

## **Address to the NCOP Budget Vote**

**Speech by Ms Rejoice Mabudafhasi, Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs**

**Cape Town,**

**27 May 2010**

Honourable Chairperson of the NCOP

Honourable Chairperson of the Select Committee

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

### **Local government support to ensure access to water services**

Honorable Chair, honorable members, from the onset, I would like inform the house that our Department is gearing up to address the developmental challenges facing water security in the country. Whilst we are grappling with challenge to ensure that all our people have access to safe drinking water, we also have to ensure that we build and maintain infrastructure that will support economic development and poverty alleviation initiatives in our country. It is for this reason that we are strengthening our partnerships with COGTA, other Departments and the private sector in order to achieve integrated approach that will enable us to speed up service delivery.

The launch of Turn Around Strategy by the Minister of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs has been embraced with great enthusiasm by our Department. We have identified key water priorities which I believe are of concern to most members here, namely:

- Refurbishment and operation of infrastructure
- Developing appropriate skills for delivery of water and maintenance of infrastructure
- Up scaling water conservation and water demand management programme focusing on fixing the leaks

- Active participation of women in water resource management

### **Water Conservation**

There is an old American Indian saying that is very profound: “the frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives”. To us this means that saving water is everybody's business and responsibility in our country and it should be a way of life for all South Africans. We admit that water conservation programme has not received enough attention and focus in the past; however, we are in a process of upscaling the programme. We are implementing water conservation programmes in all nine Provinces, with more emphasis and investment going to municipalities that are water stressed and unaccounted water. We are grateful of the cooperation we have received from cities like EThekweni, Cape Town, and Nelson Mandela Metro who have invested millions of their own funding in this programme. A lot more still needs to be done.

Honorable Members we are concerned about water losses through leaking taps and poor maintenance of infrastructure. As we reported previously to Parliament, we launched the War on Leaks project in Mogale City during national water week awareness campaign. Our Free State Region is well ahead in this regard, they have implemented projects where women contractors have been trained to fix leaks and make a living out of this programme. Our preparations are advanced for the roll out of this programme to all municipalities with high water losses. Unemployed youth will be trained to be able to fix the leaks with users affected or having leakages. Our Department's intervention in the O R Tambo municipality where we have invested millions in refurbishing dilapidated infrastructure thereby preventing water shortages is an example of what this programme can achieve.

### **Public education and awareness**

I am also pleased to announce to this house that we are intensifying public education and awareness programme to educate citizens of our country about the value of water and its

importance to economic growth and development. The programme is included in our performance agreements and strategic plans, so it will be easier for parliament and the public to monitor our performance.

The department has initiated collaboration with water boards, water utilities and private sector provincial government, municipalities, NGO's, civil society and traditional leaders engaging on proposals towards integrated approach and sustainability.

We have learnt that when local people are empowered with knowledge and appropriate skills they will be able to participate actively in water resource management, make informed decisions and be water ambassadors. If we can achieve the latter, communities will be able to deal with all non compliance issues and report to the municipality and department.

### **Protection of water resources**

Honorable members we will not win the fight towards improving our water security if we neglect the integrity of our ecosystems as enablers of water availability. During national water week we have launched Adopt a River project which seeks to mobilize our people, all spheres of government, private sector to take the highest levels of accountability to ensure that our rivers are not polluted. Through this programme women will get employment opportunities and training.

We are particularly excited by developments in the Western Cape and Free State in this regard where in the former, within this year a catchment management strategy for the Breede Overberg water management area will be published which will be a blue print of water resource management. This is a first for our country to steam ahead in our quest to clean up our water resources focusing mainly on our river systems.

In the Free State, the Wilge River, outside the Free State towns of Frankfort and Vredefort, was congested with debris from dead trees along its banks as a result it was

totally blocked at weirs and bridges, which posed a safety danger to the public and was even aesthetically unacceptable.

I would like to thank South African Breweries, the River Trust for supporting us, that problem is a thing of the past. This initiative will be duplicated to other river systems with similar challenges, such as the challenge with the water hyacinths and debris in the Vaal River in the vicinity of Hoopstad. Lessons learned from the Wilge River in terms of the success of Public Private Partnership are valuable for other provinces and towns.

We will continue to support municipalities that continue to experience drought, especially in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. Plans are prepared and the funding made available by National Treasury will be spent appropriately.

#### Drought relief

To mention but a few, R54million was raised for Middle Letaba Drought Crisis to address the bulk supply from Nandoni Dam to Giyani. We have also assisted local government with an additional R15.5million to refurbish existing boreholes and improve the supply to affected areas in Mopani and Vhembe Districts. Water demand and conservation measures are underway in Giyani with the assistance of the Lepelle Northern Water board. We must however, state that we need to improve drought management in the country and come up with much more proactive strategies to minimize harsh impacts of drought on our communities.

You will all recall the severe incidence of cholera in Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces in the last year. I am pleased to reassure the honorable members that in Mpumalanga, now that we have provided a very large number of additional Rainwater tanks and drilled numerous new boreholes, the potential of water borne diseases has been minimized.

#### **Working for Water Programme**

Honorable Members I would like now to turn to our public works Programmes which also contribute greatly to the integrity of our ecosystems while creating much needed jobs for our people.

The *Working for Water* programme's track record as a flagship programme for Government has seen it being awarded additional budget for the 2010/11 financial year, notwithstanding the challenging economic climate. We have committed to create more work per amount invested.

We are seeking a commitment from the *Working for Water* programme to produce 2,468,800 days of work during 2010/11. We shall therefore seek to create 3,565 days of work for every R1 million spent in the 2010/11 financial year – effectively an anticipated 18% improvement on the 2009/10 financial year.

We are further seeking a commitment to produce 122,437 days of work during 2010/11, through the *Working for Land* programme aimed at the restoration of biodiversity, carbon sequestration and improved soil retention resulting in higher dry-season river flows and less siltation. It will have a similar number of days of work for every R1 million spent as for *Working for Water*.

The *Working on Fire* programme will also ensure that its additional budget creates more work opportunities. Here, we are seeking a commitment that we shall produce 733,800 days of work. This translates into creating 3,529 days of work for every R1 million spent in the 2010/11 financial year – effectively a 21% improvement on the 2009/10 financial year!

## **Conclusion**

Honourable members, we are doing our best to ensure that there is enough water for development in our country, thus the development of water for growth and development strategy.

Honourable members allow me to thank all officials for the sterling work.

Water is life, water is everyone's business, lets continue to work together to ensure water security for present and future generations to come!

Thank You