



**water & sanitation**

Department:  
Water and Sanitation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEECH FOR DEPUTY MINISTER OF  
WATER AND SANITATION, SOUTH  
AFRICA, HON. D. M. MAHLOBO, M.P.,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE VIRTUAL  
BIO AFRICA CONVENTION**

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**SESSION TITLE: WATER, SANITATION  
AND HYGIENE (WASH) AND COVID-19:  
AFRICA'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19  
AND BEYOND DATE.**

Elevating the African water agenda is about prioritising the water agenda on the continental, regional and national agendas. It is also about raising the value of inter-African cooperation and partnerships in responding to the water and sanitation challenges.

South Africa therefore calls for partnerships to develop a water and sanitation flagship programme that could be initiated during its AU chair-ship.

We are proud of the fact that South Africa continues to play a key and active role within the African Continent in advancing and contributing to the water agenda. Within SADC South Africa is active in advancing the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) approach, as well as working within the various SADC structures which requires engagement with other sectors that have a bearing on what we do in the sector.

Furthermore, South Africa through the Department of Water and Sanitation, Stellenbosch University and in collaboration with the AU and Southern African Network of Water Centre of Excellence cooperate and combine their respective expertise in the training, scholarships, research, and innovation programmes within the SADC region.

The main areas of cooperation within the water and sanitation sector include skills planning, research, sharing best practices and leveraging mutually beneficial programmes.

This cooperation will strengthen networks and pockets of excellence with multi-sectoral stakeholders (water supply, research, innovators, funders, government etc.) to share best practices in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare the continent for rapid and effective response to future waterborne health infections.

Within AMCOW South Africa has played a significant role in the successful development and deployment of the first web-based AMCOW reporting tool. The integrated Pan Africa web-based reporting system was launched during Africa Day at the Stockholm World Water Week in September 2016, which was a first for both Africa and the world. This system will ultimately be fully aligned to all global reporting systems.

The AMCOW tool is also fully aligned to the SDG reporting process. It incorporates all the water and sanitation indicators pertaining to SDG Goal 6, in addition to the Africa specific indicators.

South Africa welcomes the opportunity to participate in the future development process of the reporting tool, and should the need arise, we are ready to share that monitoring and evaluation insight and technical expertise.

In the African Union, South Africa continues to contribute to the key elements of Agenda 2063, which is a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over the next 50 years.

Agenda 2063 builds on, and seeks to accelerate the implementation of past and existing continental initiatives for growth and sustainable development.

It is important to build a capable African water sector. We need to identify the skills gaps at all levels of the water sector value chain, strengthen and coordinate efforts/partnerships to implement educational and training programmes to close the gaps.

The role of youth and women remains critical in building a capable water sector in Africa thus strengthening water entrepreneurship amongst the youth and women, including capacity-building exchange programmes and initiatives.

South Africa through the Department of Water and Sanitation has a Graduate Trainee Programme designed to meet specific water and sanitation sector requirements and lead a sustained campaign to secure a steady supply of high-level skills in water-related science, engineering, and various technical disciplines.

This Programme responds to the imperatives mentioned, with a dual focus on providing aspiring engineers, scientists, hydrologists, technologists and technicians while offering them an opportunity to be exposed to real-time professional, on-the job training, mentoring and coaching, including valuable work experiences.

We can all agree that water is key and central as the first line of defence against the scourge of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 crisis continues to affect the entire world economy and more so that of Africa. Many African economies remain informal and very vulnerable to external shocks such as COVID-19.

It has therefore become critical for the continent to have an integrated and coordinated approach to assess the key measures being taken by selected African Union Member States to mitigate the negative effects, not just of COVID-19, but any other pandemic that might afflict the Continent.

Increased innovations in technology present opportunities for water utilities to integrate these smart technologies in their existing infrastructure. This will help to minimize cost, while maximising the selection of the most suitable solutions that can be easily adapted to local conditions, also assisting with adaptation.

Scientists in Africa are taking a proactive stance in the fight against COVID-19 across the continent by sharing information, clinical testing and trying to find innovative ways to apply African knowledge to the pandemic.

Countries should continue sharing best practices on innovative ideas and research in order to strengthen the coordinated response to global disasters and pandemics such as COVID-19.

Enabling and promoting the culture of innovation in the water sector is important. It must include dedicated funding to promote innovation and establish procurement processes that will enable and provide incentives for innovative solutions to address local water and sanitation challenges.

Innovation will continue to be a critical pillar in the water sector and therefore, it is critical to ensure mobilization of finance and investments in science, technology, research and innovation.

The provision of basic services including health, nutrition, education, shelter and water are critical enablers in the water sector.

As Ministries and Agencies responsible for water, it is critical that we make available the budgets for innovative ideas that will assist the sector to perform better in its mandate of supplying potable water and sanitation

Also, it is important that our water institutions such as the WRC forge effective partnerships within the continent to ensure sharing of best practices, in technology in the water sector.

The continent has a Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) to ensure that we deliver sustainable and resilient infrastructure.

The overall goal of PIDA is to promote socio-economic development and poverty reduction in Africa through improved access to integrated regional and continental infrastructure networks and services.

It is important that policy must be evidence-based and that we elevate science research and innovation to be backbone of policy development.

With the emergence of digital revolution, nations have woken up to the realities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution which require a different modus operandi including performing remotely, but still delivering effective results.

Within SADC, there is a Regional Infrastructure Master Plan which guides development in key infrastructure projects such as road, rail and ports, and also acts as a framework for planning and cooperation with development partners and the private sector.

In his capacity as Chairperson of the African Union, the President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa, has provided the necessary leadership by appointing Dr Ngozi Okonjo-

Iweala, Dr Donald Kaberuka, Mr Tidjane Thiam and Mr Trevor Manuel as Special Envoys of the African Union to mobilise international support for Africa's efforts to address the economic challenges African countries will face as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Special Envoys have been tasked with soliciting rapid and concrete support as pledged by the G20, the European Union and other international financial institutions.

In the final analysis, it is on platforms like these that we share expertise and views on how the continent's water sector policies, regulations, research agenda and partnerships should be structured. This will ensure that we build a resilient and capable water sector that can respond well to COVID-19 and the resultant impact on the Continent's economy.

**I thank you.**