



CLEAR RIVERS CAMPAIGN 2021



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



WATER IS LIFE - SANITATION IS DIGNITY

CLEAR RIVERS CAMPAIGN

“Join the action, clean up and protect water resources”

When rivers run dry, it reminds all of us that water does not come from the tap.

It is for this reason that government, business and civil society initiated the Clear Rivers campaign in 2016.

The campaign calls on everyone to dedicate their 67 minutes of goodwill activities towards cleaning up streams, wetlands, dams, canals and any freshwater source.

Everyone is encouraged to participate in cleaning up the water ecosystems; on any day during Mandela Month. This year's theme is “Action Against Poverty”





BACKGROUND

South Africa is a water scarce country and named the 38th driest country in the world; with a rapidly increasing population.

South Africa's rainfall is unpredictable and common periods of drought limit the water resources even further. Rivers that used to flow throughout the year are now dry, while others flow only during rainy seasons. Years from now, the demand for water might exceed the amount of available water in our country. This means that we must use and share our water more effectively.

The health of the rivers in our country is threatened by excessive use of the water and the riverbanks. If we pollute the river in one place, we affect the condition of the river for a long distance downstream. A river performs functions such as the ability to clean itself best, when it is healthy.

Therefore, active and responsible citizenry is encouraged across the spectrum where people from all walks of life become participants in promoting healthy rivers. The relationship between communities and healthy rivers can never be overstated as it is community members who must take care of our rivers to ensure that they are not polluted.

The need for water security, particularly in the face of global climate change and a multitude of anthropogenic impacts affecting our rivers, calls for a national and unified approach to protect our rivers, wetlands and broader catchments.

In this way all people can benefit from the added-value products of healthy rivers and can have access to clean water for basic human needs.

It is for this reason that the Department of Water and Sanitation connects South Africans to their sources of water and the natural infrastructure that are crucial for a water secure future. This is done annually, when South Africans are called to clean up rivers and water ecosystems, as part of dedicating their 67 minutes of goodwill, during Mandela Month.

We know that most of those that have no access to piped water use water from various natural water resources such as streams and rivers. The Clear Rivers campaign is one attempt by the Department of Water and Sanitation to ensure clean rivers and allow for poverty stricken communities near rivers to have clean and usable water. In this way, we are ensuring dignity of the poor amongst us as a nation.

This year's Clear River campaign comes during a difficult period in our country and the rest of the world, facing the deadly coronavirus pandemic that has claimed the lives of thousands of people across the globe. South Africa in particular is facing rapid rise in infections since the outbreak of the third wave of the virus.

President Cyril Ramaphosa recently announced the adjustment of regulations by the Cabinet with the introduction of Level 3 adjusted restrictions. The devastating effects of the virus have made the world to change the way things are done and a new normal is now in place.

Over the years, the Department has been mobilising all sectors of society to join hands in large numbers and go out to clean our rivers and streams; but this year it will be different as large gatherings in one place will be avoided. However, the Department still calls out communities, corporate sector and civil society organisations to go out in their respective communities to clean our rivers and streams, whilst adhering to the COVID-19 assembly regulations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CAMPAIGN

The objective of the Clean Rivers campaign is to undertake a collaborative effort and actively engage communities as well as promoting and creating on-going awareness and education on protecting our water resources. Fostering volunteerism among communities is actively encouraged as part of a proactive approach to protecting our rivers, streams, wetlands and other water ecosystems, given the drought that still persists in large parts of the country.

The envisaged outcomes of the campaign seek to ensure the following:

- **Environmentally conscious communities;**
- **Well informed/ educated communities;**
- **Pollution free rivers.**



LEGISLATION GOVERNING THE WATER SECTOR

3.1 The Constitution of South Africa

Section 27 (1) (b) of the Constitution of South Africa clearly articulates that everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water.

3.2 The National Water Act (NWA) of 1998 and the Water Services Act (WSA) of 1997

The Acts are complementary and provide a framework for sustainable water resource management while enabling improved and broadened service delivery. The NWA is founded on the principle that all water forms part of a unitary, interdependent water cycle, and should thus be governed under consistent rules. The Act contains comprehensive provisions for the protection, use, development, conservation, management and control of South African water resources.

3.3 National Water Resource Strategy 2

The National Water Resources Strategy (required under the National Water Act) is also currently under revision. The third iteration of this strategy was due for gazetting in 2018. There is a possibility under consideration in the revision of the legislation that a future strategy will combine water resources, water services and sanitation into an integrated National Water and Sanitation Resources and Services Strategy.

3.4 National Water and Sanitation Master Plan

The Plan sets out the critical priorities to be addressed by the water sector in the period 2018 – 2030. It also sets out annual measurable outcomes inclusive of roles and responsibilities, time frames and associated estimated costs. The Master Plan also identifies how performance will be monitored. As a plan, rather than a strategy or policy, the prioritised actions with responsibilities are detailed against which Cabinet, Parliament and the public can hold relevant players in the sector accountable.

3.5 National Development Plan

The Plan was launched in 2012 and provides a detailed blueprint for how the country can eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by the year 2030. The national blueprint articulates that all South Africans will have affordable, reliable access to sufficient safe water and hygienic sanitation by 2030.

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on any day during Mandela Month.*



NATIONAL WATER AND SANITATION MASTER PLAN

The National Water and Sanitation Master Plan notes that river ecosystems are vital for supplying fresh water; they store and transport water and, combined with constructed storage and transfer schemes, bring water to urban and rural areas, irrigate croplands, take away waste and provide cultural and aesthetic services.

Healthy tributaries help to maintain natural flow pulses and flush pollutants from hard- working larger rivers, contributing to the quantity and quality of water supplies. Contrary to popular perception, fresh water flowing from rivers out to sea is not wasted but is essential for maintaining healthy ecological systems in estuaries as well as coastal and marine ecosystems, and the social and economic benefits received from them.



BENEFITS OF HEALTHY RIVERS

In many places in South Africa, rural people depend, for their livelihood, on products derived directly from rivers. As a result, their relationship with rivers is close and their need for healthy rivers, critical. The benefits of the healthy rivers are however not only limited to the rural communities but also urban communities who use rivers for recreational practices such as fishing.

5.1 Domestic Benefit

Communities benefit from clean and healthy rivers. Clean and fresh water assists communities in their daily activities including consumption, cooking and washing. The fish that live in healthy rivers can be used as an excellent food source. The dense, indigenous, riparian vegetation around healthy rivers also attracts animals and birds. Communities and even livestock particularly in rural communities stand a better chance of an improved quality of life when our rivers are clean and healthy.

5.2 Cultural Benefit

Communities use clean and healthy rivers to perform cultural rituals, for making sacrifices and for communicating with ancestors. Rivers serve as sacred places for different religious and spiritual practices such as worship and ceremonial cleansing, for example baptism. Fish is an excellent source of food.

5.3 Economic Benefit

Different types of plants grow in and on the banks of our rivers. Some of the plants provide communities with building materials such as roofing for huts and or houses. Communities also use reeds and other wetland vegetation to make baskets, mats, curtain blinds and handbags. Wetland vegetation can help economic development if it is harvested in a sustainable way.

INDICATIONS OF CLEAN RIVERS

A river is healthy when the water is clean

A river is healthy when you can drink its water, swim in it and eat its fish without the fear of getting diseases or sick.

A river is healthy when there are healthy indigenous fish populations

A good indication that a river is clean and healthy is when there are different kinds of healthy fish living in it.

A river is healthy when there is a healthy riparian zone

The riparian zone is the area next to a river that helps the river to function as an ecosystem.

The roots of trees and plants in the riparian zone stabilises the river bank and prevent excess siltation, which occurs when soil and sand is washed into the river. The trees, plants and ground cover on the riverbank trap soil and waste materials before it enters the river.

The roots of plants also create safe areas where fish can breed, feed and hide. Wild animals and birds also hide in the trees and in the dense bushes found in the riparian zone. Therefore, destroying the riparian zone means disturbing the natural life cycle in this zone. A river is healthy when there is a healthy riparian zone.

RISKS POSED FOR RIVERS

Waste disposal

Waste materials such as papers, plastics, diapers, empty cans and unwanted clothes and more, that are thrown into rivers, are not only unsightly but also unhealthy. The water quality in rivers is reduced when rivers are used as dumping areas for waste.

Agricultural practices

Bad agricultural practices along rivers lead to poor river health.

Farming on steep slopes of rivers or removing plants and trees that grow along riverbanks for agriculture and gardens are examples of bad agricultural practices. These practices destroy the riparian vegetation and impair important river functions. If there is no riparian vegetation it is easier for sand, soil and other unwanted materials to enter the river, resulting in poor river health.

Riparian vegetation use

Rural communities use trees and plants for firewood, building fences, furniture, and for medicinal or healing purposes. River health deteriorates when trees are cut down and plants grow along the riverbank. Such activities disturb the riparian zone, leaving it with fewer trees and plants. Alien plants invade and flourish in disturbed riparian zones.

Fishing practices

Fishing is one way of providing food for families. We can also sell the fish. When we catch fish with shade nets, traps, gill nets or seine nets, we are involved in unsustainable fishing practices.

The small fish cannot escape from the shade nets to grow larger and to breed. This leads to fewer or no fish in the river. We must practice sustainable fishing methods. This means that we adjust our fishing activities.

Livestock grazing

Overgrazing increases the rate of erosion and the amount of sand and soil in the river. The land becomes bare and has no vegetation that protects the soil from being washed into the river when it rains. Healthy riparian vegetation reduces the possibility of flooding during rainy seasons. Overgrazing happens when too many livestock feed in the same area for a long time. This damages the land cover and does not give the grass and plants time to grow again.

Household practices

Although washing and bathing are not the main polluters of river systems, some detergents that are used to wash cars and clothes, contain chemicals that can make rivers unhealthy.

Communities should make use of soaps that are environmentally friendly.



APPROACH TO PROFILING THE CAMPAIGN IN THE MEDIA

During the roll out of this campaign, communication will be implemented on various communication platforms including print, broadcast, online and social media. In addition to adverts, media engagements including media briefings and interviews will be held. The Department will work with partners in local government, private sector as well as in communities in elevating advocacy for clean rivers.

Key Messages

- Know where your water comes from.
- We have a responsibility to conserve and protect rivers, dams, wetlands and the environment.
- Let us clean up rivers, wetlands, streams and all freshwater ecosystems.
- Report pollution of rivers and fresh water ecosystems to the DWS Hotline on 0800 200 200.

PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN COMMUNITIES

This campaign will have a focus on creating awareness with communities living along rivers and in close proximity of water ecosystems. This will assist in ensuring a long term intervention as communities are able to decrease their own pollution activities as well as play a watch-dog role in preventing others from polluting in rivers.

Format of activations

- Interactive door to door awareness activities with communities living in close proximity of rivers and other types of fresh water ecosystems;
- Gauging the level of awareness about river pollution;
- Solutions to be received from communities on addressing river pollution.

Advantages of activations:

- Raise the profile of river pollution with the public;
- Create platforms for the public in order to share concerns and discuss possible interventions;
- Provide the public with information on how to respond to incidences of river pollution.

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