

Gauteng Water Summit
Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Gallagher Estate, Johannesburg
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ROLE OF WATER IN MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF GAUTENG

Chairperson / Programme Director
MEC for Local Government; MEC for Agriculture, Conservation and Environment
Other Members of the Executive Council
Mayors and Councillors
Distinguished Guests
Provincial and National Officials
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for agreeing to cooperate with us.

The first priority of our people is to have safe and reliable water supply and sanitation services – the better life that the Freedom Charter committed us to fight for. I must remind you that without water, there would be no economy, no services of any kind, indeed, no life.

The immediate priority for any government is to ensure access to those services. However, the most important is to ensure that the source is always available. That is why we are already planning for us to augment the Vaal river system.

So while the immediate priority of our people is to get access to those services that I mention - and I will come back to these - I want to start by talking about that very essence of life, the water resources on which we all depend. Without the water resources, the services cannot be delivered.

This is the sixth provincial water summit and these will culminate in the national water summit next year. All the provinces are unique in terms of water availability and social and economic challenges.

In your Provincial Growth and Development Strategy, you mention that water is a finite resource, which requires careful management and protection. Furthermore, the availability of water is playing and will play a very important role in the further development of Gauteng.

Gauteng is the economic heartland of the country and due to the high demand for water, a large quantity is transferred in from outside the Province. I, therefore, believe that it is very appropriate for us to come together here today to consider how water can contribute even more to your economic and social development programmes – and where it may be a serious constraint.

This must be seen and understood as part of our efforts to make co-operative government work. We must be guided by a common vision if we are to work together to achieve our common goals.

We have come together to discuss both water resource management and water services, that is water supply and sanitation and in the presentations and discussions that follow, you will interrogate these in detail.

So let me simply highlight a few critical issues on which we should concentrate at this summit.

I must start by reminding you all that South Africa is a dry country. Because we manage water well, we sometimes forget that we are on the edge of what is internationally defined as "water scarcity" in terms of how little water we have available per person.

Because we are so short of water, we must ensure that we get as much benefit from its use as possible.

That means we have to be careful and efficient in the way we use water and we need to be clever too – internationally they talk about how to get “more crop per drop”. We must think about how to get “more jobs per drop” and “more products per drop”.

We also need to protect the quality of our water because once it is polluted, there is nowhere else we can go to find other supplies. Furthermore, pollution of our water has a very negative effect on people living downstream.

From a water perspective, two of the main elements of the aim of the Gauteng Provincial Growth and Development Strategy are:

- To ensure that all Provincial socio-economic development is based on the principle of integrated, sustainable, holistic and participatory planning and development; and
- To build cooperative governance and inter-governmental relations towards ensuring integrated service delivery, optimal use of all government resources and requisite budget allocations to support growth and development.

Furthermore, the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy states that, to give effect to your developmental objectives, some of the targets to be reached by 2014 include:

- to increase the average annual economic growth rate from 5% to 8%;
- to halve the unemployment rate from 25,7% to 12,8%.

It is therefore important that National Government supports the Province and Local Governments in your aspirations to reach your economic growth, job creation and related targets.

I know we are talking the same language because water and water services will play a vital role in achieving these objectives.

Our National Water Resource Strategy was developed precisely to address these challenges and during the presentations and discussions, I hope you will consider how its specific programmes support your priorities, because we want to ensure that the way we manage our water supports the achievement of the goals that we have set ourselves as a nation.

As mentioned before, Gauteng can be regarded as the economic hub of our country, the engine that drives our economy. You are making provision for substantial economic growth in your Provincial Growth and Development Strategy and we all agree with this. It is therefore of national importance that water is provided to the area to make this possible and sustainable.

We are also aware that with economic growth the levels of service, especially to our disadvantaged communities, should improve. There will be a tendency for the per capita use of water to increase and we are taking this into account in our planning for augmentation of supplies.

We have transferred water into the area in the past and we will have to continue to further augment this in the future to facilitate growth and development. This must, however, be done in a very responsible manner. The people in those areas from where we are transferring the water also have aspirations for growth and development. We will have to be able to convince them of the needs for additional water and that Gauteng is putting the water to best possible use. It is imperative that the water currently available in Gauteng be used as efficiently as possible before provision is made to further augment the supplies. It is, therefore, crucially important to promote the implementation of Water Conservation and Demand Management measures.

Due to the limited local water resources and the very high cost of transferring water from far away catchments, the potential for water intensive agriculture in Gauteng is unfortunately extremely limited. The need for small-scale community gardens has been identified. The reallocation of water currently allocated for irrigation through the Water Allocation Reform (WAR) programme, coupled with possible savings through more efficient use of irrigation water, will have to be considered for the establishment of resource poor farmers in future. Further development of the ground water resource in the province will also be important for the establishment of community gardens. We need creativity in terms of making water available especially for irrigation – like rain water harvesting and recycling of grey water, etc.

Another aspect to bear in mind is the effect that the water resources related activities in Gauteng has on our neighbouring Provinces, and even further afield. Gauteng is situated on the watershed of three major catchments - the Vaal, the Crocodile (West) and the Olifants. Pollution emanating from the large concentration of people in the urban areas, as well as from the industrial and mining development, ends up in our rivers. This has an effect on people and the economy, not only in Gauteng, but also in other Provinces downstream and North West, Free State and Northern Cape is specifically affected.

Although we all welcome the economic growth in Gauteng, no one would like to see this happening to the detriment of people downstream. Gauteng, as our economic engine, will have to take up its responsibility to manage its activities in such a manner that pollution is minimised. This includes the provision of adequate facilities for the management and treatment of sewage, as well as the proper operation and maintenance of these. The Industrial and Mining Sector also needs to adhere to acceptable practices to minimise the impact they have on our precious water resources. As you are probably aware, we are revising the Raw Water Pricing Strategy and the Waste Discharge Charge is included with the intention to implement the “polluter pays” principle to address this issue.

It is clear that we will have to work together in managing our water resources and the impacts on these. You are probably aware that we are in the process of establishing Catchment Management Agencies (CMAs) to manage water resources at regional level. These agencies will be responsible for ensuring that there is consonance between their water-related plans and the plans and programmes of all role-players in the catchments they manage. The agencies will, therefore, establish cooperative relationships with a range of stakeholders, including the disadvantaged communities, to facilitate decentralised resource management. I can assure you that we are committed to enabling full stakeholder participation, including that of Local Government.

With respect to those catchments partly within the Gauteng Province, the establishment of the Crocodile (West) Marico CMA has been approved and a notice to this effect has appeared in the Government Gazette. The appointment of the Advisory Committee to assist me with the identification of stakeholders to serve in the Governing Board of this CMA is also imminent.

Considerable progress has also been made in the case of the Upper Vaal CMA. Stakeholders have been mobilised over the last number of years through catchment forums and the time is now ripe to launch the technical investigations required in the establishment process. With the assistance of the stakeholders, this should be concluded relatively quickly.

Focussing now on water services, I need to highlight the successes that have been achieved by government, nationally and in Gauteng in particular.

At a national level we can proudly say that significant progress has already been achieved during the first 10 years of our democracy. Nationally, my Department has served 10,5 million people with the basic level of water supply and government as a whole – through housing and municipal programmes more than 15 million people. We are still committed to ending that backlog by 2008.

The record with sanitation is less impressive, but 8,5 million people have been served with basic sanitation, largely through housing and municipal infrastructure programmes. Sanitation remains a major challenge with 16 million people in our country not enjoying access to safe, healthy and convenient sanitation facilities.

Gauteng Province has shared in our achievements and challenges. Overall, Gauteng residents enjoy a high level of services. Gauteng on the one hand has a very high percentage of its people already having access to services but the Province still faces tremendous challenges because of the rapid growth and urbanisation we experience.

However, the poor face significant service delivery shortfalls despite the noteworthy progress made to date. You have done very well since 1994 in providing basic water supply to 2,3 million people previously living in formerly unserved households, as well as providing basic sanitation to 500 000 households.

Of course, providing infrastructure is only the start of providing water supply and sanitation. Good management of operations is critical if we are to avoid not only dry taps, blocked toilets and polluted rivers but more specifically prevent typhoid and cholera.

With respect to the challenge of sanitation, you will know that, in co-operation with the Department of Provincial and Local Government and the National Treasury, we have made R1,2 billion nationally available over the next three years to eliminate the bucket system once and for all.

We are all aware of the challenges facing some municipalities in the Province where they experience problems with the management of sewage treatment works and water purification plants. It is the responsibility of each municipality to ensure proper planning, budgeting and management of such infrastructure to prevent service delivery breakdowns, pollution incidents and worst of all, endanger the health of its communities.

I have said it before and will repeat here that the recommended sanitation level for dense urban areas is waterborne sanitation. We can especially not tolerate the situation where one side of the street is provided with flush toilets and just opposite the same road people are forced to use other systems. As a transitional measure we need to manage the situation and make sure it accepted by all.

However where you are planning to upgrade to full waterborne sanitation, please remember that it takes water to flush toilets. Make sure that existing water supply and sewage treatment infrastructure can accommodate this or make plans to expand it. You must also make sure that your projects are financially viable and that you have the necessary skills and resources to operate and maintain the services.

For this programme and to improve water services generally, my Department will provide hands-on support to municipalities to improve their Water Services Development Plans, implement demand and conservation measures, use their Municipal Infrastructure Grants effectively and institute proper monitoring programmes.

The provision of services in informal areas, poses a series of complex and very specific challenges to the water and sanitation departments in your municipalities. Please use this opportunity to discuss these challenges and look at better and innovative ways to integrate the water services issues with your housing and land acquisition programs.

The majority of residents in Gauteng are supplied with safe, clean drinking water obtained from Rand Water and Magalies Water. We have, however, picked up deficiencies in an isolated case earlier this year where a local Authority provides drinking water from its own water purification plant. We have assisted in addressing the technical expertise demands of operating the water purification plant in this instance.

As a process of strengthening the role of my department as national regulator, we have also instituted a programme to monitor the performance of water purification plants and

wastewater treatment works, in order to assist in identifying possible health risks and addressing these.

This is part of our contribution to Project Consolidate and I am pleased with the progress that has been made in this regard.

One of the key lessons in the water sector in the last five years is the power of collaboration. Even though my Department is the sector leader, in reality, all of the other key players have a critical “piece of the jigsaw”. An approach that incorporates a high level of cooperation, coordination and collaboration with municipalities, Departments of Local Government, SALGA and others, thus results in a sector that is more effective as a whole. We have also found that it produces better sector strategies and policies. This pioneering collaboration work in the water sector in South Africa has been recognised internationally as a model that others could follow and I would certainly commend this approach to the Gauteng province.

Finally, to alleviate poverty and to ensure equitable access to water services by all people, we have to ensure that the Free Basic Water Policy is effectively applied in all municipalities. This can be done if we understand that it goes hand-in-hand with proper financial management and functional cost recovery for those who use more than the 6 kl of water per month and so to ensure financial viability of the services that municipalities provide. It is recognised that Gauteng has progressed very far with regard to supplying Free Basic Services to its people.

This is often a heavily debated subject but my department supports Johannesburg Water in their Gcin’amanzi Project as proper control of water supply is essential for any properly managed system. I am also convinced that the pre-paid meters installed here as part of this project has been substantially modified to be totally user friendly.

In closing, I wish to state that water has played a prominent role to establish the principles of equality, dignity and equity, the right to safe and healthy living, the right to food and jobs and an unqualified opportunity to develop our human and economic assets.

The Provincial Growth and Development Strategy has objectives and targets relating to water issues, which clearly demonstrate the common goals and principles we share with you as a province. Let us join forces and minds and work together to achieve a better life for all our people in an effective and sustainable way.

Let this water summit be used to ensure that we reach our common goals with regard to the water sector.

I THANK YOU and wish you success in your deliberations over these two days.