

# Investment in infrastructure is key to water security



**Tshona  
Andile**

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus pandemic in SA has once again laid bare the harsh realities of the ever-widening social and economic divide that persists to characterise our country.

When the first positive case was reported by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases in early March, there was every sign that the government and its social partners had their work cut out.

While eyes were staring at the department of health, questions were being asked about whether the department of water & sanitation has delivered on its mandate of ensuring adequate access to water and dignified sanitation services.

It is an open secret that the government has fallen short of providing water to all communities and this has been confirmed by reports of Statistics SA and the SA Human Rights Commission.

While measures were urgently put in place, such as the roll-out of water tanks and tankers to various

communities as well as schools, human settlements, water & sanitation minister Lindiwe Sisulu and others in the sector have consistently argued that this is not sustainable. The provision of water tankers is only a short-term measure to the structural and infrastructure challenges SA faces.

The United Nations' high level panel on water (HLPW) advised governments across the globe to improve an enabling environment for investment in sustainable water-related infrastructure and services. In its report titled "Water Infrastructure and Investment", the UN's HLPW says: "Governments are encouraged to promote the preparation of viable, investment-ready, and high-impact projects and more than double available finance by mobilising domestic finance, blending public and commercial finance. Invest at least one-third of international climate finance in water-related projects that improve climate

adaptation and strengthen climate mitigation."

During a virtual water & sanitation budget vote debate last week, deputy minister David Mahlobo spoke at length about the state of infrastructure in SA and argued that the current one is dilapidated and that we need to invest in infrastructure to ensure water security. He said that in the next 10 years, the country will need an amount of around R126bn to enhance water security and the revival of SA's economy.

Access to water plays a crucial role in any country's development agenda as it ensures enough food production, employment opportunities; eradication of poverty and water is a conduit in reducing inequalities and ensures sustainable future of a country.

Our government has long called for collaborative efforts between government and businesses to scale up the public-private partnerships that will ensure water security.

In an effort to accelerate infrastructure investment in SA, President Cyril Ramaphosa, in his 2018 State of the Nation Address, said this is key in efforts to grow the economy, create jobs, empower small businesses and provide services to the people.

To this end, the presidential infrastructure coordinating commission (PICC) has already given a thumbs up to the priority infrastructure projects announced by Mahlobo. The PICC has named its first projects in the R2.3-trillion infrastructure drive.

The government has been the first to acknowledge that with inadequate water infrastructure the country will not realise its set objective outlined in the National Development Plan and National Water and Sanitation Master Plan, which aims to achieve universal access to water and sanitation services by 2030.

■ Tshona is a communicator at the department of water & sanitation