, and not discriminate unfairly against anyone on the basis of race, gender, religion, nationality, ethnicity or social origin, disability, culture, language, status or appearance.

Hence, on March 21, South Africa observes Human Rights Day which is linked to March 21, 1960, and the events of Sharpeville. On that day, 69 people died and 180 were wounded when police fired on an unarmed crowd protesting against the pass laws.

Human Rights Day takes place on the day before UN World Water Day, celebrated this year under the theme "Groundwater: making the invisible visible".

Groundwater is invisible, but its impact is visible everywhere. Out of sight, under our feet, groundwater is a hidden treasure that enriches our lives. Almost all of the liquid freshwater in the world is groundwater. As climate change gets worse, groundwater will become more and more critical. We need to work together to manage sustainably this precious resource. Groundwater may be out of sight, but it must not be out of mind.

Henceforth, the next question is how far has South Africa got in the provision of water for all, and what are the rights and responsibilities that come with water?

Despite the massive improvement, the arrival of Covid-19 laid bare the unequal access to water in the country and there is still much more that needs to be done to ensure access to clean water as a reality for all.

The pandemic has increased the demand for water since people are expected to wash their hands regularly to prevent the spread of the virus. We are, however, encouraged that during the pandemic we have been able to provide water tanks and pipes to increase access to water in high-density public areas, informal settlements and rural areas.

Our government is acutely aware that despite the improvements in the provision of the quantity and quality of drinking water there are still pockets of the population without adequate access or have to travel far to fetch water. Women, in particular, are still bearing the brunt of not having adequate water in their homes.

The Department of Water and Sanitation is also in the process of finalising the National Water and Sanitation Master Plan to ensure water security in the country.

Through the National Water Act 36 of 1998, we

are committed to the sustainable provision of water to all households.

South Africa is a water scarce country and most of our water comes from rainfall, therefore, we are susceptible to sustained droughts or climate change. It is against this background that infrastructure is being improved to address the issue of water security before 2025.

Using water wisely and sparingly is not the sole responsibility of government. It is important that communities and businesses play their part and take the necessary steps to preserve it.

As a country we need to inculcate a culture of water conservation to avoid running out of water and to save it for future generations.

I grew up in the same rural township where I was told not to use the river or river bank as a toilet. And, always water our plants during the early morning hours or in the evening, when temperatures are lower. These lessons taught me that water does not come cheaply.

As we continue to commemorate Human Rights Month, we should remember that we all have a role to play in conserving water and ensuring access to water becomes a reality for all.

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