

Baswa le Meetse (Youth In Water) Awards 2005
Speech by Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Galagher Estate, Midrand
23 March 2005

Honourable guests

Molweni, Sanibonani, Dumaleng, Good afternoon, Goeie middag.

Introduction

It is my honour and privilege to share this important occasion with you. We are gathered here to honour and celebrate the achievement of youth and the strides our government has made. Before the democratic government took over I do not remember these kinds of gatherings for the youth, what I can remember is the uprisings and demonstrations by the youth fighting the Bantu Education. Now the tide has turned we are celebrating the achievements of our education system, which exposes our children to a better future. "Umntwana libhongo neqhayiya lesizwe, isizwe esisiso sibonwa ngokuvuyisana nempumelelo yabantwana". It is on that basis that I invited you here today. I would also like to use this opportunity to thank all of you for attending this prestigious event of our future leaders, we are all privileged to be here today.

Background

Programme Director, ladies and gentlemen, our country is a water scarce country, faced with a challenge of rapid increase of population and demand of water by all sectors. Please note that the amount of our annual rainfall is not increasing as the demand increases. Most people are not aware of this situation, they use water inefficiently and pollute our water resources. One of the reasons for the latter-mentioned being that the apartheid government provided basic services to "Some not for All". My Department has been mandated to ensure sustainable water resources for intergeneration equity. The vision of sustaining our resources will be realised only if our society is empowered with knowledge and skills that will enable them to use water efficiently, protect it, practice good hygiene for healthy life, be aware of alien invasive species, etc. Thus the engagement of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry in education programmes such as the 2020 Vision Programme.

This programme targets youth in schools because they are the future leaders and they play a key role in changing the mindset of communities. Through this programme we hope that learners will be able to participate effectively in water resource management, promotion of health and hygiene awareness, identify problems related to water and sanitation in their school and communities, as well as become interested in careers in the water sector.

One of our achievements through the 2020 Vision Programme is the integration of water and sanitation into the school curriculum to ensure continuity and sustainability of this initiative. Thus, the collaboration with the Department of Education and my commitment to provide resources to the educators that will enable them to implement water and sanitation activities in the classroom effectively. This means that our children will learn about natural resource management at their early ages in life.

Baswa le Meetse Award

Baswa le Meetse Award recognises the role of youth in education and awareness campaigns, it evaluates the impact of the 2020 Vision Programme, links water, sanitation arts and culture, showcases our cultural heritage respecting our diversity and recognising youth as the future that must spearhead the preservation of our traditions that makes a great nation. It takes us to the roots and the depths of our heritage in the performance arts. We are renowned praise singers, storytellers, drama and song performers, our dances are classic world over and our strength has been demonstrated in the physical renditions of choral music and stage plays. Recently the world has awarded the performing artists "U Carmen eKhayelitsha" with a coveted award. Our nation is hitting the world stage and here today is what you see as the seeds of our strength displayed by our youth.

The grades six learners convey health and hygiene message through drama, music, poetry and praise singing and poster development. Their projects are guided by the theme "Washing of Hands, Caring of Sanitation Facilities for Healthy Life". Baswa le Meetse is one of the advocacy projects, which raise the profile of sanitation, which is my top priority. Today's awards ceremony is preceded by competitions from district, province and national levels.

The provincial winners are eligible to cash prizes of which 50% must be shared amongst the learners to spend it on education related items, and the balance on school resources based on the priorities identified by the school and community. From the nine provinces 717 schools participated in this project, which is approximately 15 000 learners from all races.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are here today to award the national winners of Baswa le Meetse. The learners who have developed and presented outstanding projects. I have nothing but admiration for them, their teachers and their parents who gave them support throughout.

I want to give my personal appreciation and thanks to:

Ms Naledi Pandor, MP, Minister of Education, and her officials for their support to this programme, I am honoured by our collaboration. My Department is grateful for the positive manner you have upheld our partnership over the years.

Ministers of Science and Technology, Arts and Culture, Agriculture and Land Affairs, Minerals and Energy, Chairperson of Portfolio Committee of Water and Forestry and other partners, our government promotes co-operative government, let's continue to support each other to realise the people's contract.

Ambassadors, I recognise the Missions from (Countries) that continue to support all our programmes and attend our events. We are appreciative of your dignified presence here and wish to extend our invitation to you again for next year.

Sponsors of the Baswa le Meetse Award, MTN for providing the prize (media classroom through the connectivity project) to the overall winner. MTN has realised the vision of our government of ensuring access to information. Our children are privileged compared to us.

Roundabout Water Pumps for providing four water pumps to the four schools, which are winners for each category. Roundabout contribution will provide water infrastructure that will reduce incidents of water shortage in rural areas and help fight disease that are linked to lack of purified water.

ABSA for providing cash prizes for the four schools who are winners for each category.

Imperial for sponsoring six busses, which brought learners here from the respective provinces.

To learners, I encourage you to continue or to start even if you do not win. It is not about winning, it is about participating and gaining new experiences and taking on new challenges.

Parents of all learners, the principals and educators of various schools who supported these learners. They moulded us and they are still doing the same to our children. Keep doing the good work. We cannot promise you anything that God has not already given to you, the satisfaction of seeing your effort lead to such a spectacular event. "Long Live Educators Long Live"

Officials of my Department who have tirelessly managed this programme, I value your support and wish you growing strength and I pledge my support to you.

Lastly I am very excited by the involvement of SABC in these awards. The involvement of the SABC in these awards will certainly make the awards more accessible to more youth.

In conclusion, I will be failing if I do not leave you with this message. It is easy to save water, it just requires the will to do so. We all need water to live. In fact, a person can survive for three weeks without food, but only for three days without water. In our water-scarce country, water is a precious resource. Using water wisely is in each of our individual interest, as well as the collective interest of all people in South Africa.

Water will always remain a scarce resource in South Africa, it is a semi arid country with a national rainfall average of 450 mm well below the international average of 860 mm. It is possible to save a significant volume of water without undue effort. This can be done by repairing dripping taps or taking a short shower rather than a bath. Closing a tap while shaving or washing your face, is another way to save water.

For those of us that still are to receive safe water, remember to wash our hands before eating food, before cooking and after going to the toilet. Also boil your water before using it.

I thank you.