

AS SOUTH Africa commemorated Nelson Mandela Day on July 18, with many South Africans dedicating 67 minutes of their time by engaging in goodwill activities, the Department of Water and Sanitation embarked on its annual Clear Rivers Campaign.

The campaign was joined by organisations and community members who rolled up their sleeves and cleaned up the country's rivers, streams and wetlands. This ongoing awareness campaign by the department is as a result of the never-ending pollution of South Africa's source of water supply.

Rivers are the primary source of water in the country, and they run through communities who do not ensure that they are being protected and kept free from pollution.

South Africa has a limited

Water quality is citizens' responsibility, too

water supply, primarily from rivers, which are being threatened by pollution. Urbanisation, destruction of wetlands, agriculture, industry and mining have been found to be among the factors that contribute to river pollution.

South African mines contribute hugely to the pollution of our rivers. This is prevalent in the coal mines of the Mpumalanga Highveld, where acid mine drainage destroys the aquatic ecosystems and affects the quality of water used by the surrounding communities, particularly in poor and rural areas.

The ever-increasing emergence of informal settlements around the country's wetlands and rivers seems to be another major contribution to pollution owing to a lack of

formalised waste-water services in these communities. This results in blockages of the waste-water systems, which often overflow into the rivers running through the community.

As much as it is the government's responsibility to enforce the prevention of pollution in water resources through the National Water Act, the primary responsibility lies with every citizen to prevent water pollution.

Communities need to be constantly educated to understand the importance of water quality, especially in water-scarce regions, and need to be well informed about the effects of pollution on the water sources. In turn, municipalities need to invest in maintenance and operations of water infrastructure,

particularly the water-treatment works, so that they work optimally without releasing untreated discharge to the rivers. They also need to encourage recycling facilities.

With pollution being the greatest threat to water security, the department has formed an anti-pollution task team, led by deputy minister of Water and Sanitation, David Mahlobo. The task team is made up of 22 members from various sections within the water department and the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, and deals with the escalating incidents of pollution. The water department also launched an integrated water quality management strategy to ensure protection of the quality of water resources.

SANKU TSUNKE | Department of Water and Sanitation spokesperson