

The Water and Poverty Alleviation Dialogue for Action

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

Durban City Hall

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Programme Director

Chairperson of the Select Committee on Land and Environmental Affairs: Honorable Ms Daphne Qikani

Mayor of EtheKwini representative: Chief Whip:

Cllr Fawzia Peer

Head of Danish Development Aid: Mr Carsten Laugensen

Dr May Mashego, wife of the Premier of KwaZulu Natal

Councillors

Government officials

Parastatals

Civil Society groupings and community representatives

International stakeholders

Researchers and Academics

Members of the media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

It gives me great pleasure to be here today to open this dialogue on Water and Poverty Alleviation. The department is leading an initiative on Water for Growth and Development which is a framework to deal with issues of water security and poverty alleviation in South Africa.

With only five years left until the 2015 deadline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), world leaders gathered in a summit in New York during the month of September to accelerate progress towards the MDGs. The message coming out of this summit attended by about 140 Heads of States was clear “LET US KEEP THE PROMISE”

This is the promise to reduce poverty, combating disease, fighting hunger, protecting the environment and boosting education – and to accelerate progress to reach the Goals by their 2015 target date.

It is against this background that I remind you of the global and national commitment towards ensuring that we put poverty and water issues on the Agenda in order to minimize the inequalities in our country. Lack of access to safe, hygienic and private sanitation facilities is a source of indignity, physical discomfort and insecurity for women and girls in particular.

Time burden of collecting and carrying water contributes to gender gaps in school attendance. In Mozambique, rural Senegal and eastern Uganda women spend on average 15–17 hours week collecting water.

I am therefore extremely pleased to see such a broad spectrum of stakeholders and colleagues from other government departments who have taken the time to be here.

The debates on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) tend to focus upon the planning and management aspects from a “theoretical higher level” in recognizing that water is a finite and vulnerable resource that has to be managed holistically in order to sustain life, development and the environment.

It is essential that marginalized communities have the capacity to manage their assets, (e.g. water and land) and to be able to interact with those who influence their access to resources and who impact upon their livelihoods and community well-being. The many communities here are able to provide evidence of what can be achieved if they are provided with the right catalyst.

Solutions for sustainable development require integrated approaches. Whilst this conference takes its point of departure in the water sector, it is from the point of view of water as a catalyst for development. The conference addresses: local level IWRM and local level water for economic development, proposes solutions to improve livelihoods and community wellbeing.

Moreover, the conference is about “giving dreams a chance”, that is, to recognise the aspirations of the poor to improve their situation through their own capacities and determination.

As the demands on our scarce water resources increase, and as the impacts of global climate change begin to bite, business and households alike are beginning to feel the risks associated with availability and quality of water.

While this may be seen as a challenge, it also presents an opportunity to engage both inside and outside the water sector with the issue of water management, to raise water on the political agenda, and to build the linkages between water, economic and social development.

Increasingly, other government departments, the commercial sector and households are recognizing that water is integral to development.

In many countries the argument for not “doing things” is that there is in-sufficient capacity or there is some ambiguity in the legislation and as a result we find ourselves frequently in a situation of apathy, under-development and continued disempowerment of the poor and the marginalised.

This conference will put forward solutions that build upon local capacities and solutions for sustainable development with IWRM as the catalyst. The conference will focus upon the thesis that much can be achieved if communities are empowered to shape their own destinies and to fill those gaps where governments consider they lack the capacity to deliver.

As government civil servants we must not be afraid when empowered communities make a stand and voice their concerns.

This has been the case on a number of occasions with some of the projects that are represented here today.

The Danish International Development Agency (Danida) funded a number of the Integrated Water Resources Management programmes here in eThekweni and elsewhere.

I know that in a number of cases, funds were disbursed to support activities that fall outside the responsibility of the Department but this was done to demonstrate what needs to be done to make things happen. A delay in a decision from one Department or another can have a major impact on the ability of marginalised communities to progress and improve their wellbeing and livelihoods.

We should also bear in mind that many of the projects implemented under the umbrella of the Danida funded IWRM programme fulfilled a service delivery role of government.

A considerable number of projects dealt with food security in relation to the poor, HIV/AIDS, water conservation awareness, fixing taps and leaks and another group of projects undertook monitoring functions (groundwater and climate change).

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that as leaders in various capacities we should not rest until every citizen has access to basic water and decent sanitation.

Working together we can sustain water security.

Working together we can push back the frontiers of poverty.

Thank you