



NATIONAL WATER & SANITATION SUMMIT

18-19 February 2022

WATER IS LIFE. SANITATION IS DIGNITY.



REMARKS FOR THE MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION AT THE NATIONAL WATER AND SANITATION SUMMIT, GALLAGHER ESTATE, MIDRAND ON 18 FEBRUARY 2022

1. SALUTATIONS AND INTRODUCTION

Program Director, Mr David Mahlobo (Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation),
Cabinet Colleagues present here today,
Deputy Minister Dikeledi Magadzi,
Deputy Ministers,
Honourable Premiers and MECs,
Honourable Mayors,
Chairpersons of our Water Entities,
Stakeholders in the water sector from various fields,
Director-General of the Department of Water and Sanitation, Dr Sean Phillips,
Members of Academia,
Professionals in select fields,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen.

Firstly, let me take the time to thank all of you for honoring our invitation to be part of the National Water and Sanitation Summit. Since our appointment to the Ministry of Water and Sanitation by His Excellency, the President of our Republic, we have been traversing the country, conducting working sessions with various stakeholders in the water sector, engaging with Water Service Authorities and aggrieved communities, as well as visiting projects undertaken by the Department of Water and Sanitation; the decision to host a National Water and Sanitation Summit therefore came as a result of these engagements during our working sessions as it became glaring to us that we needed to find a way to accelerate our pace in responding to the clarion call of our people for universal and adequate access to clean and safe drinking water, and to industries for economic development as well as dignified sanitation. Ladies and gentlemen, I will be the first to admit that as Government, we have not been adequately performing on water and sanitation services,

neither have we adequately responded to the plight of our people, who still do not have access to water and sanitation – even when problems are pointed out.

The mantra of the Department of Water and Sanitation is *Water is Life. Sanitation is Dignity*. We have not lived up to this mantra in as far as the provision of Water and Sanitation to a segment of our society is concerned. This is due in part, to aging infrastructure, climate change resulting in prolonged drought in some areas and unsustainable use of water by our people. In 2021, statistics indicated that on average, water consumption in South Africa is 237 litres per capita per day compared to a world average of 173 litres per capita per day. The situation is both unacceptable and unsustainable. We have always maintained the view that water is everyone's business, hence the need to convene this Summit to tackle the issues head on in hopes of finding joint solutions to the challenges that the water sector is facing. The recent rains which have seen most, if not all dams filled to capacity, should not fool us into a state of comfort. There are more pressing issues, such as ensuring that the water reaches the intended recipients for social and economic development. The recent rains have also exposed our inadequate water storage capacity as much as it has exposed our poor planning and implementation.

As a department charged with ensuring water security and sanitation provision, we are aware of the task at hand to provide water provision guarantees both for social and economic development. There are a number of tasks and actions that we need to focus our attention on if we are to address the challenges facing the water and sanitation sector.

2. CHARACTERISATION OF THE DEPARTMENT

The Department of Water and Sanitation comprises two main streams, namely: Water Resource Management and Water Services Management. Water Resource Management is largely focused on water security, and it involves planning. For the longest time, water resource management has been viewed from a national point, with little to no enquiry as to how much water is recorded provincially or where water availability stands from a provincial aspect and we are changing that approach. We are relatively stable in terms of water availability and resources, although we still experience challenges and with approximately 5641 dams in South Africa, 323 dams are owned by DWS, 86 are owned by other Government departments, 121 owned by Water Boards, we want to ensure that there is water provision for all citizens in all provinces – not only focus on Gauteng.

In respect of Water Services Management, the general practice overtime has been that the Department, along with its entities (Water Boards) are responsible for bulk water supply, while the local sphere of Government has been responsible for reticulation – the attention has always been on bulk water supply, leaving reticulation behind. This is a legacy of the past with the notion that people who need tap water are only in the urban areas; you go to the periphery, rural and small towns – there's little to no water supply. This has caused a backlog and that backlog has become a sore point, which we are now attending to without losing focus on other areas or jeopardising any services.

3. CHALLENGES WHICH PLAGUE THE WATER AND SANITATION SECTOR

Throughout our working sessions in the provinces, the following were the most notable challenges we observed:

- Ageing and dysfunctional infrastructure along with poor operations & maintenance (and this has resulted in leaks and a compromise to the quality of our water; zama-zama's also add to the dysfunction of infrastructure). The reported water leaks in one city (Kimberley) were said to be 60% and even that might not be a true reflection. We cannot speak of water security for generations to come if we constantly lose water because of leaking infrastructure.
- There are policy inconsistencies with regards to who is a water authority and who is not. In the absence of determining what defines a 'Water Authority' and a standard against which to measure such, this is the situation we find ourselves in.
- Low to no capacity in municipalities. Capacity in this respect is three-fold: numbers (competent people to service water and sanitation), skills and planning. We need qualified and skilled individuals in the water and sanitation sector – engineers, technicians etc – individuals who have an understanding into the science of water and the various directions in which it needs to flow.
- Budgetary constraints and misappropriation of funds. A number of grants are provided to municipalities – Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant (RBIG), Water Services Infrastructure

Grant (WSIG) etc; these grants are not being used for their intended purposes – and this is a point we want to prioritise.

- For the longest time, sanitation has been neglected; we have a number of sanitation systems (water-borne, pit latrines, Ventilation Improved Pit latrines, buckets, to name a few). As a result of the country and the Department having no national framework on sanitation, it is time that we develop a National Sanitation Framework; this Framework will speak to set standards of sanitation to ensure uniformity throughout the country. We cannot continue to subject our people to inhumane, degrading conditions!
- In addition to these, there are also other policy issues such as those relating to licensing, roles and responsibilities of entities, pollution and Water User Associations and allocation of water as a right etc.

Ageing infrastructure and failure to deliver water: these are the two challenges we would want the Summit to address and make decisive decisions on, so that we shift to another era – we shift from the era where there is a general complaint and grievance about water services to an era where we are able to deliver water to households, communities, and the business sector (mining, agriculture and other businesses).

4. INTERVENTIONS

Decisions were taken during our working sessions, ranging from the fast-tracking of projects to strengthening of processes and policies. As the Ministry of Water and Sanitation, we cannot talk of capacity if we ourselves do not have such. When we assumed office, there was an Acting Director-General along with several acting Deputy Directors-General: one thing stood out – we had to fill these critical senior posts urgently. We have since appointed a Director-General, who is a qualified engineer; we have filled the post of DDG: Corporate Services, CFO and have interviews next week for DDG: Water Services and Regulation. Furthermore, we are reviewing the department's structure to ensure that it is optimally shaped to carry out its mandate.

We have the Blue and Green Drop Certification Programmes which are concerned with providing excellent drinking water and wastewater quality management in the country respectively. Pertaining to the Blue Drop Certification Programme, the first report since 2014 will be published at the end of March 2022 after which an audit of the quality of drinking water will be prioritised to inform the Blue Drop Report which is due in March 2023. The Department is focused on ensuring that compliance to legislation takes cause and remains dedicated to ensuring that risks revealed through these programmes are managed and abated in order to enhance the work of the Department as a water sector regulator. Furthermore, as per the President's State of the Nation Address last Thursday, we will be processing the backlog applications by the end of June 2022 and in the long term, we will be processing Water User Licence Applications within the 90 day time frame.

We have been referring to the review of Water Boards – their footprint, number and based on the legislative and political mandates.

We are also channelling ourselves to always be alert in respect of water availability (holistically); we are therefore focusing on developing augmentation plans throughout all spheres of Government. We have unbundled the issues around the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and have solidified our transboundary arrangements such as the one with Swaziland. South Africa is a water scarce country but we are abundantly blessed with rain and with that, we are looking at constructing more dams in order to take advantage of the rainfall we receive. The Katse Dam, which is part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and is a man-made dam, was overflowing due to heavy rains in late January this year – this was said to be the first time since February 2009. The Vaal and Bloemhof Dams had also overflowed.

The President also mentioned the Umzimvubu Dam project in his State of the Nation Address and that is just one project which needs to take off.

We have to develop a strategy for underground water and we have engaged with the Water Research Commission (one of the Departments' entities) on this. We must also develop a broad strategy for reclamation for agricultural purposes.

We are hard at work in establishing the National Water Resource Infrastructure Agency; the Bill is ready for public comment.

We have already commenced with establishing partnerships with stakeholders and again, this is indicative of the role to be played by all of us in the sector. In addition to private-public partnerships, we have identified the need for all three spheres of Government to work together – ultimately, we are in office through the will of the people and we have to serve those very same people. National Government must ensure that it works with and assists provincial and local government. We held a meeting with SALGA leadership the past week and in essence, the very same challenges which we highlighted at the start of the meeting were contained in their presentation! This only serves to confirm what we know – we need to work together in overcoming these challenges!

5. CONCLUSION

Ladies and gentlemen, once again, I would like to welcome you to the National Water and Sanitation Summit; as we engage, I would like to urge each one of us to engage openly and honestly as we work together in bettering the lives of our people and the economy of our country!

Thank you!