

# Infrastructure vandalism is a serious threat to water security in SA

## OPINION PIECE

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**T**he advent of the Coronavirus pandemic in South Africa has put under the spotlight the issue of service delivery by government. Key to this is the delivery of basic needs such as electricity, water and suitable sanitation facilities.

Following the 21 days lockdown that was officially declared in March by President Cyril Ramaphosa, Minister Lindiwe Sisulu announced that the Department of Water and Sanitation would deliver more than 40 000 water storage tanks to various municipalities across the country.

The Department's social media pages, including Minister Sisulu's page, were abuzz with pictures of the delivery of these water tanks and tankers being delivered to communities in need. In its efforts to ensure communities affected by the shortage of water, the Department further enhanced its call centre capacity and notified the public they could

call in and report water challenges.

Last month, disheartening media reports emerged that residents of Orange Farm in the South of Johannesburg were burning these tanks.

A similar incident happened in QwaQwa earlier this year, where truck batteries were stolen after an intervention by the Department, allocating water trucks meant to assist with water challenges in the area. It goes without saying that the vandalism of water infrastructure is a major contributing factor affecting water supply and security in the country.

About two months ago, the former Acting Director-General, Mbulelo Tshangana told the Portfolio Committee on Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation that the Department loses more R9 billion annually due to water leaks. Water leaks could be due to other factors, however vandalism of water infrastructure is a contributing factor which can also be attributed to vandalism of infrastructure.

The effects of vandalism have not

only resulted in major financial dents for the Department, such acts also pose a serious threat to the sustainability of general water supply countrywide, especially amid the rapid spread of COVID-19. This is even more detrimental, considering the fact that South Africa is a semi-arid country and it is ranked as one of the driest countries in the world.

It is of grave concern to me as to why people would vandalise water infrastructure, and what fuels them to do so, without having to think of the consequences directly affecting them, their families and the general populace.

To an extent, I assume this could be done out of frustration. I was born, bread and lived in Hammanskraal for most of my life. I am from a small village called Stinkwater. I was informed the area was named Stinkwater because people were forced to share water with animals, and too often, the water had a stinky smell. But nothing could ever justify damage to infrastructure that is meant to alleviate challenges of water provision.

I think it is time the Department of Water and Sanitation implements its call to declare water infrastructures as National Key Points. Water is a source of life, and therefore, its infrastructure should be guarded with all the might that there is.

While we need to hold those in power accountable and ensure basic needs are provided to us, we also have to practice active citizenry by ensuring we do not commit unforgivable crimes of damaging infrastructure we need the most in our communities.

The development and progress of our beautiful country is taken back by these acts as every now and again, government has to take money meant for other deliverables to fix the damaged infrastructure so that it can function optimally.

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