



INTERNET ARTICLE

Deputy Ministers call on municipalities to ringfence water money and reduce water losses

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The Deputy Ministers of Water and Sanitation, Ms Judith Tshabalala and Mr David Mahlobo have called for municipalities re-invest money collected from revenue into water and sanitation services to ensure sustainability of infrastructure that will stand the test of time. The Deputy Ministers called on municipalities to ringfence water money and also to prioritise reducing water losses.

This impassioned plea was made during an oversight visit by the two deputy ministers in the City of Mbombela on Tuesday, 23 January 2024 held at Ehlanzeni District Municipality Council Chambers, to assess the state of water and sanitation provision in the area.

Deputy Ministers Tshabalala and Mahlobo were joined by MEC for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in the province, Mr Mandla Msibi as well as the Executive Mayors of Ehlanzeni District and Mbombela Local Municipalities, Cllr Jesta Sidell and Cllr Sibongile Makushe-Mazibuko respectively.

Outlining the performance of Mbombela Local Municipality in the recently released drops reports by the Department of Water and Sanitation, Deputy Minister Mahlobo said the municipality demonstrated some sparks of excellence and some sparks of mediocrity. He decried the increasing levels of non-revenue water which he attributed in the main to old and dilapidating water infrastructure as well as illegal connections.

“We must reduce water losses drastically and we need a concrete plan on how to reduce water losses. This includes asset management and revenue enhancement doctrine to help stabilize our municipalities.

Operation and maintenance and renewal of water and sanitation infrastructure is of critical importance, and we need to invest in this consistently. The money that people pay for services, part of it needs to be used for maintaining the existing infrastructure so that we don't experience problems in the long run”, emphasised Mahlobo.

Deputy Minister Mahlobo also issued an impassioned plea to Mbombela Local Municipality not to rely too much on water tankering, and only use it when it is necessary on an interim basis because it is costly. He added that, if they have to use water tankers, they must be government owned and not privately owned because this promotes what he termed, “black

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market”, a phenomenon of groups of people who allegedly damage water infrastructure deliberately in order to benefit from that.

Meanwhile, Deputy Minister Tshabalala said the department is committed in supporting Mbombela Local Municipality in its quest to turn things around and ensure sustainable provision of basic services to the people. She also alluded to the fact that loadshedding is having a negative impact on water provision.

“Water and sanitation services are basic constitutional rights that people are entitled to, and government is duty bound to provide these services in a sustainable manner and we dare not fail our people. It is our interest as national government to give support to municipalities as Water Services Authorities to render these services. We are here to support you, but you must give us concrete plans with clear timeframes, we will dispatch our teams to give you all forms of support, including technical support”, said Deputy Minister Tshabalala.

A steering committee will be established to deal with water issues in the province, with a focus on all the regions. The committee will comprise of representatives from all spheres of government as well as Inkomati-Usuthu Catchment Management Agency, an entity of the department in Mpumalanga. This committee is expected to meet urgently to devise plans that will restore dignity of communities and ensure sustainable water and sanitation services in the province.

The Executive Mayor of the City of Mbombela, Cllr Makushe-Mazibuko assured the community that the municipality is supplying quality water that meets the required standards. She further stated that the municipality is busy with processes to exclude the water and sanitation treatment plants from loadshedding.

After the meeting, the entourage visited the Kanyamazane and Karino Water Treatment Plants and assessed their state to gain first-hand experience of the operations and any challenges that hinder water provision to the communities.

Themba Khoza

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