

DEPARTMENT OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY

Minister's Speech on Local Government Capacity Building in the Water Sector, potential challenges and opportunities International Conference on Capacity Building and Training 30 October – 01 November 2000

1. INTRODUCTION

Mr Chairperson, distinguished guests, government officials, delegates, ladies and gentleman, it is a great privilege and honour for me to address you today at this occasion, organised through the Department and the Netherlands Embassy, and congratulations for having reached this historical milestone. It is indeed an honour for South Africa to host this important conference whose main thrust, I guess, is to tackle complex issues associated with institutional development and human resources capacity building and training. To date, my Department is working tirelessly together with our partners to develop mechanisms for a co-ordinated capacity building and training programme. This is a huge task which is complicated by the fact that we are still required to respond to some other pressing demands for providing clean potable water to poor communities. You are probably aware of the KwaZulu Natal CHOLERA epidemic which has kept us on our toes. These are some of the facts we have to bear in mind in our deliberations on the best institutional development and management options for effective service delivery.

All these must be seen against the background that almost six years into our democracy and there are still many communities lacking access to clean water. Some 7.5 million South Africans still have no access to running water and 21 million people no access to sanitation. Where is the dignity of women who still have to fetch water in the early hours of the morning from far under very dangerous circumstances.

South Africa, unfortunately, was slow in addressing the essential needs of its poor. In 1994, it was estimated that over 12 million of South Africa's 40 million population, did not have access to a basic water supply, and 20 million to acceptable sanitation. However, through our new FREE WATER campaign, I am confident that by the end of 2001 we shall have made a positive impact on the ground. We must also recognise that it is at forums such as these that experience can be brought to bear on the new and evolving policies of our young democracy. The Department welcomes this occasion and is confident that during your deliberations you will identify practical management, operational, financial, customer, institutional and social models, which can be applied in the quest to achieve technically competent and sound delivery systems. Once more, I wish to state that the Department appreciates conferences of this nature because we can jointly share experiences regarding best practices elsewhere. At the end of the day it is our responsibility to ensure that local government fulfils its constitutional obligation of water services delivery as outlined out in the Water Services Act.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Since 1994, support to local government capacity building and training has been an important aspect of the work of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. The details about local government support initiatives have evolved in response to shifts in the legislative and policy environment, and to priorities in the context of delivery.

There is also greater realisation that unless we enhance and invest in human capital within the Department, it will become impossible to be expected to deliver on local government capacity building programmes. My Department is therefore very conscious of the fact that internal human resources development and capacity building is essential. If we succeed in doing this, we will gradually limit the number of consultants which we employ on a yearly basis. Not that we don't like our consultants. They do play a critical role, however, we also have a responsibility to invest in our own personnel and prepare ourselves for future challenges.

Support to infrastructure delivery was an early priority, in the context of the RDP. Support to the development of water services institutions became a priority as the Water services Act took shape, and has remained a key element of local government support since the promulgation of the Act (December 1997). The National Water Act (August 1998) is another piece of legislation which provides a framework for the management of water resources in South Africa. Against this background, water resources managers in DWAF have been giving attention to the role of local government in the water resources management arena, and several support capacity building initiatives have been developed.

We are constantly establishing good working relationships within my Department and external structures and other role players and that there is an opportunity for an integrated approach to service delivery. This is of course in line with the very strong plea made by the President last year in his opening address to Parliament. Also, we need to grapple with means and ways of integrating capacity building and training initiatives so that we can maximise the impact of our programmes. Perhaps, at this stage I must share with you some of our local government capacity building initiatives which are driven internally by DWAF and other training providers such as the National Community Water and Sanitation Training Institute located at the University of the North;

- Direct support, in the form (for example) of advisory services, capacity building, institutional and social development support, planning support and operations and maintenance support
- Direct support to the Water Services Development Planning processes
- Training on the application of model by-laws and models contracts
- Co-ordination and information, in the form (for example) of monitoring and information management, information dissemination and co-ordination of water-related matters across sectors and between spheres of government.
- Financial assistance through grants.
- Research and development

- Transitional activities, such as infrastructure development, the operation and maintenance of services, and the transfer of schemes of local government.

3. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Looking ahead, the following are key challenges for DWAF's local government support and capacity building initiatives, with an emphasis on water services:

- The impact of demarcation. It has been found that demarcation has slowed or stalled projects and programmes in some situations. This is largely as a result of uncertainties among local government actors regarding areas of jurisdiction, roles and functions and (in some cases) their own futures. Most of these problems will be resolved in due course, but ongoing and future DWAF programmes will have to find appropriate ways to work with new and more empowered local government.
- Locating the Water Services Authority powers and functions. The appropriate placement of the Water Services Authority functions is a matter of debate at present. There are pros and cons for both local and district municipalities, but it is difficult to target Water Services Authority support while there is a lack of clarity. A support role for DWAF is to assist in decisions around the Water Services Authority role and functions.
- Building viable relationships between Water Services Authorities and Water Services Providers, and between Providers and customers. The challenge of establishing durable water businesses should not be underestimated. Securing manageable and productive contractual relationships is one element of the challenge, but the more difficult component may be that of entrenching trust and co-operation.
- Understanding the local government perspective. An important challenge for all DWAF local government support programmes is that of understanding the responsibilities, priorities and operating methods of

local government. Co-operative programmes offer the opportunity to do this.

- Identifying the appropriate support level. It is always important to offer support at the right level. DWAF has tended toward supporting district level local government, as part of the “support the supporters” strategy. The appropriateness of this view will have to be tested when the new municipalities have been established. In some ways the strategy might be strengthened if the district municipalities have wider powers and more capacity.
- Whose needs? Balancing supply and demand. Many of the support projects and programmes have been informed by DWAFs priorities and responsibilities. This was more typically the case in the early initiatives. A move to more demand driven approaches seems appropriate in the new local government environment, but this will require careful consideration of the capacity and resource implications for DWAF.
- Ensuring that the draft Memorandum of Co-operation between DWAF and DPLG is signed and that the area of Co-operation on local government capacity building is strengthened or operationalised.
- Ensuring SALGA, DPLG and DWAF co-operate closely on the implementation of the European Union-sponsored Water Services Sector Support Programme, during the gearing up and the actual implementation phases.
- Ensuring proper co-ordination of technical assistance and replicability of lessons learnt through the support provided by donor organisations. I wish to mention that we have been fortunate in the water sector to received such and overwhelming response from the donor community to fund our capacity building programmes. Just to mention a few, we have the British Department for International Development (DFID) sponsored Water Sector

Support Units based in Mpumalanga and Northern Province, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsored Bushbuckridge Retail Water Distribution Capacity Building Project, the Danish Development Agency's (Danish) local authority training and standards generation programmes, now recently we have just signed an agreement with the Netherlands Embassy for the 'gearing up' phase of the European Union MAAP process.

4. THE WAY AHEAD

Adjusting to the evolving local government, national qualifications, standards generation and accreditation milieu

It has become too critical for the Department to review its long-term role in the water sector. Many actors are beginning to raise questions on issues such as DWAF's regulatory arrangements. I must state that these are some of the issues which require thorough discussion because it took most Latin American countries decades to resolve their regulatory framework. Today, some of them are still struggling. What is required is a structured process and a framework to discuss capacity building implications, consultation and communication, regulatory and policy designs, roles and responsibilities, etc.

Besides, the Department, like everyone, is expected to fulfill other legislative requirements such as the National Qualifications Framework and the Local Government and Water Sector Education and Training Authority. These are new opportunities require from us, an incremental and a sustainable manner in which we will address the capacity building and training challenges confronting us. I hope that with the support of the gearing up phase sponsored by the Netherlands between now and March 2001, we will begin to define, conceptualise, strategise and plan for the practical implications of all these initiatives which are surfacing. Surely, DWAF will have to develop a visionary approach regarding long term policy and regulatory arrangements.

I am not going to refer further to your agenda, only to say that it is clear that the programme addresses issues that are very pertinent for all of us. I would have liked very much to have remained with you for the duration of the Conference, listening and participating in the discussions. Unfortunately, Affairs of State dictate otherwise and I will have to leave you shortly.

However, before I finish, I would like to say that we are all confronted by the need to establish a network of capacity building and training programmes which talk to each other. This will assist in facilitating information flow and a strong knowledge base which form an integral part of our programmes.

I would now like to officially open this Congress, and wish all the delegates strength and stamina to last the pace in what will, I am sure, be a most productive and beneficial period.