



MINISTRY
WATER AND SANITATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Programme Director,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Friends and members of the water and sanitation family,

Good evening,

This year South Africa celebrates 20 years of freedom and democracy, and this brings with it an occasion for us to reflect on how our freedom and democracy were achieved, the progress we have made over the past 20 years, and on how South Africans are working together to implement Vision 2030. Indeed, today's occasion gives us an opportunity to continue on our relentless drive of telling the story of the last 20 years of democracy.

The legacy and scars of apartheid brutality, built on racial tyranny in our country, has triggered the aspirations of our people to be sacrificed on the altar of inequality, poverty and unemployment. We shall never shy away from mentioning this reality, despite the false assertion in some quarters that apartheid died on the 27th April, 1994, presided over by the former President Nelson Rholihlahla Mandela.

The facts are there for all to see. In 1994, South Africa's newly democratically elected government inherited huge service backlogs with respect to access to water supply. About 15 million people were without safe water supply and over

20 million without adequate and safe sanitation services. The government thus made a strong commitment to increase service standards and to increase levels of investment subsidies to achieve those standards. Since then, the country has made good progress with regard to improving access to water supply.

*Undoubtedly, the move from 59% access to water services in 1994 to more than 95% in 2013 was a remarkable achievement. However, notwithstanding this achievement, our strategic goal can only be universal, 100% access to safe water and decent sanitation because, as we all know, **Water is Life and Sanitation is Dignity.***

Programme Director,

Let it be known to all and sundry that we will not rest until a MaDhlamini in her rural small holding in Lusikisiki has dignified sanitation in her home, adequate water for the needs of her family and her small subsistence farm and her few chickens. We will not rest until her grandchildren are able to go to the local school every day without having to first spend two hours in the morning walking to the local river to fetch water, with the young girls being vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse while doing so.

This, ladies and gentlemen is a fundamental issue. We have just commemorated Women's Month in South Africa and are currently in the 16 Days of Activism with a big lens on violence against women and children. In our domain of water and sanitation, we are forever conscious that one of the theatres of abuse is in these very rural and peri-urban spaces where women and young girls are forced to, on a daily basis, put themselves at risk to either fetch water or conduct their ablutions in unsafe places because there is no toilet at home.

I put it to you ladies and gentlemen that the very act of not ensuring that women and girls have safe water and sanitation access is in itself an act of violence against women and children.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must today declare ourselves crusaders for a safe environment in South Africa for our women and girls, and indeed for all our vulnerable people. For this water family, our goal must be the achievement of 100% access to safe and sustainable water and sanitation as soon as possible.

Yet we live in a water scarce country, in a time of local and global economic contraction. In these lean resource times, the only countries that will be successful are those that make higher investments in and have a higher reliance on innovation and science driven solutions. If Necessity is the Mother of Invention, then this mother is shouting out. The birth pangs of innovation are getting stronger and stronger. Sekunjalo!

I am confident that we can do it because we are enjoined by the vision of our National Development Plan whose tenets are people-centred and development oriented. I am confident also because we are all standing together as a family of water and sanitation; especially now being a few weeks away from the completion of twenty years of democracy.

Indeed, I can say, that one of the treasures of this water family is our water science and technology community led by our institution, the Water Research Commission. The science brothers and sisters in this water family have grown the water science and technology base, and have ensured that in these twenty years of our democracy we have become a global player of note. Our research production has put us at number eighteen in the world, remarkable for a small country like ours. We also produce more than 1.6% of the global share of papers in the water resources domain; this is more than twice the national average when compared to the average across all scientific disciplines.

As a scientific field in South Africa, water also demonstrates one of the highest rates of conversion of knowledge into real and workable solutions when considering the paper to patent ratio. We can confidently stand here this evening

and say that water science and technology is one of the fruits of our struggle for democracy as the track record of the last twenty years has shown.

Government wants to do more. We have a collective recognition that water is a pivotal component to our economic development and sanitation is a base indicator for our quality of life. We are also acutely aware of the complex challenges associated with further investing in our resource base to stimulate economic growth and the vagaries of the challenge of Climate Change. While our current levels of water science and innovation is good, we need a step up change to the next level of the game.

This is why, even in these lean times, Minister Naledi Pandor announced in her first budget vote speech of this fifth administration that a research Centre of Excellence in Water will be established, and our plan is to have this operational in 2015. The Water Research Commission is working closely with the National Research Foundation, the Department of Science and Technology and our own Department of Water and Sanitation to make this happen.

We will through these four institutions set up the funding mechanisms to make the South African Centre of Excellence in Water an important global knowledge node to serve South Africa, Africa, the developing world and indeed our partners in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Once again, the story of water research and development in South Africa over the last twenty years, since Tata Madiba led us into democracy, is a good story. It is a story that is giving us confidence to do two things.

Firstly, is to demand more of you. As the Minister charged with this crucially important portfolio of water and sanitation, I will always demand more from all of us. To pretend to do otherwise, will be an injustice to our people; and when I see something or someone working well, I want them to stretch themselves to do more for our people. It is good for the country and it is good for you.

The world's water and sanitation challenges are becoming increasingly complex and globally we need higher levels of knowledge, inclusive knowledge, innovation and ingenuity to ensure a water successful future. We also have ambitions to become a net global supplier of water and sanitation solutions in the world.

As water becomes increasingly scarce globally, the market opportunities for science based solutions also increases. The present challenge is to organize South Africa's water science and technology to help stimulate the development of a vibrant Water and Sanitation Industry, both public and private that will make us globally competitive as a country.

Secondly is the support we will provide. The Water Research Commission already has my personal attention and government will invest in the water science and technology enterprise, not only for the development of our sector, but to also help realize the larger goal of a prosperous South Africa is that of a knowledge-based economy.

As the ANC-led government we are committed to our Manifesto's goal of attaining a 1.5% GDP spend on research and development, as one of the important means to achieve this end.

And finally, as we gather here in this hallowed ground in Freedom Park, with the blessing of the spirits of those that made the ultimate sacrifice for us to have a better South Africa, I am pleased to have you join me in launching this celebration of achievement of a young democracy, this book: South Africa's 20-year journey in water and sanitation research.

Dankie.

Ngiyabonga.

