

Signing of the FETWater II agreement between South Africa and UNESCO
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, delivered on her behalf
by the Director-General, Mr J Sindane
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Dr Claudia Harvey, Representative of UNESCO
Ms Seema Naran, Representative from the Flemish Government,
Dr Rifka Kfir, CEO of the Water Research Commission,
Programme Director
Ladies and gentlemen

1. Introduction

I would like to welcome you to this event, which will see the implementation of the second phase of this important project to build capacity in the water sector in South Africa, through the initiation of FETWater Phase II for the period 2007 to 2010.

As most of you would be aware, yesterday was the birthday of our former President, Nelson Mandela; and I would like to use this occasion to reflect on some of his words on the importance of developing scientific and education capabilities.

On the occasion when he received an Honorary Doctorate from The Russian Academy of Sciences in 1999 he said,

“Dealing with the legacy of generations of oppression and discrimination is no quick or easy task. Although the lives of millions of South Africans have begun to improve, we face still greater challenges than those we have already overcome.

To house those who are still homeless and bring clean water to those who still lack it, beyond those who have gained access to these basic needs in our first five years of freedom; to ensure that all our children study in conditions that are conducive to learning; to defeat the scourges of AIDS, crime and unemployment that we face in common with much of the world, to overcome attitudes ingrained over centuries: these things will require all our strength and ingenuity, as well as that of our friends.

That is true of science and science education, as it is of every other sphere of social life. Indeed, amongst the most devastating consequences of apartheid's neglect of the education of most South Africans, is a desperate shortage of scientific and technical personnel precisely when reconstruction demands such skills in abundance.”

And in his address to the 50th National Congress of the ANC in 1997, Madiba said that “It is a matter of common cause among the overwhelming majority of our people that the production of educated and skilled people, is one of the central elements which would enable us to achieve sustained reconstruction and development.

In the end what we have to produce in this important area is:

- a system of education in the schools which directs the young towards competence and excellence in mathematics, the natural and computer sciences, engineering, management and accountancy;
- high skills levels among the working people, especially in those areas required for modern economic activity;
- the necessary pool of educators capable of helping us to achieve the two objectives;
- generally expanding the cadre of intellectuals in all academic disciplines, with special emphasis on the black component; and increasing the national research effort both quantitatively and qualitatively, with the necessary balance between pure and applied research.

To achieve all this will require that the country makes a serious and determined effort focused on institutional transformation and the integration of the work being done in the schools, colleges, technikons, universities, institutes, science councils and the private sector.”

More recently the Deputy President of South Africa, Pumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka launched the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) as a programme to attract and develop the skills required for our country.

2. Water Policy

Programme Director, South Africa has placed itself at the forefront of water resources management through the development of remarkable policy and legislation. Our National Water Act has been hailed internationally as a model of progressive water resources management. Our slogan “Some, for all, forever” captures the essence of our participatory, sustainable and integrated approach to water resources management.

Further than that, our policy and legislation have, as a central core, the notion of equity. The Government in 1994 was confronted with a situation in which the majority of South Africans were denied either direct access to water for productive use or access to the benefits from the use of the nation's water. Through the development of progressive policies and legislation we are now able to take action to address the divide between the rich and the poor.

In taking such action we are acutely aware of the complexity and difficulties in implementing our policies. We always need to ask ourselves: How do we use our scarce water resources to contribute most effectively to poverty eradication? And How do we ensure that all our people have safe, affordable and efficient water and sanitation services?

We are also aware of the capacity constraints facing us in many different areas. But we have set the bar high – and we are determined to achieve our goals, despite these limitations, so that we create a better life for our people.

Already a great deal has been achieved both on the policy front and in implementation. Since 1994 we have provided clean water to over 12 million people and nine million more people have access to sanitation. We have since the promulgation of the National Water Act seen the introduction of mandatory reserve determination measures, establishment of stakeholder forums and bodies, the establishment of our first Catchment Management Agency, development of a new pricing strategy, and more.

In addition to providing access to clean water for households we have through the National Water Act ensured that water is being made available to resource poor farmers in certain areas, and are working on compulsory licensing and reallocation of water.

3. Skills development

To fully be able to implement all the areas of the National Water Act as well as address challenges such as achieving universal access to water and sanitation, policing illegal water use, responding to growth in water demand, and addressing water quality, we need to increase capacity and develop skills.

This capacity is not only required in DWAF but across the sector from Water Boards, Water User Associations, and CMAs to local government, water service authorities, private sector and communities.

These institutions require a wide range of skills, which are increasingly in demand as a result of the growth in our economy.

Importantly, we understand the needs and are looking at what could be done to resolve the capacity constraints to ensure that we do have sufficient capacity to deliver on our programmes.

There are already a number of institutions currently involved in capacity building in South Africa:

- The higher education institutions that have a crucial role to play in producing technically skilled graduates – be it in the field of resource economics, social analysis, engineering or water quality.
- The Water Research Commission, which is crucial in building a solid research base for the sector, but also in further training for water sector professionals and students.

DWAF has also established a Water and Forestry Learning Academy. This academy is a collaborative effort by a number of role players, and it seeks to draw students into the sector and expose trainees to practical and instructional influences in the real world of work; which is achieved through mentoring by experienced and senior employees of DWAF as well as ‘strategic rotation’ to all DWAF technical operations.

We have been engaging with selected Institutions of Higher Learning and partnerships have been established with eight universities around the country which are currently administering bursaries to students

studying in the fields of engineering, science and technical. On the professional development programme there were already 61 graduates enrolled in the academy. We expect this number will soon be increased with the new intake of graduates specifically with civil engineering qualifications. Professional Bodies have also been brought on board to ensure that the core curricular meets the highest industry standards and that when the learners have been taken through the comprehensive programme, they will have attained the requisite professional registration and recognition. This is but a start and there is no doubt that this initiative will grow as more and more universities become involved and the enrolment numbers increase.

4. FETWater

As far back as 1996, DWAF began these collaborative approaches, requesting assistance from UNESCO and the World Meteorological Organisation to investigate the capacity needs of the water sector in South Africa. A needs assessment was conducted in 1998, and the establishment of the Framework Programme for Research, Education and Training in Water or FETWater was recommended by the mission. The idea was adopted and endorsed by DWAF and the water community in South Africa. The result was that in 2002 the FETWater programme was established with the support of the Flemish government, and assistance of UNESCO.

FETWater as a programme that promotes cooperation in research, education, and training supports our efforts to build capacity and to achieve our aim of integrated water resource management in South Africa.

One of the key components of FETWater is delivering capacity through networking, which has seen in Phase I:

- Seven South Africans receiving training in Europe to strengthen international cooperation and learning from the European experiences in capacity building through the use of networks
- Four networks being identified, established and receiving financial support
- An innovative Groundwater training manual and accompanying software being developed to address identified capacity needs
- A total of 391 professional and DWAF staff, along with 23 students being trained throughout the nine provinces in South Africa.
- Effective cooperation being achieved through active participation of partners from 10 universities, various Professional Service Providers, the Water Research Commission as well as the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry.

I am therefore pleased to be signing the agreement to implement the second phase of this programme. And I am sure that through the signing of this agreement we will be contributing toward enhancing partnerships and building the much needed capacity in the water sector in South Africa.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, South Africa still has much that needs to be achieved in order to have greater equity in our society. Our Government has recognised that in order to address our past imbalances we need to ensure that we increase the scientific and technical skills in our society.

I must therefore thank our partners from UNESCO and the Flemish Government for their support in responding to the very real needs of South Africa.

I thank you.