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COMMENT



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WATER AT THE CENTRE OF COVID-19 FIGHT

THE INVISIBLE and deadly novel coronavirus, which has a heavy psychological toll on the poor who reside in densely populated environments, poses a major challenge for South Africa as a country still striving to achieve a sustainable, equitable and secure water supply for all.

In these uncertain times of Covid-19, water becomes a fundamental requirement for human health and well-being, making its provision to communities the single most important necessity to meet basic human needs.

To avert the calamity that could arise as a result of not having enough water to regularly wash hands, the Department of Water and Sanitation is delivering water tanks and water tankers (trucks) to vulnerable communities across the country in a bid to stem the spread of the coronavirus.

These deliveries follow an announcement by Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation Minister Lindwe Sisulu to provide water to drought-stricken areas and other parts of the country with chronic water challenges.

In providing water, the department is executing its constitutional mandate to service vulnerable communities to deny this virus a chance to cause more harm.

Vulnerable communities that lack access to water are particularly at risk during this time, and the intervention of the department will go a long way to ensure that the guidelines provided by our health authorities receive resonance with the communities.

From the time the department became aware of the outbreak of the virus, it firmly believed it had a duty to act responsibly to save lives and not compound the situation of the most vulnerable by shirking its responsibility to supply much-needed water to communities.

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In this regard, the department is moving with speed to ensure that the provision of water to communities is implemented without delay to avoid the spread of the virus and any other possible eventuality of loss of life.

Accordingly, officials of the department are working with different municipalities to help communities combat the spread of the virus by installing water tanks at strategic areas for easy access.

The department is also partnering with other stakeholders to provide not only water, but soap and sanitisers to communities to enable them to practise proper hygiene.

The present situation calls on the government and like-minded structures to see to it that disadvantaged communities are not left to their own devices.

All of us must be instruments of change so that we provide protection to people who need us most at this time.

As communities access water, it is important that they keep in mind that it is of the utmost importance that they comply with social distancing and stay one metre apart from each other.

The department is urging communities to work with municipalities to safeguard the water tanks because they provided a lifeline that protects those who are most at risk.

Mthembu is head of the Department of Water and Sanitation, Gauteng Province