



## Publication

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# Women must take centre stage in water provision

YEAR 2020 marks 22 years since South Africa embarked on the UN-led 16 Days of Activism campaign for No Violence against Women and Children.

It is evident that gender-based violence has long overcome our nation.

However, since the outbreak of Covid-19, reports have shown that violence against women and girls, particularly domestic violence, has increased.

Our mothers, sisters and children continue to live in fear. Therefore, it is time for everyone to take action in ending all forms of violence.

The theme for this year's campaign is: "Women's Economic Justice for a Non-Violent and Non-Sexist South Africa". Through this theme, the focus is on the importance of women's economic empowerment, the role of women in the workplace, access to opportunities, unfair treatment and equal opportunities in male-dominated sectors.

As it stands, the water sector in our country is male dominated.

Water security is a universally important goal, but one with particular gendered significance. Since women and girls carry the bulk of the water collection burden in most rural areas, they are subject to substantial physical and psychological strain, and lose

many hours that could otherwise be spent on other productive and valuable activities, including schooling or employment.

Gaps in water facilities also hinder the ability of women and girls to meet their reproductive and menstrual hygiene needs, and increase their exposure to gender-based violence risks when walking to, waiting for or using public facilities.

Furthermore, water-related issues, such as droughts and floods, tend to mostly affect women and girls, as their assets and nutritional intake are typically sacrificed first, and they have lower access to resources, relocation opportunities and other coping mechanisms. If left unaddressed, the negative impacts of global water insecurity on women and girls will only increase, as climate change and concentrated population growth exacerbate existing water security threats.

Water insecurity is, therefore, a growing driver of poverty, vulnerability and risk in many low- and middle-income areas in our country.

This makes it an important concern for those aiming to tackle the long-term drivers of poverty, vulnerability, risk and gender inequality – including those working in the social protection and gender sectors. Yet to date,

there has been limited focus within these fields on the importance of water security for the reduction of gendered poverty and vulnerability, or on the role that social protection could play in addressing gendered water security risks.

Because of water's important role in economic development and poverty reduction, addressing the constraints that women and girls face in accessing and managing water is essential.

However, through the Water and Sanitation Policy and the Black Broad Based Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) and working with other key stakeholders, we can discover innovative solutions, which will assist us to fight unemployment, inequality and poverty.

Transformation requires a government that embraces new solutions to realise the goals set out in the National Development Plan (NDP).

Our government has achieved delivery of access to basic water and sanitation services to over 80% of citizens and is committed to ensure universal access by 2030, in line with the NDP's Vision 2030. This is also a commitment towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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