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Are we Free or are we Dom, to let water down the drain?

OPINION PIECE

April is declared Freedom Month in South Africa. This is meant to commemorate and reflect on the history of the nation as a month that saw the first democratic elections in 1994. I however think 27 April has since become a repetitive history class which we continue to fail dismally to learn anything from.

The day comes, "class" commences about activities that took place on the day, 27 April. Too often, the "teacher", who happens to be the President, will urge citizens to take on the baton from the "class" of 1994 and continue to fight the good fight. The fight for equal opportunities, equal provision of services and so on. That is our fight, the good fight I am referring to here. Then the day ends, and we go on about our lives as per normal.

Some people go back to their homes which are without water or electricity, communities without adequate road

infrastructure, health services, or schools within reasonable distances. Others on the other hand, go to their warm homes with heart-warming food and belly filling drinks. This is the sheer reality of South Africa. Inequality is the big white elephant in the room.

I say this very cognisant of the great strides the South African government continues to make, to better the lives of the previously disadvantaged and ultimately all citizens of the country. But not without tripping and falling, too often on blunders that could be avoided.

Last month was Water Month, as declared by the Department of Water and Sanitation which coincided with World Water Day on 22 March. In a handover event of a national non-revenue water management training programme from the Japanese Government to South Africa, I was gutted hearing that South Africa, being a water scarce country, loses close to R10

billion each year due to water losses, technically Non-Revenue Water. This was attributed to burst or leaking pipes which are too often not attended to, or if attended, it only happens 24 hours or more later. Leaks due to illegal connections were also flagged as major contributors to the loss of this most precious and disrespected resource, water.

I found my mind wandering and ended reflecting about the once viral and funny mobile phone operator advert about their 60 minutes' free product.

Where firefighters are talking about working night shift and comedian Trevor Gumbi appears and begins telling them about freedom, rather Free Dom. He goes on and on and then asks them: "Are you FREE or are you DOM.?" My childhood was characterised by this phrase. As an adult now, I cannot recall what I found funny about this advert at all. This is not of significance now, as I am only

referencing it because I want to borrow from it and ask you, "Are we Free or are we Dom?" to let water down drain, especially in the midst of climate change and extreme weather patterns. Is this the kind of freedom the "class" of 1994 fought for? To waste water?

We all have a significant role to play, to save water and billions of money that we need in the quest to deliver services, more so as we commemorate Freedom Month.

Freedom Month celebrations offer all of us an opportunity to reflect on the progress that is being made to move South Africa forward in transforming society, while also examining our challenges. In this case, water scarcity tops the list for me of challenges to examine.

As we prepare for this year's history class of Freedom 101, themed: "The Year of Charlotte Maxeke: the Meaning of Freedom under COVID-19," let us make efforts and stop being passive

"learners" who fail to take the lessons that come with Freedom Day.

We owe it to the next generation to preserve the little water we still have left available in the country. We have seen significant rains in this rainy season for the inland provinces. The national averages of the dam levels have not been better in a very long time.

This does not mean South Africans now have a licence to abuse the resource. In effect, it should impress upon all of us the need to protect the resource; not just by using it prudently, but also by ensuring we protect it at source.

We are a Free generation, especially those born during and post '94; however, we cannot choose to be remembered for being Dom. Let's do better. Save water. Use it wisely.

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