

Policy Review Debate 2005/06
Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
National Council of Provinces, Parliament
24 May 2006

Honourable Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces
Premiers here present
Honourable Members
Members of Executive Councils
Dignitaries
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my honour and pleasure to once again, address the National Council of Provinces on what has been keeping our Department busy over the last 12 months.

Chairperson, let me start by saying, that whilst our Department is a sector leader in Forestry and Water Sectors, our achievements in the targets set by government, depends on how well we co-ordinate the implementation of our legislation and in collaboration with Provinces and Municipalities as provided for in the Constitution and the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act 13 of 2005. I am happy to say that in addition to progress made in the delivery of water and sanitation, we have also made progress in our core function as a sector leader, a supporter, and a regulator.

In the context of our theme for this year which is **“Water and Forests for Shared Economic Growth and Development”**, our Department has seriously interrogated its relevance and role in supporting the objectives of the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGI-SA). We have always emphasized that water is not only life itself, but it is also central to the growth and economic development that our Deputy President is passionately driving. Our Department also contributes to this important Programme.

It may be necessary to remind the members that the delivery of water and sanitation is now the responsibility of municipalities, however, as a leader, our Department remains accountable for progress made in this regard. I am sure you will agree with me when I say the challenge of being accountable for activities that take place in another sphere of government requires not only strong leadership, but effective intergovernmental relations as well. The Intergovernmental Relations Act therefore becomes critical to our department.

Our Department has successfully spearheaded a number of collaborative initiatives such as the establishment of Provincial water sector forums in all of the Provinces. In all the nine Provinces, we have functional collaborative structures where all water and Provincial issues are deliberated upon. Internally, we are also looking at establishing a stronger intergovernmental relations unit that will ensure that collaboration between our Department and other partners in the sector are strengthened. Most provinces have succeeded in developing Provincial Water Sector Development Plans (WSDPs) with our support.

One of the highlights of our achievements are the water summits we held in all nine Provinces in the last year. These summits culminated in a very successful National Water Summit that was attended by about 560 people from all corners of our country. Chairperson, I am proud to say that these summits were an enormous success, and we owe that to the overwhelming support we received from Premiers, MECs, Mayors, Councillors and senior officials of these provinces. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude for this support.

The primary objective of the summits was to understand the unique challenges facing each Province when it comes to water and sanitation delivery. The summits were another mechanism to seek ways of supporting the Provinces in their Provincial Growth and Development Plans (PGDPs). I can mention that lack of capacity to deliver, operation and maintenance of infrastructure, and challenges of meeting our targets came out prominently and consistently in each Province. It is from these summits that today, we can safely say that we fully comprehend the challenges and opportunities facing service delivery in each Province and in the country as a whole.

The outcome of these summits complemented Project Consolidate and the Izimbizos that our President held throughout the country. We have listened attentively to issues raised by municipalities at the Izimbizos, Water Summits, and Project Consolidate initiatives. This has led to the Department formulating a Water Services Sector Support Strategy, which will be launched this year.

With less than 24 months and less than 48 months before meeting our water and sanitation targets respectively, our focus in the last year has been on intensifying our support function to the municipalities. This has led to the Department engaging in the following activities:

- The development of a Sector Wide Capacity building Strategy which we plan to launch by August this year.
- The secondment and deployment of DWAF engineers and technicians to municipalities to provide hands-on support in line with Project Consolidate.
- The transfer of funds to the Department of Provincial and Local Government to mobilize more technical skills from the private sector.
- The deployment of 21 Engineers to support the process of eradicating buckets by 2007.
- We have 11 engineers and water resources specialists from the Republic of Cuba who have been deployed in Limpopo, North West, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces. We are exploring options of getting more expertise in the areas of hydrological services, engineering and forestry sectors from Cuba. We are also exploring an option of sending our young learners to Cuba to bring back the technical skills that our country desperately needs.
- We have leveraged and mobilized capacity that exists in our Water Boards for the benefit of the struggling municipalities.

Furthermore, like most Government Departments, we are interrogating the suitability of our organizational structure in relation to our legislative mandate. It is in this context that we are embarking on a strategy that will lead to stronger and more efficient Regional Offices which will be in a better position to take up their leadership role on all water related matters.

Chairperson, we need to emphasize that more work is needed to accelerate the pace of delivery to meet the targets of the Millennium Development Goals. The delivery of water remains constant at approximately 1 million per annum and we see a steady increase in the delivery of sanitation services.

Maintenance and refurbishment of our infrastructure

As a sector leader, we are also guarding jealously that our hard earned progress is not jeopardised. Last year a financial modelling exercise undertaken on behalf of the DPLG by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) found that the delivery rate in some major municipalities may result in these municipalities acquiring infrastructure at such a pace that over the next few years, they would increasingly be unable to afford the operations and maintenance costs of such infrastructure.

Studies also show that there is a lack of sufficient investment in asset maintenance and in the longer term this will result in negative health impacts and expensive refurbishment projects. This problem is a serious threat to the progress we are making in service delivery and the quality of our drinking water. This issue also came out very strongly at the National Water Summit held recently. To counteract these risks, we are putting a strategy in place to ensure proper water and sanitation asset management by municipalities. In the Northern Cape and Limpopo, our Regional offices are already involved in very creative support initiatives to municipalities in this regard.

Following problems experienced in Delmas, our Department has embarked on a comprehensive drinking water management programme to support municipalities in ensuring that the quality of our drinking water is managed effectively. As a country, we are not prepared to compromise the quality of our drinking water which is acknowledged

internationally. It is in this context that we have embarked on a robust support and monitoring programme for all municipalities. Municipalities are now submitting monthly drinking water quality reports to our Department where it is stored as part of our National Data. Through this programme, we are able to pick up problems, raise them with municipalities for a speedy intervention where necessary. We are also considering the establishment of an internal specialist unit within our Department that will manage the programme nationally and be able to promptly intervene in case of disasters.

As challenging as this task is, we have already made successes. In the Free State we have developed a comprehensive model for drinking water quality that is not only functional, but very effective as well. It is our aim to replicate this good practice to other parts of the country. Chairperson, seeing is believing - members can see this programme in our exhibition outside.

Lastly, on this matter, the allegations on maggots found in our drinking water, were thoroughly investigated by our Department and external parties. I wish to say once again, these investigations confirm that our water is safe to drink.

Economic Growth and Development through Water Infrastructure Development

Chairperson, you may be aware that our Department is in the process of making more water available for basic needs as well as to support the envisaged mining development in the Limpopo area as part of our Department supporting development initiatives of Provinces. This involves the construction of the De Hoop dam as the first phase of a project that will cost R4,9 billion. A project worth R2,5 billion is underway in Mpumalanga to improve water supply to our big users like Sasol and Eskom

In the Western Cape, the Berg River Project which is due to be finalised by the end of next year is also under construction and is progressing well. This development is meant to improve the impending water shortage in the Western Cape Metropole. Chairperson, all these initiatives can only be an illustration of the importance of water to growth and development in this country. We are also progressing with the establishment of a Branch and an Agency that will be responsible for the management and development of infrastructure on behalf of the Department.

The Department is part of a development programme in the Umzimvubu area which is in its initial stages of planning. Huge potential for hydropower, afforestation and agricultural development has been identified in this area and we believe that the initiative will bring huge economic growth benefits in this part of the country.

Whilst our approach to regulation of the sector is a developmental one and is guided by the Intergovernmental Relations Framework, achieving regulatory compliance, good governance, and a sustainable environment is key to our Department. I am deeply encouraged by the call from the water sector to put in place regulatory framework to ensure that all the above issues are addressed.

The Department is increasingly taking up its role as regulator and sector leader. In this regard the Department has drafted a regulatory strategy for water services and is in the process of revising the Water Services Act. The regulatory strategy will be finalized this financial year. However, various parts of the strategy are already being implemented, for example, the system for drinking water quality management.

Chairperson, in combating poverty, we have zero tolerance for unlawful water users and any other offenders of the National Water Act, and Forestry Act. Building on achievements in the previous year in this regard, I am glad to announce that we had very successful initiatives on combating illegal abstraction, storage and use of water in the Free State province. It is envisaged that this function will be intensified as we are currently busy with establishing an enforcement unit within the Department. We have learnt good lessons from our sister Department, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism who are making use of Green Scorpions. Watch this space for our Blue Scorpions!! We are also in the process of revising our Water Services Bill to deal with some of the challenges we are picking up in the

implementation of the legislation. The final Draft of the National Water Services Bill will be ready for submission to Cabinet and for public comment next year.

Statistics show that 74,3% of our people with basic infrastructure are receiving their Free Basic Water. Whilst this is a big achievement, we are concerned about the inability of some municipalities to implement the Free Basic Water policy. We are therefore prepared to scale up our capacity to support this policy and also to deal with practical challenges like limited water and financial resources faced by many municipalities. We are currently also reviewing the relevance of this policy to new challenges posed by the impact of HIV/AIDS and poverty.

Our contribution to the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of SOUTH AFRICA (ASGI-SA)

Chairperson, like all other Departments, it is our responsibility to contribute to the noble objectives of ASGI-SA and we are taking this responsibility very seriously. Our plan in this new financial year is to structure our programmes in such a way that they contribute directly to the objectives of ASGI-SA.

A typical illustration of this was the development of the "Operation Gijima" programme that our Department launched in the Limpopo Province recently. This programme is aimed at accelerating sanitation delivery in rural areas, whilst building skills and creating jobs. This is in line with the Expanded Public Works Programme and its successful implementation will ensure that we reach our 2010 Sanitation targets. The Department has allocated a total of R11,4 million for 2006/7 for the job creation project and we are focusing on Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West and the Eastern Cape.

I am also glad to announce that the first sanitation week in the country and in the world was launched by our Department in March 2006, in Tarkastad in the Eastern Cape. South Africa is the first country to implement the decisions taken in Dakar in 2004 that all countries should have sanitation week!! This new campaign is aimed at promoting health and hygiene and raising the profile of sanitation in the country.

Taking our contribution to poverty alleviation further, Chairperson, last year, I launched the Water Allocation Reform (WAR). This programme is aimed at reallocating water to historically disadvantaged communities and individuals in order to address the racial and gender biases that are still present in access to water for productive purposes. This year, we intend intensifying the implementation of this programme and identifying "quick wins" in terms of areas where we have surplus water that we can speedily allocate to communities for small scale agricultural use.

Through this programme, we have a grand vision and we hope to see poor communities and small scale farmers engaging in commercial activities. As part of this Reform Programme we have made huge investments in several irrigation schemes in the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, and Free State. However, more work still needs to be done in terms of bringing other Departments like the Department of Agriculture and Land Affairs on board. As part of addressing underdevelopment and marginalisation and ensuring that the poor share in growing prosperity, we have initiated a programme for rainwater harvesting in rural communities as well as supporting small scale black farmers with a budget of R25 million for this financial year. We are currently completing the pilot of our rainwater-harvesting programme with 73 rainwater harvesting tanks being built in 25 villages across Free State, Eastern Cape, Limpopo and North West. We have here in our midst, Mme Selinah Mokhothu from the Free State Province who can bear testimony on how this project has changed her life. Chairperson, this is what matters most to our Department, i.e. practically touching and changing the lives of our rural poor, especially women, for the better.

During this financial year we envisage spending R12 million on a further 1 500 rainwater harvesting tanks across the four Provinces mentioned. We are supporting small scale farmers through raw water subsidies as well as grants for bulk infrastructure, purchase of water entitlements, irrigation development and expansion, and operation and maintenance.

Our *Working for Water* programme, recognised internationally as one of the most effective programmes to address the problem of Invasive Alien Plants (IAPs), combining water and environmental issues with social development objectives has since its inception invested more than R2, 500 million and establishing programmes in over 300 areas around the country creating roughly 20 000 short term jobs on an annual basis. Employment opportunities were focused on local community, women, youth and the disabled.

This R 480 million programme is administered through the Department of Water and Forestry and works in partnership with local communities, National Government departments such as Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Agriculture, Trade and Industry as well as Provincial departments of agriculture, conservation and environment, research foundations and private companies.

Water is both a Social and Economic Commodity - Let us conserve it

The fact that South Africa is a dry country is no fiction but a reality. Whilst our Department has intensified educational campaigns aimed at encouraging society to conserve water, through programmes like Baswa Le Meetse and 2020 Vision. In this regard, Chairperson I would like to present to the Honourable Members the three famous young men in our midst - Motebele Motshidi, Sechaba Ramabenyane and Pontsho Moletsane from Sechaba Semaketse Combined School. These brilliant young men are the international winners of the youth competition called the Stockholm Junior Water Prize for 2005. These learners developed a project called Nocturnal Hydro Minimiser. This project is designed to use water efficiently for irrigation by activating the water tap at night and only when evaporation levels are very low. It ensures that gardens are only watered when the soil has lost the necessary moisture needed by plants. This feature makes it more effective in saving water compared to some commercial models that provide water regardless of whether plants need it or not.

I have also been extremely impressed by initiatives that some municipalities have embarked in this regard. Commendable initiatives are being implemented in Gauteng and here in the Western Cape where municipalities have embarked on water conservation and water demand management strategies.

Great strides have also been made in the establishment of Catchment Management Agencies in accordance with international best practice of decentralizing and democratising water resources management. The Inkomati CMA has already been established and during 2006/07 we will establish an additional four CMAs, being the Thukela; Usuthu-Mhlathuze; Gouritz; and Olifants-Doorns Catchment Management Agencies.

Forestry Contribution to Poverty Alleviation

Our forestry industry is well developed and is meeting and even exceeding standards set by developed countries. There is considerable potential for growth in this sector and it therefore has a major role to play in poverty eradication and job creation. However, if we want to realize this role, we have to address transformation issues such as ownership, employment equity, skills development, enterprise development and management control. We strongly believe that the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) Charter, that we launched in April last year, among other things, will be instrumental in realising the goals of transformation and will ensure participation of previously disadvantaged groups in the entire forestry value chain. I am glad to announce that the Draft Charter will be ready for consultation by the end of May this year.

Our afforestation programme, which is part of ASGI-SA is underway in the Eastern Cape where approximately 100 000 hectares of suitable land have been identified for forestry development. There is potential for a further 253 000 hectares beyond these strategic blocks to be developed in the medium to long-term. It is envisaged that a total of about 120 000 households will benefit from this development. The Department has already put in place intergovernmental processes to ensure the fast tracking of the afforestation programme in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape.

This year will also see the beginning of the development of a saw log strategy for South Africa. This is a crucial matter as a looming shortage of saw log timber may have an adverse impact in the forestry sector.

Lastly, Chairperson, I stand here proud on behalf of our country about the positive recognition that we received at the Fourth World Water Forum held recently in Mexico. Our country was recognized not only for the progress made on providing water to the poor, but it was repeatedly mentioned as one of the countries with the most progressive and pro-poor policies in the world!

Women have played and continue to play a critical role in the water, sanitation and forestry sectors. Every year we recognize these women throughout the country and celebrate their hard work through our Women in Water Awards, which is now called the Women in Water, Forestry and Sanitation Awards. Within the Department itself, we are changing the gender balance and strengthening our newly established gender and disability unit.

At this point in time, I would like to thank my Special Advisors for their contribution, advice and support over the last year. My sincere gratitude and appreciation goes to my Director-General, Jabu Sindane, for his leadership and commitment, and to all the officials in the Department, for their hard work and dedication.

Thank you also to the NCOP's Select Committee on Land and Environmental Affairs as well the entire water and forestry sectors, including municipalities and their association, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), the South African Association of Water Users (SAAWU), the Trans Caledon Tunnel Agency (TCTA), Water Boards, the Water Research Commission (WRC), and the National Advisory Councils for Water and Forests and all other stakeholders and partners for their cooperation and support during the past year.

Combating poverty means acting now, not later. My Department will not rest until the last person has been served with water and sanitation!!

I THANK YOU