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INTERNET ARTICLE

SADC River Basin Organisation Workshop deepens cooperation between sectors

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Delegates at the Southern African Development Community (SADC) River Basin Organisations were urged to encourage the water, energy and food sectors to work closer together for the accelerated industrial and economic prospects of the region.

This was the message of the three-day biennial workshop hosted by the Department of Water and Sanitation from 22-24 May 2017 at the Riverside Sun Hotel in Vanderbijlpark. The workshop, which is attended by the 15 member states of SADC, provides a unique platform for sharing experiences around co-managing shared water basins in the region.

This year's workshop, which is taking place under the theme "Enhancing Regional Integration through Improved River Health and Nexus Approaches", is a build up from 2014 workshop which encouraged close cooperation between the SADC countries to deal with water-related disasters.

Outlining the purpose of the workshop, Kenneth Msibi of the SADC Secretariat told delegates there was a need for in-depth understanding challenges and efforts that are being made by River Basins Organisations on water quality management and aquatic weeds control.

Msibi said central to this were the concrete steps be taken on how to tackle the environmental water management agenda forward, reiterating on the importance of understanding of water, energy and food nexus as a worldwide programme.

He said the economies of the SADC region to grow the water, energy and food sectors should be able to work as one unit, stressing that this was required for businesses to be sustainable.

Gavin Quibell, who delivered the keynote address, reflected on the European Union's experience, highlighting the vitality of putting in place programmes dedicated to water quality monitoring.

Quibell said the EU water framework directive directs all water quality in Europe, ensuring good quality status.

"This also includes the question of affordability and why each member state signed up. This is primarily driven by the opportunity to be part of EU, with funding availed from more affluent countries and the creation of common standards," he said.

SADC Resource Person, Catherine Mutambirwa, said in terms of the African Water Resources Management Priority Action Programme the SADC countries were expected to meet the minimum wastewater and quality standards and regulations. She said these were agreed to and adopted by the African Union (AU) member states for waste water treatment, environmental flows and water equality management.

"Countries have legislation and policies dealing with water quality, but that not all the countries were monitoring river water quality and effluent discharge quality," Mutambirwa said.



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She said there was a need for research, technical and institutional capacity building.

“Raising awareness on river health and engagement with other stakeholders in monitoring river health is critical as water is an engine and catalyst of increased investment,” she concluded.

Hosia Sithole