

Speaking Notes for video interview

Minister Mokonyane at the opening of the WRC RDI Symposium

16 September 2015, Birchwood, Gauteng

The global water and sanitation dialogue has become more urgent and candid, and the general mood more solution oriented. As we approach the finalization and adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, there are a few matters that are becoming increasingly clear:

1. The awareness of water both as the primary risk to the Global Economy as assessed by the World Economic Forum, as well as the route to Green Growth and Sustainable Development now has universal acknowledgement across all geographical regions, among all stakeholder sectors and indeed over all political ideologies. The translation of this appreciation into real action and investment is of course highly variable, but, the uniqueness of this point in history remains this collective acknowledgement of better water management as the route to a more sustainable future and one that we should build on;
2. That in every major global gathering, be it the World Water Week or the World Water Forum in Rep of Korea before it or the various preparation meetings for the SDGs or the Paris COP21, the plight of the world's marginalized – women, youth, people with disability and the newer phenomenon of displaced people in the form of refugees clearly need a special focus, and;
3. That no "business as usual" pathway in any sector will get us anywhere near the SDG targets in water and sanitation.

We therefore need disruptive innovation to enable a step change in our water and sanitation fortunes.

While it is always important to create new knowledge, we must do this in a manner that facilitates the rapid use of that knowledge in the real economy. In my first engagements with the WRC I set out three tasks for the institution:

1. To, in partnership with the relevant government departments and the broader R&D community both locally and internationally, facilitate a more rapid pathways from the laboratory to changes on the everyday water and sanitation fortunes of people on the ground,
2. To, in this process, help us develop a much more robust water industry with higher participation of the private sector with inclusion mechanisms of the previously and indeed currently marginalized groups in this country, in particular women and the youth, and,
3. To organize for us to take our rightful place as an important international partner to ensure the realization of the water and sanitation goals of not only this country, but also that of Africa, the global South and the world as a whole.

I am pleased to see that the design of the Symposium and Water Tech Summit has been organized to meet these objectives robustly. The quest to further entrench the pathways to impact as described by the six baskets of the WRC Knowledge Tree. These impact baskets

are – informing policy and decision making with good science, developing new products for the real economy, developing human capital, empowering our communities directly, creating sustainable development solutions and of course taking forward the Transformation Project. The achievement of the SDGs are only possible with a very high injection of new knowledge based solutions, disruptive innovation – technological and social as well as high levels of investment. Eventually though, the critical success factor will be partnership. Partnerships between governments, the private sector, Academia and Civil Society. In this regard I am happy that an old comrade Andile Ncgaba, a successful businessman and one of South Africa's captains of industry is going to continue this conversation from a private sector perspective.

Colleagues, delegates to this WRC Symposium and Water Tech Summit, my expectations are high. They are high not only because of the need and urgency of water and sanitation in this country and around the world, not only because in the wake of climate change we may well be the last generation that can still choose to be on a more sustainable pathway, not only because we have finally got the attention of Boardrooms around the world with the Global Risk report;

But also because I know the quality of people in this room. I know the passion of the people in this room. I know the resolve of the people in this room. I wish you the best with the Symposium and Summit and know that we will be more empowered partners going forward.