



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address to the Opening Session of the Stockholm World Water Week Delivered by Mr Trevor Balzer, Acting Director General (Department of Water Affairs) on behalf of Honourable Rejoice Mabudafhasi, MP, Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Republic of South Africa, in Stockholm, Sweden

“Responding to Global Changes: Water in an Urbanising World”.

22 August 2011

Programme Director

Ministers

Excellencies

Laurettes

Distinguished guests

Congress participants

Ladies and gentlemen

Programme Director!

Let me extend warm greetings on behalf of the people in the Republic of South Africa, to Honourable Minister Gunilla Carlson and Swedish people, for having hosted South Africans for many years to the Stockholm World Water Week.

Allow me to pay tribute to the late liberation stalwart Professor Kader Asmal who was the first Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry of the South African Democratic

Government. In 2000, Professor Asmal was awarded the Stockholm Water Prize Laureate. Who passed away in June of this year.

Our participation in the Stockholm World Water Week has enabled us to share information, showcase policies and legislative initiatives, institutional governance, and to promote innovative and diversified initiatives for example water conservation, active participation of youth and women in water resource management to name just a few. The Republic of South Africa would like to thank you for creating an enabling environment for growth and development of the water sector in our country.

The water sector globally is faced with several challenges including climate variability and change, industrialisation, water quality, unaccounted for water, water availability and accessibility, South Africa is not immune to these challenges. Climate change will have a drastic impact on the world's water resources hence it should be top priority for the water sector globally. An increased global temperature will lead to changes in the water cycle that will affect people's livelihoods and development opportunities. Millions of people will face water scarcity, and will have to deal with water hazards including floods, droughts and glacier-melt.

As you are all aware South Africa will be hosting the COP17 in December in Durban. The effects of climate are by now well documented. The question might be whether the documentation is sufficiently interacted with, understood and put to life. Africa and the Small Island States will, according to the most optimistic projections, experience the worst effects of climate change. Today's starvation levels experienced in Africa will look like a biblical "land of milk and honey" as compared to what shall be when African food production drops by 50% the predicted and flooding in the coastal areas become the order of the day in the wake of the effects of climate change.

Nations will rise against each other when desertification drives some to invade others and compete for the ever-shrinking space that shall be left. Without being in anyway alarmist, it is safe to summarize that as a result of climate change things will indeed

fall apart, and the centre may hold and mere anarchy sets in. And among the issues to be highly impacted is water.

We hope that Adaptation issues will be at the centre of the Durban deal by ensuring a process for concrete implementation of adaptation activities, and recognizing that adaptation needs financial support, capacity building and technology from developed countries. Durban is expected to finalize an ambitious Adaptation Framework, develop guidelines and support for our National Adaptation Plans and build momentum towards a mechanism to compensate for climate-related losses and damage.

Allow me to share some of our interventions responding to climate change constraints. Our country is busy developing various interventions such as National Climate Change Response Policy which includes sectors such as water, agriculture, biodiversity, forestry, oceans, energy, health, tourism, local government, transport etc. Currently we are about to finalise the white paper on climate change which will be finalised before COP 17 in December 2011. The policy will take into consideration other existing policies.

Both urbanisation and industrialisation have advantages and disadvantages, some of these disadvantages are amongst others: inherited incorrect spatial planning, rezoning, rapid population growth, increased usage of mechanisation etc. These challenges are impacting negatively on our water resources in terms of pollution and increased demands of water by major sectors (mining, industry, agriculture) for developmental needs.

This calls for the global water sector community to join hands and share information in order to tackle the aforementioned factors. In South Africa industrialisation and urbanisation contributed to economic growth, on the other hand this resulted in major implications on our water and financial resources. With the election of a democratic government in 1994 various development opportunities emerged specifically in our metropolitan areas and this presented great opportunities for rural people to migrate to urban areas.

Due to this influx of rural people to urban areas pressure started to build up on basic services including water sanitation, electricity and housing. Many of these citizens relocated to the cities and bigger towns in search of a better life and job opportunities. The influx of people to the urban areas also gave rise to informal settlements that brought its own challenges with regard to the quality of our water resources. These areas traditionally do not have access to basic water and sanitation services and that resulted in pollution of our rivers and streams and that also poses both environmental risk and health hazards. Our government has prioritised the provision of basic services, and our targets are in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

The Department of Water Affairs as a custodian of water resources has been mandated to ensure that there is enough water for various sectors, thus the development of all Water for Growth and Development strategy which is aimed at balancing water demand and supply by various sectors. We have also developed sound regulations to manage our water resources, we have just established the Compliance, Monitoring and Enforcement Unit which monitors non compliance and takes action in areas where there is.

As I have mentioned earlier that our rivers and streams are polluted with mostly chemicals from industry, agriculture, waste etc, we have launched the Adopt a River Programme which is aimed at cleaning the highly polluted rivers whilst creating job opportunities and skills development for women especially in the rural areas. To date this programme has created 595 job opportunities for women in our country and has also improved the ecosystems. These rivers and the programme will be adopted by the local leaders and communities to ensure sustainability. Unaccounted water is also a big challenge in the water sector as a result of that we launched the War on Leaks Programme.

We adopted the principles set by the World Health Organisation for drinking water quality management in a form of Water Safety Planning, and applied it in the wastewater field of business as well. Our nation took the brave step to commence with

the introduction of Wastewater Risk Abatement Planning to ensure that we identify all possible risks posed to the environment by poor wastewater management and to subsequently manage or mitigate these identified risks. The first wastewater risk abatement plans are currently being implemented in the areas that suffered most due to the rapid urbanisation. We shared our concept with the World Health Organisation's Regulatory Network for Drinking Water Regulators in June in Cape Town, and will soon commence sharing this great initiative with the world.

We have also initiated the Green Drop certification programme which is an incentive-based regulation initiative to encourage excellence. This programme ensured that Local Government (who are the accountable authorities for these services) aspire higher than just minimum requirements in the endeavour to facilitate sustainable turn around. Our recently released Green Drop report clearly indicates that we are far from our wastewater service management targets, but we are certainly busy changing the tide.

We have also introduced the Blue Drop Certification programme to ensure that our drinking water quality management meets international standards. These approaches recently gained recognition from the American Academy for Environment Engineers.

Urbanisation has also brought with it the opportunity of consolidated wastewater management as we identified that more than 60% of the country's wastewater treatment (in terms of volume) occurs in the metro areas and this presents the opportunity to utilise the scarcely obtainable process controllers skills at the largest works that are responsible for large volumes of wastewater effluent.

In this regard the South African Government has taken several initiatives to improve water and wastewater quality including the training of process controllers, with a focus on our rural areas.

In conclusion I would like to remind all of you that we are left with less than 4 months towards COP17 scheduled for November - December in Durban. South Africa and Africa is ready to host this important and historical event. As the water sector let us ensure that Adaptation issues will be at the centre of the Durban deal by ensuring a process for concrete implementation of adaptation activities, and recognizing that adaptation needs financial support, capacity building and technology from developed countries.

Durban is expected to finalize an ambitious Adaptation Framework, develop guidelines and support for our National Adaptation Plans and build momentum towards a mechanism to compensate for climate-related losses and damage.

On that note, let me take this opportunity and wish you very fruitful and robust World Water Week discussion under the theme "Responding to Global Changes: Water in an Urbanising World".

I thank you all.