

AMIWASH
African Ministers coming together to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals
Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
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THE FUTURE OF AFRICA: SOUTH AFRICA LEADING THE WAY

Honourable Ministers of Water, distinguished guests, dear friends in water and sanitation from all over the world.

It is an honour and privilege for me as an African Minister of Water to share with you experiences, efforts and actions taken by South Africa as a member of the African continent to address challenges for achieving the Millennium Development Goals on water and sanitation. You will indeed agree with me that water and sanitation services are the core of healthy life and economic development.

Those of you who were at the Global Wash Forum in Dakar, Senegal in November 2004 will recall that the Forum focussed on harnessing various countries' energy towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on water and sanitation as agreed during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002. You will also recall that the Dakar Statement of Actions and Commitment endorsed, among others, gender sensitive, people centred approaches as non-negotiable for achievement of WASH Millennium Development Goals in a sustainable manner. The Road from Dakar towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals was also accepted as a meaningful and practical tool to assess whether countries are on track and moving in the right direction.

In my keynote address at the Global Wash Forum, I highlighted South Africa's commitment to the eradication of water and sanitation backlogs, as well as challenges we face in implementing the plans in a manner that ensures sustainability and begin to attack the poverty situation in our country, and I will again share our efforts with you today.

As a starting point, South Africa sets its targets for eradication of backlogs and provision of access to basic services for both water and sanitation in the years 2008 is the year we envisage we will have supplied all South Africans with clean water. 2010 is the year we envisage we shall have supplied all South Africans with sanitation services. In addition, these targets have been broken down to the following categories which are closely monitored by all sector stakeholders and ultimately by Cabinet: Access to services, education and health, free basic services and institutional development and performance. These targets are stipulated in the Strategic Framework for Water Services document, which is a product of collaboration of all water services sector stakeholders with the South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry as a leader.

Access to water and sanitation is a human rights issue that is provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. To this end, the South African Government provides grant funding for development of infrastructure to ensure provision of basic services through what we call the Municipal Infrastructure Grant. The Water and Sanitation Programme is biased towards the poor and most vulnerable people who have in the past been left to fend for themselves with minimal or no support from Government. These are the people that you find in the rural and fringe areas, which, as a legacy of apartheid were not catered for.

This programme further demonstrates the co-operation and collaboration of different Government departments and spheres of Government in line with the notion of South Africa being one Government. The South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry provides policy guidelines and support to municipalities who are responsible for implementation. In doing this, the municipalities are the waters authorities, and have the power to engage the services of both the private and public sector, including civil society organisations and structures. The National Treasury provides the required budget.

Government departments are providing hands-on support to local government and municipalities through the South African Government's programme known as "Project Consolidate". This programme aims at enhancing local government's functionality as the deliverer of services. I want to

put an emphasis on capacity. We have just transferred this function to municipalities. In 87 of our municipalities we still do not have even a single engineer, which is an example of the lack of capacity that we still experience in South Africa.

A people centred and holistic approach to the provision of services ensures that needs and concerns of affected and impacted people are addressed. To this end, ward committees at local government level and community development workers play a major role of interfacing with the broader community. Infrastructure development is done in such a manner that capacity building and training become an integral part of projects and programmes. Apart from the development of hard technical skills at community and project levels, both water and sanitation programmes have a health and hygiene education component.

The aim is to minimise or eradicate water related diseases and illnesses, an intervention that will result in healthier communities and citizens. Health and hygiene education is taken so seriously that specific learnerships have been developed and registered to ensure that accredited training is provided around this issue. The provision of hard technical skills training and contract management is provided through the Extended Public Works Programme. At the end of the infrastructure development, hard skills are left in the community and can be harnessed for other local economic benefits.

Political will has been created in all levels of Government. Regular interministerial and interdepartmental consultations, dialogue and planning are held to ensure co-ordinated approaches. As I indicated earlier on, the Strategic Framework for Water Services (policy guiding the water services sector mandate) has been developed jointly with all spheres of Government and other stakeholders in the civil society, public and private sector.

Currently the South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry is working on strategies to guide the evolving regulatory function, as well as firming its support role to the sector. At the regional level participation and support to the African initiatives within the continent, as well as the SADC sub-region is a further indication of political will towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

You will agree with me that sustainable service delivery starts with sound planning frameworks and guidelines. Our water services legislation makes planning of services a requirement to the extent that only projects that are reflected in local authorities' Integrated Development Plans receive Government funds. As far as water services are concerned, the Water Services Development Plan is a component of the Integrated Development Plans of municipalities. These plans are reviewed on an annual basis to coincide with the Government's budgeting processes.

Systems to monitor progress do exist and are updated regularly as need arise. Monitoring and Evaluation is one area we still need to work on with Local Government. All efforts are made to synchronise and align the monitoring systems so as not to create additional burdens to municipalities and other spheres of Government. Alignment will also enhance credibility of data and information collated and thus enhances the analytical role of Government. In addition to this sector, reporting forums have been established to review progress at quarterly intervals. At a strategic level the Water Services Leadership Group meets twice a year to review strategies applied and give overall policy direction and guidance to the implementers. Furthermore, reports are provided to the South African Parliament's Portfolio Committee overseeing water matters, and ultimately to Government.

Earlier on I mentioned the people centred approach to development as a building block to sustainability of services. We should also not forget that discriminatory practices based on gender have been a part of our historical and cultural lives since time immemorial. The legacy of this is evident in the gender imbalances prevalent in the sector. It is on the basis of this and other factors that as a country we have been putting focus on mainstreaming gender in all sector functions and programmes. Addressing gender imbalances has an additional benefit of addressing the poverty situation. Due to the discrimination and marginalisation of specifically female citizens (who in most cases constitute the majority of citizens) has created huge poverty challenges in Africa.

It is for this reason that the South African Government located the Office on the Status of Women in the Presidency, and provincially in the Premiers' offices to ensure that Government departments addresses and promotes gender-mainstreaming activities. The South African Department of Water

Affairs and Forestry, as a sector leader also has a gender mainstreaming programme, which addresses both the organisational/institutional environment, as well as the external in terms of sector projects, and programmes.

About two weeks ago, on 12 August 2005 to be precise, I had the honour of awarding a prize to one of my regional offices for the best gender-mainstreaming programme in the Department for 2005. This is an annual award to encourage Departmental managers and staff to take gender mainstreaming seriously and afford it the attention it deserves.

I also wish to share with you our efforts regarding women's empowerment initiatives in the sector. In recent years we have come up with annual "Women in Water Awards" giving recognition to efforts and initiatives of women's contribution to the water sector in the following categories:

- Research: 35 years old and above;
- Research: under 35;
- Community Development, Education and Communication; and
- Management and Policy.

Prioritising women for bursary allocations in the sector remains a challenge, which will hopefully diminish with the current Government initiative to promote Science and Technology education and training in the country.

We are implementing an education programme in schools, which educates the society about water and sanitation related issues. The education programme is integrated into the school curriculum. Through this programme we are encouraging the young people to participate actively in the water resource management and sanitation in their communities, also enhancing their interest in water resource management careers. They identify problems in their communities, conduct research and recommend solutions. The youth promote health and hygiene in their communities through drama, poetry, traditional music and poster. Annually during National Water Week held in March I present Youth in Water Awards to learners who presented outstanding projects.

In South Africa we still have other challenges like direction of specific funds for sanitation. We also still experience a shortage of skills, like those of engineers, technicians, and even skills in relation to management and financial management. There is always the problem of under-spending, which is more due to a lack of financial management skills rather than a lack of funds.

Minimising environmental degradation as a result of infrastructure development is one of the key pillars of sustainable service delivery. To this end, the South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism plays a leading role in development of policies, which are then translated into strategies and guidelines by the South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry for use by local authorities and other structures in the development of water and sanitation infrastructure.

In conclusion, Programme Director, let me point out that as we are moving forward in our efforts to provide adequate access to water and sanitation services, we are faced with more challenges as well, which would include urban migration, rising unemployment rates, which then increase poverty levels, etc. However, as a Government we have also put in place measures in South Africa to address challenges of access to basic services for our poor population through the Free Basic Water and Sanitation Programmes where the Government subsidises basic services to the poor.

We shall soon be holding local elections. In keeping with the ideals of our Constitution, our President has said that 50% of the names on the election lists need to be women.

There is something that I do not see. I believe that we need to collate and co-ordinate the efforts on the continent with regards the delivery of water and sanitation.

I am very concerned of the statistics that keep on cropping up with regards the backlog on the continent. It seems like as a continent we have not moved below the 2 billion people still outside of these services. Someone needs to look into those statistics and give the latest updates.

I would like to suggest a new acronym: WIFE: which would stand for Women Institutions Finance Education.

Collective commitment and action is required from all of us in the continent and the globe to meet the targets, which we have set for ourselves. There is strength in united efforts.

I thank you.