



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPINION PIECE

WATER INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS PROTECTION- WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY

03 OCTOBER 2018

Amid the on-going dire effects of drought and climate change in most parts of the country, the vandalism of water infrastructure is one amongst the major contributors affecting water supply and security, with effects hard felt by those in marginalised communities.

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) is the custodian of water resources in South Africa, that said, it cannot be that the responsibility solely falls on the shoulders of the department and that community members are absolved of the same responsibility of ensuring water security. Collective efforts are required to enhance water conservation and protection of our resources, with DWS taking lead in formulating and implementing policy governing the sector.

The effects of vandalism have not only resulted in major financial dents for the department and stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector, they too often pose a serious threat to sustain general water supply countrywide.

You would recall in 2014, when residents in the Johannesburg, Tshwane and Ekurhuleni metros were left stranded without water due to cable theft. Taps ran dry, as Rand Water struggled for days on end, to increase reservoir levels in Gauteng.

One wonders why people would vandalise such infrastructure, and what fuels them to do so, without having to think of the consequences directly affecting them, their families and the general populace.

On close observation, I would say vandalism stems from a lack of income; this is normally theft with the aim of gaining income through selling of scrap metal. Though fuelled by the dire socio-economic circumstances of the many unemployed, it remains unacceptable that state-owned infrastructure is targeted.

The impact of this illegal activity is significant and extremely costly. It is hard to accept that operational equipment is rendered dysfunctional by vandalising working components and selling it as scrap.

The accessibility of a willing legal market to sell the vandalised infrastructure is also intensifying the problem.

It has become a common practice that communities, when they are not satisfied with service delivery, would vandalise infrastructure to draw Government's attention to their plight.

In addition, with the official statistics suggesting that the unemployment rate in South Africa has increased to 27.2 percent in the second quarter of 2018, DWS has, through its programmes contributed significantly to reduce the level of unemployment, especially among the youth.



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This has been done through programmes such as War on Leaks (WOL), which seeks to address youth unemployment and poverty alleviation and to assist municipalities' operations and maintenance efforts to ensure that the aging infrastructure, which normally results in pipe bursts and leaks, is fixed timeously.

It therefore should not come as a surprise, the call by DWS Minister Gugile Nkwiti to regard water infrastructure country-wide as National Key Points. Water is a source of life, and therefore, its infrastructure should be guarded with all the might that there is.

Should Minister Nkwinti's calls bear fruit, the results will enhance security services of targeted infrastructure. Offenders who vandalise water infrastructure would have to face the full wrath of the law, necessitating closer operations relationship between DWS and the South African Police Service (SAPS).

As the Department of Water and Sanitation awaits feedback on a suggestion by Minister Nkwinti to declare water infrastructure national key points, let us, as South Africans, play our part in safeguarding the much needed infrastructures.

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