

Baswa Le Meetse Awards 2007 National Prize-giving Ceremony
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Reipela Primary School, Northern Cape
12 October 2007

Programme Director
MEC and Members of the Provincial Legislature
Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee of Water Affairs and Forestry
Honourable Mayor
Councillors
Principals and Educators
Learners
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Introduction

I am pleased to be here today to celebrate the achievements of our youth and to hand over the wonderful prizes that these learners have won through the Baswa Le Meetse programme. I always enjoy the Baswa Le Meetse events and I look forward to being entertained by the spectacular performances with captivating and educating messages by our aspirant actors, poets and artists.

As part of the prizes I have brought with me copies of a book that we launched yesterday with the Water Research Commission. The book is called, 'Our Water, Our Culture', and I will be giving the winning schools a copy of it.

I have brought this book with me because I wanted to share some of the interesting stories and ideas that are presented in this book. South African's relationship to water and the culture that has developed around water is very interesting; water has held an important and often sacred place in traditional African society - long before the arrival of the colonial powers. And the book talks about the different traditions that exist in all of our cultures - from Modjadji the Rain Queen, to the Khoi and San, and the many stories and practices that exist even today in our country.

The history of colonisation and apartheid can also be seen through the eyes of water. Being a water scarce country meant that control over water, meant control over agriculture and the ability to be a successful farmer. Students would have learnt about how the 1913 land act took land away from black people, but we also had the Irrigation and conservation Water Act of 1912, and later under apartheid the Water Act of 1956 – both of which came about as part of the broader policies of segregation. Since 1994 we have changed those laws to bring about greater equality in access to water.

The book also looks at water as part of the mining and manufacturing industries, and recognises the beauty of water, with its many photos from across the country. I hope that you enjoy this book, as it is an excellent resource on the history and current uses of water in our country.

2. Youth in Water

Programme Director, through our Vision 2020 programme, which includes the Baswa le Meetse and Youth in Water programme, we have over the past few years been able to create greater awareness amongst learners about the importance of water in our country, and that it is not a resource that we can take for granted. Through the programme we have approached water from the different angles – we have looked at the cultural issues and encouraged learners to make posters, poems, plays, praise songs and dances around water. We have also exposed learners to practical projects that will enable them to identify water and sanitation problems in their schools and communities, and to embark on action to solve them. We also have the South African Youth Water prize where high-school students compete on innovative technologies, and the winning learners are taken to Sweden to compete against youth from across the world, and given bursaries to study water related qualifications. The learners from Sechaba Se Maketse Combined School, Free State who were winners of the Stockholm Junior Water Prize in 2005 are studying Civil Engineering in the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Through these different programmes we are educating both learners and the broader community about water and sanitation to enable them manage this scarce resource through water conservation, to practice good hygiene and understand the problems of not washing hands or using unclean water, and to make informed decisions. We have also encouraged them to identify water and sanitation related problems in their schools

and communities. So for example, that when they see problems such as water running on the streets from a burst pipe they know that it is wrong and who to call.

We are fortunate that the Department of Education is our partner in this programme, and I would like to especially thank the MEC of Education from the Northern Cape for joining us today. Through our partnership with the Department of Education we have been able to include water and sanitation into the curriculum, and we are supporting educators with curriculum aligned educational resource materials that will enable them to teach water and sanitation activities in the classroom effectively.

I believe it is important that we involve the youth from an early age about the importance of water and our natural resources, so that they understand the importance of protecting them for the future, and future generations.

We are also fortunate that the private sector has come on board with these excellent prizes. The generous prizes by MTN for the media classroom, ABSA with the cash donation, and Roundabout Playpumps for the water pump. These prizes are substantial and will make a real difference to lives of the pupils in the winning schools. They will enable the learners to access information, conduct research and interact with other learners nationally and internationally. We are looking to expand the prizes for the winning schools and are looking for private sector partners to come on board with sponsoring science laboratories.

These prizes along with the support that my Department is providing through our bursary programme are helping to create a new generation of youth who are excited and interested about joining us in the water and forestry sector, and contributing to creating a better life for South Africans. As our economy grows and as we are able to provide water and sanitation to millions more of our people, so we are seeing that there are a growing number of jobs and opportunities in the water sector. Through these initiatives and through our learning academy we are creating the space for young people to enter these areas of work. I am very excited about our learning academy, as it is training university graduates, and equipping them with the skills needed by my Department and by the water and forestry sectors. We are working with eight institutions of higher learning and already over 70 trainees are part of the programme.

3. Message to the Youth

On the 30 March 2007, I gave the winners the status of being Ambassadors of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. I would like us to please give a round of applause to these winners and our water Ambassadors.

To you, the learners I have a message: Today the challenges for the youth are different from when I was growing up. When I was young we were fighting the poor education system and inequalities in our country, and we were in a bitter struggle against oppression. As young people born into democracy, you are lucky enough to have a free and democratic society. With that freedom comes responsibilities but it also provides huge opportunities. Many of the young people today do not know the history of our country and the sacrifices that people made so that future generations could have a better life.

Those who have gone before you would want you to enjoy the freedom that they have fought for, and to use the opportunities available so that you too can contribute to your country. You do not need to fight as they did, and your challenge is to be part of the generation that builds - builds our country and economy so that we do not know poverty anymore and can compete on an equal footing with the rest of the world. In doing so you must remember the lessons of Baswa Le Meetse and how to use our water resources wisely, look after the rivers and protect our environment.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to everyone who has joined us today to for the handover of these prizes. I am appreciative of the support given to the learners by their educators and parents. Ntate Tambo said: "A country, a nation that does not care for its children has no future". The youth are our future and through initiatives like this we are support them and helping them to grow into our future leaders.

To the learners, the national winners of Baswa Le Meetse Award, I congratulate you for your perseverance, you have come a long way; the national competition was very tight, but you never gave up and you brought something back to your community which you will be proud of for the rest of your lives. Ekunyamezeleni kukho umvuzo, this is your reward. It will benefit everybody in the community. Keep up the good work

To the sponsors, your ongoing support is appreciated. I believe that these prizes are making an impact and my Department is committed to this programme. After today's event I will be asking my staff to go back to the

previous schools that have won the prizes, to assess what has been achieved by learners from these schools. These findings might motivate us to expand our initiatives so that more schools and learners can benefit.

Finally, I would like to thank the organisers of this project and the event, your hard work and passion is highly appreciated.

Please come and join us as we proceed to unveiling of the media classroom.

I thank you.