

**Official handover of the Rural Water Supply Project**  
(Funded by the Japanese Grant Aid)  
**Speech by Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Dambeni Junior Secondary School, Ntabankulu, Eastern Cape**  
**30 April 2005**

Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I first wish to convey the condolences on behalf of the people and government of South Africa to the people and government of Japan for the tragic train accident that has caused a loss of lives of many people of Japan. All our sympathies are with you.

I feel honoured to be standing here today as you join us in celebrating our water delivery. I am particularly proud because the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry also celebrates the delivery of water to 10 million people since 1994. What this means is that we are delivering at the pace of one million people per year. I have repeatedly indicated that we should accelerate this pace to ensure that the delivery of safe and dependable water supply is extended to every citizen of this country by 2008.

As Government, we entered into a contract with the people of South Africa, the People's Contract. What does this mean to you and me? It means that we are driving home the message of inclusivity, which says that Government must work together with its people in addressing issues of service delivery, poverty eradication through job creation, etc. Yes, this Government has shown that it is possible to create a better life for all our people, especially the poorest of the poor. For the 11 million who have benefited in our water delivery, there is no more carrying heavy water containers long distances, no more taking water from polluted rivers and streams, no more walking long distances up and down hills, no diseases because of polluted water, no more deaths from crocodile attacks. Yes, we are creating a better life for all our people.

But we must remember that our work is not yet complete. We must make sure that those who have not yet received water and sanitation services, receive them in the shortest possible time. Our Government is determined to eradicate poverty and to provide a better life for all and to improve the lives of all citizens. Despite the challenges we face, much has changed over the past eleven years.

Providing water services in the country is a major challenge. Of particular concern is the Eastern Cape, which at the present moment is one of the poorest provinces in the country. In this Province, the OR Tambo District Municipality has the highest backlog in terms of water and sanitation. Many reports have highlighted the fact that a significant percentage of people in the rural areas are living below the poverty line. The reality of poverty that our people are facing in this Province is also of great concern to our Government and to my Department.

The development of our water services programme by all role-players in the Eastern Cape, including Local Government, has ensured that we receive financial support from donor countries like Japan, the European Union (EU), France, the United Kingdom (UK) and the Irish Government. It is my pleasure to be here with you to celebrate the launch of a water services programme funded by the Japanese Government. This project entails the construction of sustainable water supply and sanitation facilities to the 21 rural villages, with 49 446 people to be served in the O R Tambo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape. This is delivery! This is creating a better life for our people! Most importantly this co-operation must be understood in the context of South Africa relations and benefiting the poorest.

The project places important emphasis on the use of groundwater. The constructed facilities are boreholes, water supply facilities that comply with the current Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) facilities. This project was divided into two phases for ease of implementation. Phase 1 consisted of 13 villages and today we mark the extension of the services to the remaining 8 villages.

The Japanese Government extended to the South African Government an amount of 630 000 000 Japanese Yen, equivalent to approximately R55,8 million at the time when the agreement was signed on 10 September 2002 and these funds were made available in March 2003 for Phase 1 of the project. The population served for this phase is 23 354 people. This phase consists of 11 small schemes serving 13 villages. The level of engagement by all partners that was outlined here earlier on is commendable.

My Department in partnership with the OR Tambo District Municipality will ensure that this scheme is properly operated and maintained. As you will all know, my Department is withdrawing from direct operational and management responsibilities in both the water and forest sectors to make way for my Department to rightfully assume its new policy making, regulatory and oversight mandate. Government's key challenge is to ensure that water is delivered to the people safely, reliably and efficiently with Local Government taking the leading role. We will continue to provide support to Local Government to ensure that they meet the standards that we have set.

My Department and I wish to acknowledge sincerely the financial support received from donor countries such as Japan. Japan is one of those countries that have an understanding of our dual economy – two worlds in one: with few people who are very rich and the majority of the people being very poor, a legacy that we inherited from the apartheid regime. Hence we still need the wealthy nations to direct resources to us and there is still resistance based on the argument that we are a middle-income economy. Japan is one of those countries that understand that we are but a developing economy and is committed to contributing for the improvement of the lives of the people for the better.

I would like to thank the Premier, the Executive Mayor, the Mayor and all Traditional Leaders present here today.

Thank you honourable guests and special thanks to the Japanese Deputy Ambassador, Mr Oti Shinichi and the delegation for gracing this occasion.

I thank you!