

Budget Vote Number 37 Address
By The Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs
Ms Rejoice Mabudafhasi
National Assembly
15 April 2010

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Members
Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me once more, echo the words of our President when in his State of the Nation Address he reminded us that we are a water scarce country; therefore we have to conserve it in order to meet our social and economic developmental needs.

Access to safe drinking water

Honourable members we are all aware that there are still people in our country without access to potable clean water. Over the past few years, we have learnt hard lessons in water delivery. The most important one is investing in building of new infrastructure and operations and maintenance of infrastructure generally. Given the delivery challenges facing our local sphere of government, we are intensifying our Municipal Support Programme to ensure that the key primary objective of ensuring that our communities have access to safe drinking water is met. This support can clearly be illustrated by an amount of R4.417 billion over the 2010 MTEF that the department secured from National Treasury to help municipalities improve bulk infrastructure. This grant was established to supplement financing for the development of regional bulk water infrastructure and regional bulk sanitation collection.

Since the inception of the programme we have implemented 107 projects in the 9 provinces of which 11 have been completed and the rest are in progress. When these projects are completed they will improve access to a further 2,5 million people. 6,342 job opportunities have been created through this programme.

Accelerated Community Infrastructure Programme

Honourable members, I have already alluded to delivery challenges facing us as government, particularly the implementation arm of our government, namely local government.

Growth in demand for water for both domestic and economic use are posing serious challenges on our water resources. In our water for growth and development strategy, we have identified key priority programmes that will help us achieve water security in this country. It is in this context that our Department initiated an Accelerated Community Infrastructure Programme which we have allocated R83 million in Cape Town, eThekweni, and Nelson Mandela Metros. We are grateful that Metros have made financial commitments as their contribution in this initiative.

This programme is a rapid intervention that seeks to focus on four key areas:

- Community water and sanitation infrastructure;
- Water conservation and demand management;
- waste water infrastructure refurbishment programme; and
- drought intervention

This programme selectively targeted provinces where there were serious challenges relating to drought, cholera, water supply, ageing infrastructure and general shortage of water.

Under this programme we have identified four priority areas for water conservation and demand management activities i.e. Vaal River System and the metropolitan areas of Johannesburg, eThekweni, Nelson Mandela Bay and Cape Town. The upper Vaal River system has been identified as the most appropriate area to address “illegal” use of water for irrigation purposes. The department is implementing measures to curb this unlawful water use and to speed up monitoring and enforcement efforts.

The programme also makes provision for investment in the refurbishment of 20 waste water treatment plants. This intervention is meant to address areas where there is potential risk of cholera, plants exceeding the effluent quality units, exceeding hydraulic capacity, plants that suffer from mechanical failures or plants that are in areas prone to spillages.

Protection of water resources

Honourable members, it is an indisputable fact that our rivers are a fundamental life giving channels, and are almost as important as the precious natural water they carry. If we mess up our rivers we are in grave danger. These life-bearing channels need to be protected and preserved for our children’s future survival. As the Ministry of Water and Environmental Affairs we are best positioned to ensure protection and preservation of these natural life-sustaining resources. The bringing together of water and environmental affairs departments under one Ministry is an opportunity for a holistic approach in ensuring conservation of our natural resources

As a response to the above mentioned challenge, during Water Week we launched the Adopt a River Programme in Eerste Rivier in the Western Cape and Umtata River in the Eastern Cape. This programme is aimed at raising awareness to the communities about the importance of protecting our rivers as they are the main source of our water. Women will be trained in water resource management skills and there will also be job opportunities for them. I would like to make an appeal to the members of Parliament to adopt a river in your provinces or constituencies as your projects. The Department will make necessary institutional arrangements and coordination in consultation with your constituency offices. I am looking forward to working with you. This approach will enable active participation of communities in our programmes for sustainability. Municipalities, sector partners, members of parliament, private sector, community leaders and women will be the key role players of this programme.

Promoting water conservation

Ladies and gentlemen, seeing water dripping through open taps and flowing into the streets is a common sight amongst all of us. This situation is critical, and demands the most urgent interventions. The issue of water losses goes way beyond inadequate and badly maintained infrastructure. We lose water through theft, through our own negligence in the way that we deal with this precious commodity in our homes, and through irresponsible and unchecked industrial use. The investments we make in infrastructure for water services will not work if we continue to waste water through leakages. There is a perception that water is wasted by those who stay in informal settlements whereas it is mostly those who stay in formal settlements and suburbs. We cannot resolve this problem in isolation; we must tackle this problem holistically and with determination.

We will intensify the existing Water Conservation and Demand Management Programme. During Water Week we launched a project called "War on Leaks" in Mogale City local municipality which is aimed at educating water users about water conservation and supporting them to repair leaks. We are identifying and training unemployed youth and arm them with plumbing skills, to be deployed within communities where they will fix leaking pipes and toilets. The spin offs here will be water saving, skills development for our youth, and job creation. We intend to swiftly broaden this to other areas, so as to draw other municipalities, industries and agricultural sectors.

I would like to encourage more partnerships in water conservation, such as a widening of the "Adoption" concept, and other practices aimed at reducing consumption.

Drought Management.

Honourable members, despite the apparently abundant rains this past summer, it is clear that changes in the climate are now a reality. Certain parts of our country continue to be threatened by the challenge of drought and we know that drought is the dreaded partner of poverty. In some areas it is so severe that dams have run completely dry; yields from supplementary boreholes have dropped, springs and wells hold no water whatsoever. Experience on drought in the last few months has challenged our department to look at drought management in a much more serious manner. We are looking at improving drought management, intensifying our monitoring programmes, supporting municipalities, and providing rainwater tanks where necessary and possible.

Promotion of rural development

It's an accepted fact that water can act as a stimulant and catalyst for economic development. As stipulated in our Water for Growth and Development strategy, we continue to prioritize water allocation of water to resource poor farmers.

Thus far we have assisted 360 poorly resourced famers with bulk water distribution, infrastructure for irrigation and subsidies for operations and maintenance payments. In this financial year, resource-poor farmers will receive more irrigation water related support from the department. This includes efforts to rationalize water use by the commercial agricultural sector for the purposes of equable distribution. A total of R30 million has been set aside for the rain water harvesting and support of poorly resourced farmers' and households where a household will harvest water to an underground tank.

Women's empowerment

Honourable Members, you will be encouraged to hear that the department has been focusing on women empowerment initiatives particularly in rural areas. The department partnered with the Lukhanji Municipality to train eighty women as water-treatment controllers. This is an area that has been dominated by males and we are determined to explore new frontiers of empowerment for women. We also launched a programme in partnership with the Tzaneen Local Municipality, to recognize women who pioneered the rain water harvesting project; thereby raising awareness around water-conservation activities. Given the plight of our women out there, we know that such interventions are a drop in the ocean.

Through Adopt a River Programme we will capacitate women to be able to participate actively in water resource management and also create job opportunities.

Promotion of Youth Development

Honourable Members, the role of youth in water conservation cannot be under-estimated. Our youth programmes, which are located within the ambit of the National Youth Service, are geared to educating and involving our youth in water management and conservation issues.

In 2009 we undertook a pilot project of the National Youth Service Programme in the Alfred Nzo and Letsemeng municipalities. The programme focused on improving the sustainability and marketability of skills-development through accredited training on all water and sanitation projects for unemployed and other targeted groups.

A total of 150 young people, 75 from each of the two municipalities, were registered for training in various areas in order to fulfill the requirement of youth registration in the youth programme. A budget of R3 million was made available for this project and each municipality got an allocation of R1, 5 million for training. These young people, have now graduated and some are participating fully in poverty alleviation programmes like Project Hlasela in the Free State. We intend to expand our efforts to other Provinces to optimize the impact of youth in poverty alleviation initiatives.

We are also implementing a successful programme called 2020 Vision which targets learners from Grade R-12. It is aimed at educating the young people in schools about conservation of natural resources i.e. water and environment. Through this programme we also promote careers in water and environment sectors as we all know that the sectors face a huge challenge of scarce skills.

In conclusion Honourable members, I am appealing to you to support us in educating our citizens about water conservation and protection of our rivers.

- We will not rest until all South Africans have access to clean safe drinking water
- We will not rest until we ensure that our resources are protected and
- We will not rest until we can guarantee sustainable water supply to future generations

Thank you