

Launch of National Sanitation Week
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Keate's Drift Primary School, Msinga Local Municipality, Umzinyathi District Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal
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Programme Director
Director General: Department of Health
Members of Parliament
Honourable Mayors
Councillors
Amakhosi
Community of uMzinyathi District Municipality
Ladies and gentlemen

1. Introduction

It is a great honour for me to launching our National Sanitation Week 2007 here in Msinga. We have chosen Msinga for this launch because of the excellent work done in the Keate's Drift Sanitation Project. I am please to be joined today by the Director-General from the Department of Health who joins us for the launching of the National Health and Hygiene Education Strategy. This strategy recognises the close relationship between the delivery of water and sanitation infrastructure, and the improved health of a community. The strategy also informs our theme for this year's National Sanitation Week which is **"SANITATION FOR HEALTH AND DIGNITY"**.

This year is the second year we are holding a national sanitation week and I am proud to that last year South Africa was the first country in the world to hold this week. The government recognises the importance of sanitation in improving the lives people and giving them dignity. In the past few years the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry in co-operation with local government has dramatically increased the amount of resources allocated to provision of sanitation and ensure that universal access to sanitation is high on our national agenda.

The purpose of National Sanitation Week is therefore to highlight the work that we are doing to ensure that all South Africans have access to sanitation, the critical importance of looking after our sanitation facilities and toilets, and to inform our communities of the need to wash their hands after going to the toilet and to wash their hand before preparing food - because there are health risks in not doing so.

2. Sanitation is an International Concern

Ladies and Gentlemen, the lack of sanitation is a pressing challenge in many other countries and more than 40% of world's population (that is approximately 2,4 billion people) still have no access to basic sanitation. Globally, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1.8 million people die each year from diarrhoeal diseases, mostly related to poor sanitation and hygiene. It is estimated that 5 500 children across the world die every day from diseases caused by contaminated food and water.

There is an international movement to address the lack of sanitation, and the United Nations General Assembly in adopting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in year 2000 agreed to halve the global backlog in sanitation and water by the year 2015. South Africa supported the adoption of these goals and with an estimated 15 million of our citizens not having access to basic sanitation services, our country is part of this global challenge to address the sanitation backlog. We have however set our targets higher and committed ourselves to ensure that all buckets in formal established settlements will be eradicated by December 2007, all clinics will have safe and adequate water and sanitation by December 2007, all schools will have safe and adequate water, and all households have access to basic sanitation by 2010.

To raise the importance of access to sanitation, the United Nations 'Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council' launched an International Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) campaign. This WASH initiative was aimed at mobilising political support and action around the world to address global backlogs in water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion; and raise public awareness on the need for sanitation, hygiene and safe water. One of the most important outcomes was to gain the commitment of political, social and opinion leaders around the world to addressing these challenges. South Africa is very supportive of this initiative, and I met with the Director of this organisation when he was out here from Geneva last week and I agreed to become one of the champions of this WASH initiative.

3. Sanitation on the National Agenda

Programme Director, because of the unacceptable mortality rate and economic stress poor sanitation has on affected communities there must be prioritization of sanitation both internationally and within South Africa. We therefore need to embark on vigorous campaigns to put it on our agenda and ensure that everyone prioritises sanitation delivery as well as health and hygiene awareness.

Two years ago the Minister of Health and Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry launched the Limpopo Clinic Sanitation Project to promote health and hygiene. Since then our departments have collaborated in the development of the National Health and Hygiene Education Strategy that was launched today. This strategy sets out a comprehensive approach to the delivery of sustainable and effective health and hygiene education in South Africa. The plan is to provide this education within programmes for the delivery of water supply and sanitation services, and through ongoing education and awareness initiatives implemented as part of local health programmes.

Programme Director; I envisage that our presence here today will go a long way towards closing the gap that exists between the delivery of latrines and provision of health and hygiene education to the receivers of the latrines. We are convinced that this co-operation is essential to make a real impact on the health of our communities.

In the provision of water and sanitation we have already made substantial progress during the first 13 years of our democracy. We have served nationally about 12 million people with basic water supply infrastructure and approximately 9 million people with basic sanitation facilities. However, we cannot be complacent as 15.3 million people still do not have access to basic sanitation. There is still a huge task for Government, in partnership with communities and other stakeholders, to address this backlog.

In KwaZulu-Natal 714 000 households still need to be provided with adequate sanitation services. This Province has the second highest backlog in household sanitation and follows Limpopo – the province with the highest backlog, which still has more than 810 000 households lacking adequate sanitation. The Eastern Cape has the third highest backlog with more than 450 000 households lacking sanitation. To meet our 2010 target for sanitation, delivery in KwaZulu-Natal alone has to increase from the current delivery rate of around 50 000 structures per year to at least 180 000 structures per year.

Substantial financial resources have been allocated to addressing the remaining backlog, and national government has allocated approximately R3 billion of the total Municipal Infrastructure Grant budget to water and sanitation services for this financial year. Forty percent of this allocation, which translates to R1.2 billion, is earmarked for sanitation delivery. Provincial and Local Governments have also allocated resources to addressing this critical challenge.

Financial resources alone will not help us achieve our goals. We need to give sanitation delivery greater priority at all spheres of government - we have to adopt a “business as unusual approach”. We must also ensure that resources that are allocated address the backlogs in our rural areas, which have the bulk of backlogs and these communities are usually the most affected by diseases that are caused by poor sanitation and unsafe water. Our municipalities must give higher priority to providing services to these communities than what they have done in the past.

The Water Services Development Plan and the Integrated Development Plan processes and documents are the tools that reflect the necessary planning at municipal level to achieve the development priorities of Government. But, it is a great concern that in most instances these tools are not aligned with our 2010 targets. Sanitation in particular remains a step-child on these development plans. Part of this short-coming can be attributed to the lack of appropriate and adequate human resources at municipality level. The President in his State of the Nation Address in February 2007, voiced great concern on a significant number of senior management and professional positions that remain vacant in the public service, including municipalities.

My Department, as a Sector Leader, has to ensure that the sanitation targets are met and once again commit ourselves to support municipalities to achieve the targets through close co-operation and where required, the provision of additional human resources and support to municipalities. My Department, in consultation and partnership with other relevant departments, has mobilised engineers within the country and abroad who have the relevant skills to provide hands on support to struggling municipalities. My Department further has developed an accelerated delivery plan, which seeks to provide hands-on support to struggling municipalities and strengthen existing capacity. The strategy also stresses the need to move away from conventional delivery approaches and models to more vigorous approaches and best practice that will significantly increase service delivery.

5. Bucket Eradication

Programme Director, as I mentioned earlier one of our upcoming targets is the eradication of all bucket toilets in established areas by December 2007. KwaZulu-Natal is one of the provinces that had few bucket toilets and have already eradicated their backlogs. However in January this year there were about 132 000 buckets being use in established areas across the country. National, provincial and local government have all come together to contribute resources to remove these buckets, and substantial progress has already be achieved in removing these buckets. It is very encouraging to see the commitment demonstrated by affected municipalities who have committed additional municipal funds, as well human resources to achieving this target. Extensive support and efforts are directed at provinces such as the Free State, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape, where the bulk of the buckets exist. These buckets will be replaced with appropriate technologies and depending on local conditions such as the availability of water and difficult geological conditions. Members of municipalities and the public should be aware that our target to eradicate buckets by the end of this year is limited to buckets in established areas; buckets that are still used in the informal settlements are being addressed through human settlement programmes and are not included in this target.

The Bucket Eradication Programme is one of the programmes that is enjoying considerable support from the political leadership at all levels. We must ensure that there is similar support by political leaders at both provincial and local government level to support the household sanitation programme.

6. Sanitation in Schools and Clinics

Ladies and Gentlemen, a further target that we are seeking to achieve in the near future is the provision of water and sanitation in schools and clinics. There are still schools and clinics in our country without proper sanitation facilities and without access to clean water and it is a priority for us to address these backlogs. We are working very closely with the both the Department of Education, and the Department of Health on this project.

I also commend the initiatives that have been taken by the Department of Education, including the public-private partnership that is being used by the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Department of Education to eradicate school sanitation backlogs; which saw the involvement of Ithala Bank, Umgeni Water and the Department of Public Works, where the first phase provided improved water and sanitation at 334 schools, while the second phase will cater for 300 schools. This is the spirit, co-operation and determination needed to ensure accelerated service delivery.

7. Keate's Drift Sanitation Project

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are making progress in our sanitation programme, and today we celebrate our achievements here in Msinga. It makes us proud as government to see our commitments being realized. I am pleased that the uMzinyathi Water Services Authority in consultation with the Msinga Local Municipality has prioritised sanitation and has taken all the steps necessary to initiate this project for the people of Keate's Drift.

One of the important parts of our delivery of sanitation has been to ensure that local jobs and opportunities created, and indeed I am told that jobs have been created in this project. Job Creation is a priority of our government and we encourage municipalities to use labour intensive approaches as much as possible in our development programmes. Not only do we want to count structures built, but it is also our underlying purpose to develop skills within the local communities, and thereby reduce poverty through sustainable job creation. It is for this reason that my Department signed a memorandum of co-operation with the Job Creation Trust to work together to maximise job creation on all sanitation projects. I am told that R1.3 million has been spent on this Project at Keate's Drift for wages for community labour; a big achievement indeed!

I am also pleased to note that women involvement was given attention in this project and that women have benefited in that they have gained technical skills. We must ensure that there is equal work for women and men in all our development work. This equality must not only be in numbers, but also the practical involvement of women in technical and management positions, both in community development projects, as well as within the workplace. It is important for our Water Services Authorities to remember this when they are implementing community projects.

Our youth, who constitute a significant portion of our unemployed population, must be part and parcel of our development programmes. I am pleased to note again their involvement has been fully supported in this project.

Let me commend the approach taken on this project in that it not only looked at job creation for the unemployed, but it also strengthened the economic base of the local suppliers, thus contributing to local

economic development. I am told that approximately R4 million worth material was sourced from the local suppliers whilst the project management was also outsourced to a company 100% owned by historically disadvantaged individuals.

As part of this project and in line with the health and hygiene strategy launched today, we have been providing Health and Hygiene education to ensure that our families are conscious of hygiene as well as waterborne disease. My Department realises that giving health messages such as washing of hands after the use of a toilet is not sufficient when there is no hand washing facility to use. We have therefore supported this community and included hand washing facilities as part and parcel of the water supply and sanitation infrastructure. To coincide with the launch of the national sanitation week and the Keate's Drift Project, my Department has organised drinking water containers with lids with "keep water safe" messages engraved on them. This is not part of the normal infrastructure delivery programme but a demonstration of one of our key messages during this week. We have asked the Project Steering Committee to ensure that all 2 950 households that benefited from this Project to receive one of these water containers.

8. Operation and Maintenance

Operation and maintenance is a huge challenge for household sanitation, as well as for schools and clinics. Whilst we are chasing our infrastructure delivery targets we have to be very conscious of the operation and maintenance implications of the infrastructure we use. We also need to ensure that our water resources are not polluted by badly managed and operated sanitation infrastructure.

The cost implications to ensure affordability, acceptability and long-term suitability need to be addressed sufficiently. We also need to plan in advance, for example, in projects such as this one at Keate's Drift, we need to plan for the emptying of pits when they become full.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, Sanitation Week is important annual programme, and we need to ensure that our messages are far reaching. In order to extend our reach we have been co-operating with the Department of Education, and I am happy to announce that from next year health and hygiene will be taught in our schools (from grades R to 6).

There is a great deal of work that needs to be done going forward and without well capacitated municipalities Government will not be able to achieve its developmental objectives of *a better life for all*. We are all aware of the huge demands on local government and the human resource constraints many of them face. As I mentioned earlier National and Provincial Government are providing support to municipalities but there are also resources available close by that can also be used. For example Tugela Water Board, which can be used for water services provision. DWAF has made an investment of around R30m to establish this entity and I would like to encourage municipalities to utilise it and use this resource. I have also noted that other parts of KwaZulu-Natal do make use of water boards as water services providers and I would also like to encourage other Water Services Authorities to pursue and tap into these resources, particularly for drinking water quality management. Water boards have proven to excel in this area, as well as in the Operation and Maintenance of the treatment plants.

Before ending I would like to report that since the visit by my predecessor Minister Sonjica to Muden almost two years ago there has been some progress regarding the community's request for a small dam for livestock. The Muden region is in the process of establishing a Water User Association in the area and has taken up the request for a dam with the Department of Agriculture. This process is continuing and local community structures will be kept informed of developments.

For us in the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry there is a great deal of work to be done to ensure that everyone has access to basic sanitation services by 2010. Targets are set and ours is to direct our focus and efforts on how we are going to realise the targets. We must, however, ensure whilst we are rolling out the infrastructure programme, we do not compromise on sustainable job creation, women and youth involvement, and long-term sustainability of our infrastructure.

Sanitation Week starts today until Friday, 30 March and I am inviting all South Africans particularly this week to practising good sanitation i.e. wash your hands with water and soap after visiting the toilet and before food preparation. Let us all work together to accelerate sanitation delivery to those who are unserved.

"Sanitation for health and dignity"

I thank you.