

Water Conservation and Water Demand Management Ministerial Sector Awards
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Gallagher Estate, Midrand, Gauteng
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The Power of Water. The Power of a Nation

MEC for Local Government, Ms Qedani Mahlangu
Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee, Ms Connie September
Programme Director
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentleman

1. Introduction

I would like to welcome you to our inaugural Water Conservation and Water Demand Management Ministerial Awards. These awards are an important part of our efforts to create a culture of water conservation amongst South Africans by recognizing advocacy and excellence in implementation of water conservation and water demand management programmes. Tonight's event should be seen against a backdrop of our National Water Week, and our efforts to create awareness on a number of water issues, particularly the need to conserve water and the need to protect our water resources.

The Dow-Jones Triple Bottom line index, states that the sustainable socio-economic prosperity of a nation is founded on the appropriate balance of the social, economic and environmental pillars of a nation. Economists are in agreement that the subject of economics is premised on scarcity and choice. Gandhi once said, "If we continue taking from the earth without giving back to it, then we are just greedy consumers".

As a growing nation our sustained socio-economic prosperity is dependent on the choices that we make and on how we manage our natural resources. We can decide to be greedy consumers and exploit our limited natural resources without care. Or we can think of the future of our children, and act responsibly to conserve our natural resources, and strike the critical balance for sustainable socio-economic growth, development and environmental protection.

2. Water conservation and social context

Programme Director, our government has a social contract with the people of South Africa to create a better life for all. This contract, in the context of water, requires that our people have a right to have access to clean water for social needs. It further means that our people also have the right to have access to sanitation services to protect their dignity. As we celebrate Human Rights Day later this week, we will continue as government to ensure that these fundamental rights of our people are protected and realized through the continued provision of good quality services.

In a water scarce country that is achieving significant social and economic growth, the challenge for government today is how to go beyond the provision of universal access to water and sanitation services in response to immediate needs and also ensure the continued availability of water well into the future.

When looking at the available options it is clear that the efficient use of water through the implementation of water conservation and demand management measures provides us with one of the best ways of sustaining our water resources.

Through the pilot projects that we are running in partnership with eight municipalities, we are able to see how water conservation measures have contributed to a reduction in the water used and improved the finances of the municipality. I reported last year that my Department working together with the Water Research Commission had estimated that the revenue not earned by municipalities as a result of water losses to be in excess of R3.2 billion per annum. Through this water conservation pilot programme we are addressing this

issue and results are very promising with some municipalities already saving in excess of forty percent of their total raw water bill.

In addition we see that the measures implemented have contributed to ensuring the elimination of service disruptions and intermittent supply due to pipe bursts and poor water supply infrastructure. These pilot projects have also created job opportunities for poor and unskilled people. A number of women and youth have been appointed as community liaison officers, leak detectors and plumbers in the communities where projects have been implemented.

I am aware that in the Emfuleni Municipality, in excess of 250 local jobs have been created by the water conservation and demand management projects currently underway. Similarly jobs have also been created in the other municipalities running this pilot programme, which demonstrates the practical value of such interventions not only in sustaining the environment but also in uplifting the social conditions of our people.

Our challenge is to learn lessons from this pilot programme, document these lessons and roll out the programme to municipalities throughout the country. We heard from Professor Biswas during his keynote address at the National Water Summit earlier this week that we will make mistakes when we implement development programmes but it is important that we go back to the communities to see how they are responding to these interventions, to see if we are making the desired impact, and to then deal with the concerns.

3. Water conservation and economic context

Programme Director the most important message from the address given by Professor Biswas was that in pursuing our goal to provide water to people, we must not lose sight of the reasoning behind that goal, which is to create a better life for people through social and economic progress. These comments are a good reminder and we must not forget them as we push to achieve our water and sanitation targets, as well as, our support of the economic growth targets of government through initiatives such as ASGI-SA.

We are however very fortunate that we have close co-operation with the power generation sector, and earlier today that co-operation was cemented even further through the signing of an MoU with Eskom on water use efficiency. This MoU, ladies and gentlemen, is an important milestone in the sustainable utilisation of water by Eskom power stations.

It is clear that if we are to grow our number of water users and grow our economy sustainably then we must conserve our scarce water resources, including the use of water by our productive sectors. Like Eskom, other industrial sectors and the agricultural sector must look at how to become more water efficient.

These sectors are also contributors to large volumes of wastewater that is discharged or otherwise disposed of, and some of which ends up polluting our rivers. I made it very clear in my address to Parliament last week and in my address at the National Water Summit that we will be strengthening our monitoring and compliance unit so that we are better able to protect our water resources. It is thus crucial that these users not only look at water efficiency but also look at a reduction in the volumes of wastewater discharged or disposed of.

4. Conclusion

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, all of us must take this message seriously, and there is enough time to implement structured programmes to achieve greater water efficiency but we cannot delay. We need a social compact with the different sectors of our society so that we all play our part and take personal responsibility for our use of water.

Tonight we are recognising those 'superstars' who have already started championing water conservation or successfully implementing programmes. To the winners I hope that you keep up the good work. It is through your exemplary efforts that our vision of 'some for all forever' will be realized. I challenge other partners in the sector to emulate the sterling work done by these superstars so that we deepen and consolidate our commitment towards water conservation and water demand management.

I thank you.