

Water Week Celebrations, Eastern Cape
Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Madiba Municipal Services Zone Centre, Pontseng Village, Matatiele, Eastern Cape
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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today at this momentous occasion. We are gathered here today together with the community of the Alfred Nzo District Municipality to celebrate National Water Week 2006 under the theme "Water for Growth and Development."

Today we will appropriately open a Sanitation Project to mark this occasion. No one can contest the inexorable linkage between sustainable water and sanitation service delivery. So it is with enthusiasm that I look forward to this delivery milestone.

Sanitation service delivery and the provision of health and hygiene education not only provide dignity, but realize the Constitutional rights of South Africans to have access to this service and social equity. Sanitation delivery in affording improved health and the prevention of water borne disease significantly contributes towards and allows for the productive participation of people in the economy alleviating poverty. Sanitation too contributes to Growth and Development incrementally.

This theme was one of the themes of the 4th World Water Forum, a major international event which took place in Mexico City last week, to address the necessity for water for growth and development in all aspects of society and which I had the honour of attending.

BACKGROUND

The 2001 Census revealed that over 600 000 households were without basic sanitation facilities, with the Eastern Cape the Province having the biggest backlog in the country.

Alfred Nzo District Municipality faces major challenges in confronting poverty with the overall poverty index standing at around 76%. The leadership of the Alfred Nzo District Municipality and Local Municipalities are faced with daunting challenges and responsibilities to deliver. According to the 2001 Census the backlog in Ventilated Improved Pit Latrines stood at 115 300 households in Alfred Nzo District Municipality.

To date Alfred Nzo District Municipality has provided 20 930 rural households with water. In September 2004 the District Municipality initiated the Alfred Nzo Rural Household Sanitation Programme and in conjunction with community leaders established nine Zonal Municipal Service Centres. A total of 18 324 units have been completed, 4 000 of which are corrugated iron structures. The Programme up to January this year employed a total of 12 061 community labour. Skills transfers also occurred.

Different levels of service are rendered to different categories of users in the Eastern Cape with rural communities receiving Ventilated Improved Pit Latrines (VIP), informal settlements small bore water system, urban communities water borne and farm dwellers VIP to waterborne services.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, as sector leader, works in conjunction with the Provincial Sanitation Task Team, which manages sanitation activities and reports to the Integrated Water Services Management Forum. Over and above implementing sanitation projects, the Task Team assists with support to the District Municipalities as Water Services Authorities. The support to District Municipalities includes a Water Services Authorities Business Plan and the implementation thereof, support staff in the District Municipalities themselves, the addressing of policies, by-laws and free basic services, Health and Hygiene Awareness programmes, Sanitation Resource Centres and also, School and Clinic programmes.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES

In regard to the 2005/2006 Municipal Infrastructure Grant allocation for the eradication of the sanitation backlog R522 698 556 has been budgeted for 154 projects in the Eastern Cape. Of this the Alfred Nzo District Municipality will receive R90 027 988 for eight projects.

National Government has set targets for the eradication of water service backlogs namely: 2008 for bucket eradication; 2008 for the provision of water supply and 2010 for sanitation service delivery.

The challenge facing my Department, stakeholders and partners to meet the targets is an on-going one. Delivery for the 2001/2002 was only 3 169 latrines completed. During 2002/2003 a further 11 702 household were served, indicating that delivery increased three-fold. But if the target as set by National Government is to be met, delivery must be increased a further 10 fold.

In 2003/2004 further progress was made in the increase of delivery, as some 32 171 household latrines were completed; showing an additional three-fold increase in delivery. During the 2004/2005 financial year a total of 58 371 household latrines were completed. A similar type of progress in the increase of the production of household latrines was planned for 2005/2006, but due to flattening off of the capacity in the region and the swing from my Department as implementer to District Municipalities as implementer through the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) Programme it was expected that the acceleration would slow down. Progress reported by the District Municipalities up to the end of January 2006 was just over 30 000 household latrines. This, though, excludes the number of buckets that have been eradicated in the meantime.

Presently a total number of 154 MIG Programme projects are in the implementing stage in the 2005/2006 financial year of which 69 are new projects. This figure includes both District Municipality and my Department's implemented projects. Although the focus has always been on rural household sanitation, recent developments have broadened the focus to include informal settlement; urban and peri-urban areas, farm-dwellers and institutional sanitation (clinic and school programme). This obviously puts the total sanitation requirement more in perspective.

The challenges the region must face include the lack of adequately capacitated human resources in both the Sector Department and at the District Municipalities, a lack of funding and a programme to efficiently and speedily distribute it. A lack of adequate resources to physically implement projects and manage them and a lack of material suppliers who still do not understand the need to supply the required material on time. Other challenges include clarity on what the actual backlogs are and clarity on the level of service to be provided. Co-ordination between Sector Departments to provide the most efficient implementation process also remains a challenge.

Given the above challenges, we as partners must confront our constraints no matter what their nature. Project Consolidate was initiated precisely to uncover and overcome obstacles and constraints facing municipalities. The assessment of the backlogs has been a difficult exercise and greatly influences grants to municipalities for basic infrastructure. My Department's Directorate Planning and Information is currently comparing information pertinent to backlogs from a number of sources, including my Department's information systems, information compiled by municipalities, and data from STATS SA. We need to use the Project Consolidate approach to get to the bottom of our problems and address water and sanitation constraints. Secondly, my Department, the Water Services Sector and Local Government are all working towards the same objectives, and we must work together to find solutions and to achieve our targets. Collaboration needs to be properly planned.

This brings me to the support role of my Department and of the Water Services Sector as a whole. National and Provincial Government have a constitutional obligation to support municipalities in fulfilling their powers and functions and we must ensure that this role is effectively executed.

Together with our partners such as the Department of Provincial and Local Government, the South African Local Government Association, the National Treasury and other stakeholders in the Water Sector, there are a number of programmes through which we are providing support to Water Services Authorities. These include the Water Services Authority capacity development Business Plans, the Municipal Infrastructure Grant Programme, the National and Provincial Joint Response Teams providing section 78 support, the transfer programme, the Institutional Reform initiatives, capacity building for water services authorities, planning support and so on. But, I am not going to discuss these programmes in any detail, as they are ongoing programmes designed to ensure infrastructure and institutional sustainability, which I am sure you are very familiar with. What I want to focus on is practical hands-on support that addresses the urgent problems and challenges you are facing. The targets, which are an integral part of your Integrated Development Plan, are a good example to illustrate some of the challenges.

Our water and sanitation targets are politically challenging because they are about fundamental human rights. They are a planning challenge because they involve an accurate identification of backlogs, planning infrastructure, allocation of sufficient capital funds, provision for ongoing operating costs, and determining responsibility for ongoing operation and maintenance.

Each capital project identified in the Integrated Development Plan and Water Services Development Plans has to comply with various conditions and criteria, and has to be registered. Feasibility studies, business

plans, procuring implementing agents, making use of local labour and ensuring community participation in project planning and implementation are all necessary steps, but these steps require careful project planning, skilled personnel, proper systems and collaboration between stakeholders.

We are aware of the many legislative and administrative requirements placed on municipalities and we are aware that it is not always easy to comply with these requirements given the many demands and challenges that you are faced with. The challenge we as National Government and as the Water Sector are faced with is how to support Local Government in achieving sustainable water services? How do we provide hands on support that will have a positive impact on your work? How do we assist you to navigate as smoothly as possible all the conditions, requirements and steps to implementing good project and to put in place sustainable arrangements? How do we make it easier? These are some of the challenges we are faced with, but we need your input on how we can best support you.

So what are we doing about these challenges? Our first step is to work with you to identify the obstacles and the real needs of your Municipality in terms of ensuring sustainable water and sanitation services. In this regard we have established teams of Project Consolidate Champions who are personnel of my Department who will fulfil an interface role between your Municipality and my Department's Eastern Cape Regional Office.

Whatever problem, delay or blockage you are experiencing, the role of the Champions is to facilitate 'unblocking' by communicating the problem and ensuring that the right support is provided to the Municipality.

To this end, my Department has developed a Water Services Authority Checklist. This Checklist is a tool designed to quickly identify legislative compliance and capacity gaps, in line with Project Consolidate. Whilst the quick assessment will provide information for prioritising and consolidating support, more in-depth service provision assessments will also be undertaken to assess performance and provide water services benchmarks. This Checklist exercise is a first step. We welcome any suggestions or ideas as to how best to identify needs and support required.

We are equipping the Project Consolidate Champions with the various tools and guidelines we have developed, as well as contact details of technical experts within my Department. Their role is to ensure that municipalities can easily access supporting tools and technical support. A Department of Water Affairs and Forestry Internet page with all the tools for water services authorities is currently up and running. Peer support and lesson learning is one of the most successful means of building capacity and we would like to see your efforts shared with other municipalities. Our Project Consolidate Champions can facilitate the sharing of tools and best practice.

Establishing water services authority bylaws, policies, plans, and regulatory capacity often requires technical or specialist support. We aim to provide hands on support to prepare capacity building business plans to access funds from the Municipal Systems Improvement Grant and possibly from other funding sources as well. From my Department's perspective we are aiming to ensure that every municipality reaches a certain level of proficiency as a water services authority. We thus want to ensure that you have the necessary tools, funds to access specialist support, access to technical expertise within our regional and national offices, and access to relevant information and networks.

In line with the commitments outlined in the Strategic Framework for Water Services, a sector support strategy is in the process of being developed. Consultations will be held in each province and I invite you to participate in the process so that we can ensure that the Water Services Sector is properly equipped to support Local Government and so that Local Government receives the support it needs. A major task is how to turn around our water services providers so that services are properly operated, managed and maintained. We would like to see managers of successful water services providers becoming part of a reference team that can advise on best practice and the most effective strategies to provide support. Another support challenge is how to streamline the various support programmes for Local Government so that section 78 support compliments Water Services Development Plans planning support which compliments the Municipal Infrastructure Grant support and so on.

Central to support is collaboration with the Province and collaboration amongst all stakeholders in the Sector. We have encouraged the development of Provincial Water Services Plans (also referred to as the Masibambane Water Services Strategy here in the Eastern Cape), which provides an overall 'provincial' picture of water services in the province, including *status quo* and objectives to achieve the planned future situation. The purpose of these plans is to outline how the sector will work together to support Local Government water services needs, as well as contribute to the Province's Growth and Development Plan. These Plans are meant to operationalise co-operative governance, and ensures a sector-wide collaborative approach to the water services delivery process.

CONCLUSION

I have no doubt that under the very capable leadership of the Mayors and Councillors in this District and its Local Municipalities, the mechanisms for intergovernmental collaboration will continually be strengthened, so that the implementation of the targets in your Integrated Development Plan can be achieved. The progressive achievement of our targets across each household brings us one step closer to realising the peoples' contract for a better South Africa. It is the right of all people to have access to a basic level of water and sanitation service – it is our duty therefore to ensure universal coverage. My door is open, my Department's doors are open – if there is anything slowing down or preventing universal coverage, I would like it on the top of my agenda. I wish you well with taking your Integrated Development Plan forward.

Let's remember: *Water is Life. Sanitation is Dignity*

I thank you.