

National Assembly Budget Vote Number 37
Speech Delivered by The Honorable Minister Buyelwa Sonjica
Cape Town
15 April 2010

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee
Honourable Members of Parliament
Chairpersons of Boards and CEO's of Public Entities and NGOs
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

As we conclude the first decade of the 21st century, what has come to be known as the “global water crisis” is fast becoming common knowledge in the world we live in. The Overseas Development Institute explains this global water crisis as follows: “Three quarter’s of the world’s fresh water is frozen in glaciers and icebergs. Less than 1% flows in rivers and lakes. That which does, together with the 20% lying underground, faces increasing pressure as global population grows and demand for water rises”.

It is therefore a frightening reality to know that we do not have enough of this resource. It is also clear that if we continue to squander the increasingly limited water resources at our disposal, we will aggravate the shortage and plunge our country into a severe crisis.

Honourable Members, many of us who are the more privileged have to merely turn on a tap to enjoy a stream of bright, clean water, the water that flows in seeming abundance. The hard fact is that the people who are favoured with such amenities are an exception, not the rule. An even harder fact is that poor people in their millions, both within and beyond our borders, continue a daily struggle for access to clean drinking water. It is not too much to say that this struggle represents the front line in the fight against poverty and the spread of the dire diseases that are so closely linked to poverty.

Last year I committed myself to tackling the challenges faced by communities living near or adjacent to the so-called “single purpose dams”. These communities have no access to the water contained in these dams and clearly deserve better treatment and attention. The aim is to

broaden access to close by communities who are currently receiving limited water services from existing boreholes.

I now report that we have started the implementation of ambitious projects to convert Taung and Jozini dams from single to multipurpose dams. In the Taung and Naledi areas, about 86 000 people stand to benefit from this and another 68 000 people in Jozini. In Jozini alone we are spending a total of R1, 1 billion over three project phases. While the implementation of these projects commenced during 9/10 financial year, they will be implemented in phases. It is anticipated that the communities will get water by 2013/14.

This is a long term programme with huge financial implications and it involves commissioning of 40 dams across the country. We will spend R172 million for Taung and R62 million for Jozini over the next MTEF period. We intend to proceed with the planning process for the construction of Umzimvubu Dam. The funding requirements will be presented to National Treasury before the end of this financial year.

Investment in water resources infrastructure

Honourable Members, our Department has completed an analysis on the status of water resources within identified growth areas in the country. You will recall that we committed to investing about R30 billion on mega water resources infrastructure projects for economic development - projects for Energy, Agriculture and Industry. I am also pleased to announce that DWA plans to complete seven new bulk raw water augmentation projects during the 2010/2014 medium term expenditure framework to support sustained economic growth and meet the growing social water needs.

These projects include:

- The Olifants River Water Resources Development Project and the construction of De Hoop Dam where the partial impoundment of water is scheduled to begin by October 2010. The first delivery is expected by April 2011. There are currently 752 people employed in the project.
- The Mokolo River augmentation project which will supply water to the new Medupi Power station, coal mines and Lephalale municipality. The project will create opportunities for the development of future power stations, the development of the new petrochemical industries in Limpopo Province. On average, about 500 jobs will be created over the next 5 years.

- The Mooi-Mgeni Transfer Scheme project, which involves the construction of Spring Grove dam for domestic water supply in Ethekwini and Umgungundlovu areas. The construction of a transfer pipeline from Mooi River to Mgeni River is also planned to commence by the end of 2010 and it is anticipated that the first water delivery will take place by 2013.

Water resources infrastructure maintenance programme

We are also focusing on rehabilitating existing water resources infrastructure. The Department is spending in excess of R1 billion per annum on capital maintenance projects, including the Gamtoos Irrigation Scheme, the Vlakfontein Canal, and the Bospoort and Nsami Dams.

Eighteen (18) dams have been completed to date, and this financial year will see the completion of a further seven (7). The repair of these dams brings substantial benefits, including the sustainability of water supply to water users; the mitigation of water losses, and an expansion of the spillway capacity to ensure dam protection as part of disaster management

Desalination and recycling programme

South Africa has a boundary consisting of approximately 3 000 kilometres of sea water, and this water is presently unusable because of its high salt content. We therefore made a decision to press ahead with unconventional water treatment – in this case, desalination – largely because of the unavailability of river water due to drought. The desalination initiative attracted greater attention when the Department requested the affected Municipalities to recycle water as part of the Municipalities water management regimen.

Coastal towns bordered by the sea such as Plettenberg Bay, Knysna, George and Mossel Bay have relied on river water for the past three hundred years or so, notwithstanding their proximity to the sea. But with the prevailing drought, now worse than any in the past one hundred and fifty years, these towns are obliged to introduce purification processes that can utilise sea water as a source for their potable water supplies. Desalination has become the preferred purification option in terms of both the cost benefit and the flexibility of application.

The concept of recycling wastewater coupled with the desalination process is a leading example of optimising the use of water by utilising it more than once, and thus greatly increasing water security.

The Honourable Members will appreciate the need to maintain a delicate balance between the need for water security and the environmental impacts of desalination plants. There is ample

scientific evidence that the impact of the effluents from the desalination plants on the seawater environment increase the seawater temperature, salinity, water current and turbidity. They also harm the marine environment, causing fish to migrate while enhancing the presence of algae and other harmful marine organisms.

We must walk this tightrope skilfully as both Departments of Water Affairs and Environmental Affairs for the benefit of both present and future generations. We have an obligation to think creatively about security of water supply using cutting edge technology but we cannot do that at the expense of environmental integrity.

Water quality management for a healthy South Africa

Marking the World Water Day on 22 March 2010, the Bolivian President, Evo Morales, called on the United Nations to declare 'access to safe drinking water' a basic human right. As Honourable Members are surely aware, South Africa is among the few countries in the world that have '*access to water*' as a basic human right enshrined in the Constitution. It is in recognition of this fundamental constitutional obligation that we should respond as a matter of urgency to issues affecting various sectors and communities in respect of access to safe drinking water.

The Department pledged to work closely with municipalities to strengthen their capacity and to improve reporting on their water-quality systems. Those that pass the test are awarded Blue Drop certificates. I am pleased to report that last year we awarded twenty-two (22) systems with these certificates. We will now redouble our efforts to multiply these numbers. Our aim was to assess around 450 systems and it is edifying that so many municipalities are eager to improve both their systems and their reporting, in a bid for Blue Drop status.

The 2010 FIFA Host Cities Blue Drop Certification Report on Drinking Water Quality rated all our host cities as "excellent". This is not only highly encouraging, but sets the bar at a high level for others to emulate. D-Day for the Soccer World Cup is fast-approaching, and it's gratifying to know that we can confidently assure our visitors, and the citizens of the world, that our water is safe to drink.

I know that the release of the green drop is long overdue. There has been much speculation about its contents and I must say that the general state of our waste water treatment works is not very pleasing, however it must be noted that there are pockets of excellence even in some of our small towns. It must also be borne in mind that the document is only reporting on 55% of waste water treatment facilities in the country and as such the department did not want to be tempted by

speculative statements on the rest of the sector. I undertake to release the report in about two weeks or so

Pollution from mining activities

There is a big problem of Acid Mine Drainage in the Witwatersrand area which threatens our ground water resources and the very integrity of the environment and human survival. Even the famous Cradle of Humankind, a World Heritage site is under threat. We are currently engaged with short term interventions to alleviate the worst effects, but the time has come for those responsible to account for their actions.

An intermediate solution is needed for the central basin in order to avert major problems in the Johannesburg and the Vaal areas. We set aside R6,9 million for work over a three month period on this. We also need a sustainable long term strategy to manage this. I hope you will be encouraged when I tell you that we are presently hard at work with mining operators in search of a lasting solution.

Honourable Members, I wish to emphasize that we made these interventions in the western basin as government to avert a catastrophe. We cannot sit back as government and allow the situation to degenerate into a crisis. The bottom line is that the mine owners have an obligation to deal with environmental problems such as these in terms of the rights and obligations they inherited from the previous owners.

Polluters must indeed pay and in this regard we are already well ahead in consolidating a framework to deal with this matter as initiated by the Minister of National Treasury. We are also concerned about the issue of ownerless mines which is a matter we are already jointly dealing with, with the Department of Mineral Resources.

Enforcement, compliance and monitoring

We are in the process of strengthening our enforcement capacity to deal with water crimes. Our Constitution guarantees citizens the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health, and further makes a commitment to the prevention of pollution and degradation. We are all aware of the problems emanating from the pollution of our rivers and streams – an incident which compromises the quality of our raw water to a great deal. Also, a substantial proportion of water scarcity and pollution is caused by criminal acts, including illegal abstraction and the diversion of rivers by greedy farmers to serve their own needs at the expense of communities downstream.

You will be pleased to note that the department has done a lot to crack the whip on many of these defaulters. In the financial year 2009/10, we have issued a total of 239 directives, 31 of these have been resolved positively and 14 are currently before the courts. The rest of these are undergoing the rigorous process of being resolved. We will intensify this aspect of our work and ensure that we bring to book all offenders in this regard.

I am also pleased to announce that we have increased the capacity of the Blue Scorpions. A total number of Fourteen Water Management Inspectors have been recruited and trained in our Enforcement, Compliance and Monitoring programme. A Regulation Branch will be established to attract the right level of expertise and enhance our regulatory capacity.

Effective Local Government Support

Honourable Members, we are now prioritising Focused Support to Local Government for Sustained Water Delivery. One of the key pillars of the Local Government Turn Around strategy is the focus on improved access and provision of water to communities. We are committed to working closely with the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) to ensure successful implementation of this strategy.

The Department's effort to support local government has historically been focused on building and strengthening the administrative, institutional and financial capabilities of municipalities for delivery of services, particularly to struggling municipalities. This included hands-on technical support through deployment of engineers in collaboration with key sector partners. However, due to challenges related to non-compliance and ageing infrastructure, the Department subsequently reviewed its support strategy, and presently addresses these issues by placing more emphasis on regulatory support. This includes positioning and implementing systems to monitor compliance with drinking water quality and effluent discharge standards at municipal level, together with water conservation, demand management, and the deployment of technical expertise to guide the compliance processes.

Honourable Members, it is opportune therefore to note that the Local Government Turnaround Strategy provides both a vehicle and a structure to enable CoGTA to work together with us to fast track the implementation of this strategic move. Further, effort is directed towards building the supporting bulk infrastructure for social needs, including the refurbishment of existing infrastructure, such as waste water treatment plants and water services infrastructure in some risk areas.

Groundwater exploration programme

The Department will be implementing a comprehensive National Groundwater Strategy this financial year. This strategy is aimed at full utilisation of groundwater resources in conjunction with surface water. Studies suggest that we are using less than 30% of renewable groundwater resources. This number has to be increased to at least 50% if we are to effectively address the challenges of water supply to our communities, especially in rural communities where there is most need. We will work with local government through our Regional Offices to ensure an integrated and holistic approach which takes into account economies of scale.

Water for Growth and Development

Honourable Members, you will also recall that during 2009, I convened a series of Provincial Water Summits – covering all provinces with the exception of Gauteng and Northern Cape, and which are by no means excluded – and through which various stakeholders came together to deliberate on critical challenges facing the water sector, with the objective of finding common solutions to such challenges in a collaborative and inclusive manner.

At the Summits, I urged all stakeholders to elevate water to priority status in provincial development planning, and to form Provincial Water Committees to strengthen integrated planning, and to give oversight on programme implementation. To their credit, all Provincial Water Summits acknowledged the critical importance of water in supporting key provincial functions, including agriculture, rural development, health, environment, tourism and economic development.

Elevating water to the high table of national deliberations is the critical factor which I believe will contribute to economic growth and development. Accordingly, later this year, I will convene a national summit which will among others work to synthesize the deliberations and common trends and water challenges emanating from the various provincial summits.

This will also help us to craft a more integrated national action plan to address water challenges and to determine support mechanism required to deal with these. We also should emerge even better positioned to streamline water in provincial developments.

Water conversation and demand management

South Africa has limited water resources hence water is a finite resource which requires a firmly entrenched management. We cannot, in all conscience, let this matter rest, or delay any longer.

The facts should act as a clarion call for urgent and decisive action. I implore you to raise your voices together with mine. Let us roll up our sleeves and start the fight-back against water wastage and scarcity. Let us produce a chorus of concern and muster a movement of water conscious citizens who are determined to stop at nothing in preserving, sustaining and renewing this valuable resource.

We will not be alone in raising our voices for some decisive action. Today we are joined by a cadre of young activists who will add their compelling voices to our chorus. I'm referring to three stars of television: *Katlego from Home Affairs, Dineo from Society, and Bafana from Chisa* – who are touring our country talking to communities in towns and villages, to other young people, to women, to learners, to heads of households, to everyone who will listen – about the importance of water, the value of water, including water saving tips for efficient use in homes, in work-places, and even in our various recreational spaces.

Promotion of rural development

The role played by our Natural resources management programmes in poverty alleviation and job creation is commendable. These programmes such as *Working for Water, Working on Fire* and *Working for Land*, as well as the sibling *Working for Wetlands* programme, cut across the mandates of several departments and other organs of state.

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 creating more work per amount invested in these programmes.

In my own Performance Agreement with the President, I shall commit that we produce 2,468,800 days of work during 2010/11, through the *Working for Water* programme. We shall 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.

With regard to *Working for Land*, I shall further commit that we produce 122,437 days of work during 2010/11, 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*.

Honourable Members, the *Working on Fire* programme will also ensure that its additional budget creates more work opportunities. Here, in my Performance Agreement with the President, I shall commit that we 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!

An additional focus will be to create more widespread, targeted fire-fighting capacities in rural poor areas, working alongside the Community Works Programme.

I wish to place on record that my commitments in my Performance Contract with the President will not undermine co-operative governance. The outcomes of the work undertaken in these programmes will still be balanced to meet the mandates of the several departments which the programmes serve.

Contribution to global relations

Honourable Members, I think you will agree that “a better Africa means a better World”. South Africa has been honoured with the chairmanship of the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW) for a period of two years. This is a daunting responsibility which requires us to lead with integrity and precision. Most importantly, we cannot urge others to do things which we are unwilling to do ourselves. In accepting this position we draw inspiration from Frantz Fanon, one of Africa’s revolutionary icons whose prophetic voice echoes our vision and commitment. “Africa shall be free. Yes, but it must get to work, it must not lose sight of its own unity.” We reaffirmed our pledge to strengthen global relations, and to build the pool of skills and best practice needed to take the water agenda forward on the continent. Water must be a catalyst for unity and peace rather than divisions and war.

Together with our counterparts in the continent, we will use this responsibility to instill a sense of ownership and responsibility of our water resources. We must harness our energies to achieve best practice in water management in the continent but most importantly, we will forge African Unity and set a continental benchmark in effective water management.

Our Hosting of the 2nd Africa Water Week in November 2009 in Johannesburg was a great success, and we will continue to strive for an even better African platform for engagement and dialogue.

We are determined to build a stronger partnership among African countries to increase access to water and sanitation, based on the principles of shared responsibility and mutual accountability. Through the joint political weight of the AU and other leading political groupings, like the EU and G8, we will ensure adequate momentum and commitment on water improvements at national, regional and international levels, for concrete results on the ground.

We will also ensure that we spare no effort in making our own contribution towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by the Continent. It is an undeniable reality that the water challenges in the continent compromise our potential in social and economic growth. The problems of poverty, disease and migration are exacerbated by the scarce water resources in our continent.

Effective management of State Resources

Honourable Members, I am pleased to report that we are improving the way we manage state resources. As you are well aware, we have in the past years received adverse audit opinion from the office of the Auditor-General. We have since restored order to our housekeeping and managed to achieve an unqualified audit report. We will continue with the implementation of the financial management improvement plan to sustain the gains made during the 2008/09 Financial Year.

Concluding remarks

Honourable Members, our responsibility is to serve our people with distinction. We cannot say that we have achieved that unless we have helped honour our President's pledge, which is 'never to rest until every one of us has access to water'.

Water is the essence of life, the lubricant of life itself. Without water there can be no life. With water there can, indeed, be a better life for all. Accordingly, we table this Budget Vote with a strong conviction that as we strain to create a prosperous country of dignified citizens, water is a key element.

Thank You