



**water affairs**

Department:  
Water Affairs  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

## **DEPUTY MINISTER MABUDAFHASI SPEAKING NOTES**

### **GENDER, WATER AND DEVELOPMENT; IN SUPPORT OF AMCOW GENDER STRATEGY**

**World Water Week Side Event**

**5th September, 2013; Venue: Rica Talk Hotel;**

**Time 10:00 am – 12:30 noon**

Mr Dhesigen Naidoo, Chief Executive Officer of the Water Research Commission of South Africa;

Dr Rosemary Rop from the World Bank, Water and Sanitation Program;

Mr Oseloka Zikori from the African Ministers Council on Water;

Dr Alice Bouman from the Women in Water Partnership;

Dr Barbara van Koppen from the International Water Management Institute;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning and thank you for joining us in this important workshop around Gender, Water and Development. I am probably like all of us here in this room aspiring for enhancing our understanding of the relationship between gender, water and development.

The major task, which the international community is facing today in the field of water resources, is the transfer of committed obligations into concrete actions that need to be implemented on the ground for the benefit of people, ecosystems and the biosphere as a whole.

Nurturing the opportunities for cooperation in water management among all stakeholders and improving the comprehension of the challenges and benefits of water cooperation can help build mutual respect, understanding and trust among countries and promote peace, security and sustainable economic growth.

With all the numerous efforts for easing the plight of marginalised groups including women, we seem to make very small strides. Women continue to struggle, be it in education, employment and financial standing. Latest statistics report released in July 2013 in South Africa show that average annual household expenditure is higher for male-led families in comparison with women-led homes.

Even in death, the registration of women who have died is much lower compared to the registration of dead men. According to this gender report, men were more likely to be employed than women, regardless of race. The figures indicated that 72.6% of white men were employed, 56.1% of white women, 42.8% black men, and 30.8% of black women.

You will agree with me that this is not true only for South Africa. Many developing as well as developed countries are dealing with similar figures. But in my mind, it is not all doom and gloom. Just last week I awarded 14 deserving women awards for distinguished achievements in 4 categories; Adopt a River, Education and Awareness, Water Conservation and Community Development. Success stories of struggles that have produced heroes are numerous out there and we find great joy and dividends to recognise and reward those successes.

Continuing with the success thrust; there is international consensus to treat gender as a precondition for the achievement of social and economic development objectives.

The Rio Conference on Environment & Development in 1992, the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 that promulgated Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development all emphasized and demanded that gender mainstreaming be the priority for human and sustainable development. Water is also now considered a high priority particularly for developing countries to meet international targets and national social, environmental and development objectives.

AMCOW subscribes to these international policy pronouncements and has made its commitment, it is convinced that mainstreaming gender in water resources management makes a difference. AMCOW perceives gender equality and women's empowerment, not only as a human rights issue, but a pathway to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development.

In May 2011, AMCOW launched its Policy and Strategy for Mainstreaming Gender in Africa's Water Sector. The Strategy provides a coherent framework enabling different implementing and policy organisations undertake and monitor activities aimed at mainstreaming gender across different and sometimes competing users and sectors that have water as a critical input.

Many implementing agents are already putting plans forward for implementing the AMCOW gender strategy; several others are assessing their own activities on gender in water related sectors with a view to identifying how they can improve on the performance in the context of Africa's gender strategy. This workshop is aimed at doing that as well. Sharing, taking stock and in this year of cooperation identify potential partnerships to create the desired impact in the lives of many women in Africa.

The active participation of women in water development and management and decision making at all levels of governance has subsequently been championed by grassroots movements, advocacy and professional networks, the United Nations and other governmental organisations and donor programmes. While this has resulted in some progress in including women in the access to water and also the management of water resources, it is especially women's inclusion in decision making about water development and management from the lowest to the highest level which is still lagging behind.

The gender gaps have increased in a changing physical, political and economic landscape with increasing competition for scarce land and water resources, necessitating innovative solutions to the gender, class and race divides.

Yet research on the different gendered uses of water is still limited and fragmented, typically relying on anecdotal evidence and lacking historical and political-economical depth, while the impact of such research on influencing policy making and implementation strategies also remain largely unfathomed. Dialogue between grassroots movements, civil society, policy makers, practitioners and researchers has been limited.

The pace of gender research and civil society and policy advocacy for gender equality in the water sector is therefore slow and is exacerbated by a scarcity of funding, while an urgent need to build out the limited research skills capacity in this sector has been identified.

To address this need, The Water Research Commission of South Africa, in partnership with the Department of Water Affairs of South Africa, Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), the African Ministers Council On Water (AMCOW), and the International Organisation of the Women for Water Partnership (WfWP), are hosting a conference on gender and water;

one of its aims is to address how best the recent AMCOW Gender Strategy can be addressed and rolled out, in a meaningful and practical way that will make a real difference to the lives of poor women and men in Africa.

The Gender and Water conference will be hosted in East London from 19 to 21st February 2014. It aims to bring together a wide range of people from inside and outside the water sector to engage, debate and find solutions to these challenges, and through this to assist AMCOW, African countries and other developing nations to address the developmental challenges of gender, poverty and water. You are all encouraged to come to South Africa in February next year to our beautiful East London in our beautiful Eastern Cape province.

I thank you....