

**REMARKS FOR THE MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION, MR SENZO MCHUNU,  
AT THE DEBATE ON THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS, 14 FEBRUARY 2024:**

***“Building the capacity and capabilities of Water Services Authorities (i.e., Local municipalities) to provide water and sanitation services as mandated by the Constitution”.***

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1. The human right to water and sanitation is indeed a recognised principle emphasising that access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities is essential for maintaining human dignity and well-being. The United Nations General Assembly explicitly recognised this right in 2010 through Resolution 64/292, which affirmed *“the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.”*
2. As per the provisions of our Constitution in South Africa, access to water is a basic human right. *“Everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water. The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights”*; as a national Department of Water and Sanitation, we have been, and are working on realising the right to water for all South Africans.
3. According to Stats SA, in 2023, 98% of the population residing in urban areas, which includes metros and consists of about 5336 communities representing 64 % of the population, have access to basic water supply. 85% of the population living in rural areas, which consists of about 22570 communities, representing 36% of the population have access to basic water supply. For the eight (8) metros, in which about 42% of the total population resides, virtually 100% have access to basic water.
4. In 1994, 15.2 million people were estimated to have no access to basic water supply and an estimated 20.5 million lacked basic sanitation. According to the Census in 2022, 82,4% of households in the country had access to piped water either inside their dwelling or inside their yard.
5. According to our stats as a department, there has been significant progress, as 94% of the population have been provided with access to a basic water supply, of which 68.3% can be classified as ‘reliable’ (which is defined as an uninterrupted supply for

90% of the time through a fully functional infrastructure system which is operated and maintained to set standards supported by an effective governance institution that provides an acceptable quality of water supply that is based on sustainable water security principles).

6. South Africa has also made large strides in eradicating sanitation backlogs. Households with access to improved sanitation, increased from 49% in 1996 to 84,1% in 2023. This demonstrates that government has made huge inroads in terms of ensuring access to water and sanitation services.
7. Municipalities, as Water Service Authorities are mandated by the Constitution, to ensure that residents and industries are supplied with water and sanitation services that meet the national minimum norms and standards. It is an open secret that most municipalities throughout the country are failing when it comes to service delivery. Lack of technical capacity, lack of effective O&M, lack of infrastructure investment are just some of the challenges which plague them. So, there are weaknesses and challenges in the water and sanitation services, and we are dealing with them.
8. As a Department, we have been assisting and engaging municipalities to deliver on their mandates. We understand that as a National Department for Water and Sanitation, we have an overall responsibility for ensuring that the bulk water we provide, is ultimately consumed by the citizens of the country. Since the Water and Sanitation Summit back in 2022, we have gradually shifted our attention to building, renewing and in some cases refurbishing and upgrading water and sanitation infrastructure.
9. There are legislative reforms underway in both the Water Services Act and the National Water Act. Section 63 of the Water Services Act will be amended to enable the Minister to enforce the separation of the water services function from the municipal administration where there is persistent failure to meet license conditions and will require municipalities (as Water Services Authorities) to contract with a licensed Water Services Provider.
10. In his State of the Nation Address last week, the President made mention of some of the projects underway in our portfolio, such as the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

There is also Ludeke Dam and Welbedacht Dam as well as large scale reticulation such as uMkhanyakude and Giyani, to mention a few. The Brandvlei Water Scheme was completed in December 2022.

11. We have ensured that institutionally, as a department, we are equipped to carry out our mandate: we have reconfigured our water boards, we have filled all senior manager positions and are confident that we have skilled professionals tasked with carrying out the department's mandate.
12. We agree with the idea that Treasury has put forward regarding the change of local government grants from Schedule 5B to 6B, to enable the proper management of grants (i.e. to ensure that grants are spent towards improving infrastructure). We are aware that it is a constitutional requirement that allocations for the department are meant for direct transfers, however, given the many failures by municipalities, the Department intends to gradually work on strengthening and supporting municipalities so that they build capacity within the sector.
13. The Department has established the Water Partnerships Office at the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) to assist municipalities to contract for public private partnerships (PPPs) and to contract with independent water producers. The Water Partnerships Office comprises five standardised national programmes for private sector participation in municipal water and sanitation services, to make it easier, quicker and cheaper for municipalities to enter into partnerships, without having to *'reinvent the wheel'* for each partnership. In addition to this, we have broadened our engagements with DFI's such as the DBSA, to go beyond the Water Partnership Office.
14. Lastly, the Department in collaboration with South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) has developed a Water and Sanitation Councillor Development Strategy (2021-2026) which is designed to provide the necessary direction on how to train and develop Councillors to be more effective in their water and sanitation business leadership roles. This strategy is currently being implemented in all provinces.

15. We recently convened a 2-day Water Summit, where we engaged with municipalities, in their capacities as Water Services Authorities, on the findings in the Blue, Green and No Drop Reports released by the Department last year.
  
16. During the Summit, it was agreed that fundamental changes would be implemented within the existing legal framework, such as: changing the allocation of the Water Services Authority function (e.g., reducing the number of Water Services Authorities, reallocation of the Water Services Authority function between Districts and Locals), appointing another municipality to provide the Water Services Provider function, etc.
  
17. National government is providing more than R60 billion per annum in grants and transfers to municipalities for water and sanitation services. DWS's contribution is in the form of grants (R12 billion per annum from the Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant and Water Services Infrastructure Grant), as well as facilitating support through technical advice and management support from DWS officials and water boards.
  
18. We are working towards ensuring sustainability of the water sector, and that will require efficient, professionally managed and financially viable institutions. We will continue to render support to municipalities to enable them to deliver on water and sanitation services, we do know that there are shortcomings, but we are addressing same.
  
19. The Israeli government shut off the pipes that supply Gaza with water and currently, only some parts of southern Gaza get piped water. Israel's denial of water to Palestinians is a gross violation of this universal human right and has placed Palestinians at risk of dying of thirst and diseases related to the lack of safe drinking water. Water is in essence, being used by Israel as *a weapon of war*' and as South Africa, that is not a standpoint we are in support of. We stand with Palestine.

Thank you.