

Keynote Address by the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs
Speech by Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, At the Western Cape Provincial Water Indaba
Cape Town International Convention Centre, Cape Town
23 AND 24 November 2009

Programme Director,
Chairperson of the Water Portfolio Committee,
Honourable Members of Parliament here present,
Mayors and Councillors from various municipalities,
Director-General and Deputy Directors-General,
Chairpersons of various water institutions,
Leaders of NGOs and CSOs,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentleman.

Good morning, Goeie more

It is encouraging to get to an area where the municipality appreciates its role in the supply of water services. It is encouraging to learn that the metro is using its resources and capacity to deal with the challenges of water in the area. I am happy with the programmes that are in place to deal with water losses as articulated by the Member of the mayoral Council. One thing I would encourage is that as you get into these programmes you need to consult with the communities affected and impacted upon.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to address you all today at a very important meeting. Important as we are reminded that water is life and plays a central role in our country's socio-economic life. It is for this reason that we are having Water Indaba's again so that we reflect again on this central role that water plays in this instance in the Western Cape. I am worried that we do not sufficiently ensure that Provincial economic growth strategies take into consideration water scarcity, water conservation and public awareness of how to protect this precious resource. We do not put water at the centre of our development planning.

As we meet here today, as government we have embarked on our campaign on 16 Days of Activism Against Abuse of Women And Children. Water plays a significant role in ensuring the safety of our woman and children. Our resolve should be to provide access to water to especially women in those areas in rural areas, farms, townships so that we do not put the lives in danger by walking far to fetch water and use dark areas in search of sanitation facilities. There are many other ways we can contribute in this sector to empower our women and children in this country.

I addressed a Provincial Water Summit in the Western Cape three years ago, and since then there has been remarkable achievements to look back on as well as many challenges. Here are a few of the highlights I would like to mention:

The **first achievement** relates to partnerships between my Department and local government, and in this case, the City of Cape Town. Through this partnership the Berg River Project has been completed. The Dam will

improve water security of the province with 20% additional water. The City of Cape Town Council approved a 20% savings programme Water Demand Management prior to any approval of the Berg River Dam.

Water Conservation and Water Demand Management remains a huge concern for us, with climate change leading to reduced rainfall and diminished runoff into our water supply, we should use this Indaba to further discuss and explore our options in mitigating as well as adaptation programmes of implementation. I am acutely aware of the increase in drought in provinces as well as unusual rainfall patterns as if it is winter again. We are going to Copenhagen to defend our national interest so that we have an outcome that takes into consideration that South Africa and Africa are and will be affected more than the developed world.

The **second achievement** is the progress related to the raising of the Clan William Dam wall. Our **third achievement** is the improvement in eradicating basic water services backlog. However, we need to address the challenges in the informal areas and regulating land use to ensure that communities do not settle in wetlands or in areas without basic services.

Therefore, it is highly laudable to note that our **fourth achievement** is development of a province specific Climate Change Response Strategy.

Moving to our **fifth achievement**, my department is promoting the exploration of alternative sources of water. Near here in Somerset West, South Africa's first commercial factory for producing ultra filtration membranes has been launched by Water Research Commission and Ikusasa with science translated into a production scale water technology for use by our water authorities

I am informed that we now have a desalination plant approved by the Knysna Council which will be ready to supply water by mid-December 2009: this is to be a sterling example of improving water security in the face of a crippling 1:100 drought.

Programme Director, this list is by no means exhaustive, but what is common in all these things, is that they are all products of joint efforts by government, civil society and the private sector.

We note that the whole world is facing the impact of economic recession, and our government has prioritised job creation, so we must lead the way through the governance and management of our raw natural resources. We must rise to these challenges; we cannot afford to do otherwise.

Moving forward

We are currently implementing a water monitoring system in the Western Cape and Mpumalanga – this provides first-hand information on the quantity and quality of water in our catchments.

Effective water security measures include the implementation of economic tools to manage demand. The implementation of the National Pricing Strategy for Raw Water began in 2002 to ensure that, as far as possible, the costs of the management of water resources and water supply infrastructure are borne by water users.

Action has been taken against a number of illegal water users across South Africa in response to growing concern about an apparent increase in the rate of illegal water use in some catchments areas. We are strengthening our regulatory focus and I must warn everyone that we are not going to stand by and observe individuals and institutions pollute our rivers and in some cases “steal” the limited water resources we have not only in this province but in the country as a whole, we are going to act decisively to ensure that our water resources are protected and legally utilised for the benefit of all.

Programmes such as the Consumer Voice Initiative that you have here in the province assist in ensuring constant communication between government and communities. I am particularly pleased to learn that my Department has held engagements with civil society in the pre-Indaba workshops that sought to derive key issues that need to be put on the table for discussion at this Indaba. I have noted with interest some of the issues that were raised by civil society and these included:

- Issues around infrastructure, maintenance and management. This includes storm water drainage and security around dams in terms of fencing and covering of water canals to prevent loss of life as has happened in some instances;
- Another major challenge raised which we also have been grappling with is the provision of water and sanitation services to informal settlements and backyard dwellers as has been alluded to earlier. We also need to bring in farm dwellers. The civil society also raised problems experienced with the water devices in terms of malfunctioning and breakdown which result in reduced or no access to water especially for vulnerable groups the elderly and the disabled people; I keenly await results of the task team that Minister Shiceka has initiated in this regard.
- The lack of concern for water conservation through use of sprinklers, the impact of car washes and a need to promote the use of recycled water for gardening, swimming pools and golf estates was articulated. A need to introduce water wastage control measures was proposed at the pre-Indaba workshops; and
- Other issues related to the quality of the water that is supplied and in some cases communities drinking from untreated streams. There are concerns about even lack of access for some farm communities.

I have just highlighted a few issues but I do hope that these will be further discussed at the level of commissions and we will all, collectively find practical solutions to the challenges raised.

Programme Director, I must emphasise that having sufficient water is not an end in itself. Water must be allocated equitably across the different water use sectors. Water allocation must be balanced and informed by

our country's development agenda, which amongst others calls for redress and empowerment of the historically marginalised. The Water Allocation Reform Programme is a proactive approach towards redressing race and gender inequities regarding water use – where “water use” refers to promoting access to water for productive purposes (and not only to the provision of basic water services).

Beyond promoting applications from historically disadvantaged individuals and giving support to the license-evaluation process to promote equity, we are implementing the compulsory licensing process in one stressed catchment areas namely, Jan Dissels Catchment in the Olifants Doorn Water Management Area. Through this programme, the Department is developing and overseeing the implementation of frameworks for compulsory licensing, and the allocation of water between and among users.

Again, the pre-Indaba workshop held with the different sector partners and institutions in the four Water Management Areas that have been responsible for the allocation, utilisation and protection of our water resources within our decentralised system of water management will be taken into account on these matters. On this note, I wish to commend the leadership in my Department in this province and all the other stakeholders for the innovative and a very inclusive approach to dealing with issues of water and particularly consulting all relevant stakeholders to voice their issues to be put on the table for discussion at this important Indaba. I must say that this is first time where I have learned of such an approach and I will be proposing the same for the other provinces in the coming Indabas.

Programme Director, all these issues that I am mentioning must be translated into collective action and we also need platforms for monitoring, reviewing and reporting on achievements and impediments. Therefore, I propose that in the immediate term, my Department must work closely with the Premier's Office to develop a province-specific five-year plan that should integrate water resource planning and provincial development planning as contained in your Provincial Growth and Development Plan. Secondly, the Premier's Office, working together with my Department, must explore means of strengthening the engagement between water sector stakeholders and the provincial government using existing inter-governmental platforms. Ideally, I would like to see a water-specific forum established to develop, monitor and report on the implementation of a provincial water plan. This forum should, however, be overseen by provincial government, either through the office of the Premier or a designated MEC. This we have discussed with all other Provinces too and they have warmly welcomed the idea.

In conclusion I wish to end my speech by quoting Kofi Annan in his report “Larger than Freedom” in which he says that: *“We will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights and the rule of law.”*

By holding the Western Cape Provincial Water Indaba, we are indeed alive to the need for cooperation among all stakeholders because achievements such as successful hosting of the FIFA 2010 Soccer World Cup are possible because we all play our part and work together as one nation.

I thank you all for your attention and wish you well in your deliberations.