



A WOMAN fetching water from trucks delivering it to Makhaza residents in Khayelitsha during the lockdown earlier this year. The writer accuses mainstream media of ignoring the major obstacles Minister of Water and Sanitation and Human Settlements Lindiwe Sisulu has overcome and her many successes . | AYANDA NDAMANE African News Agency (ANA)

# The truth about Sisulu

*What the mainstream media is not telling you about the minister*

ONE OF the key roles played by the media in a democracy is to inform society truthfully, objectively without fear or favour. The backbone of any democracy is an independent, ethical and responsible media.

Sadly, the media has scored many own goals leading to a loss of faith among the public in news groups.

Not so long ago, one so-called leading Sunday publication was left with egg on its face when it admitted to allowing itself “to be manipulated by those with ulterior motives”.

The question is: has this publication and its mainstream media partners learnt from their mistakes?

Regrettably, the current agenda-driven reporting of our mainstream media indicates nothing has changed.

Take, for instance, the dubious Cabinet ratings released this week by a news outlet in which ministers, who are not the darlings of the media, were not appraised objectively.

One such minister who was rated lowly is Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation Minister Lindiwe Sisulu. Ironically this is one politician whose penchant to serve the people with dedication is unrivalled.

Here are the facts that the mainstream media choose to ignore: Sisulu is in charge of a massive department comprising two departments, Human Settlements and Water and Sanitation that have been merged into one.

She inherited a department with challenges accumulated over many years. There was huge financial mismanagement in the water sector, with the result that many officials at national and municipal levels are under investigation.

## COMMENT



STEVE MOTALE

The minister found a department that no longer enjoyed the confidence of the people it served, having been eroded by a number of cases of corruption. In essence, she inherited a bankrupt department with problems accumulated over many years.

On assuming office in May last year, Sisulu was informed that the amount of irregular and wasteful expenditure amounted to R16 billion and this amount was revised upwards to a staggering R31bn.

She ordered investigations into these matters. Since her appointment, the minister has focused on re-engineering and prioritising ways of improving the efficient functioning of the Department of Water and Sanitation.

During her Budget Vote address on July 16, last year, Sisulu made a commitment to clean up the Department of Water and Sanitation and to bring stabilisation to all nine water boards that work directly with municipalities by supplying bulk raw water.

To her credit, she has managed to stabilise the majority of these institutions and has continued to fight fraud and corruption. Just this week, three

people, including former chief executive of Lepelle Northern Water board, were arrested on fraud and corruption charges. Similar criminal cases have been opened against former executives of Amatola Water Board in the Eastern Cape. Sisulu is confident that the work of the Special Investigating Unit, the Hawks and the whole justice system will assist the department to find closure on these matters. Another challenge is water security for the nation.

To address the problem, the Department of Water and Sanitation has developed a National Water and Sanitation Master Plan, which was launched by the minister in November last year. It will enable the department to meet the targets set out in the National Development Plan Vision for 2030 and sustainable development goals of affordable and reliable access to sufficient and safe water and hygienic sanitation for socio-economic growth and well-being.

Another critical department for her is Human Settlements. Since her appointment to this portfolio, 69 513 houses and 51 166 serviced stands, including temporary residential units and social housing, have been delivered to deserving beneficiaries.

A total of 374 additional projects were registered during 2019/20 – there are currently 18 193 projects in various stages of development.

Covid-19 impacted on the department’s plans for this financial year. Sisulu is of the belief that the pandemic has taught us that we can deliver more, and faster through innovation.

Another significant achievement is the Human Settlements Development Bank, which has been completed and

approved by the National Treasury.

The bank is to become the pre-eminent development finance institution in human settlements and is expected to play the lead role in the financing of activities across the human settlements value chain.

The department has consulted with the state law adviser on the draft Human Settlements Development Bank Bill, which will provide for the formal establishment of the bank.

Another intervention aimed at assisting low- to medium-income earners and first-time homebuyers is the partnership with the banking association.

Recently, Sisulu held a working meeting with the Banking Association of SA (Basa) to review the partnership that started in 2005, while identifying further areas of partnerships.

The meeting focused mainly on how banking institutions can assist the government to achieve its mandate of providing affordable housing by unlocking access to finance for low-to-medium income earners and first-time buyers through the Financed Linked Individual Subsidy Programme.

The minister called on all those who were facing difficulties to service their mortgages and construction companies which were struggling to service their loans to make arrangements with their banks. Basa has on behalf of banking institutions committed to assist those in financial distress.

Considering all her achievements, evaluated objectively, Sisulu should pass with distinction.

Motale is spokesperson for Minister Lindiwe Sisulu