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COMMENT



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Let’s use water sparingly

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 April 27 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. Too often, the “teacher”, who happens to be the president, will urge citizens to take 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. Then the day ends and we go about our lives as per normal.

Some people go back to their homes which are without water or electricity; communities without adequate road infrastructure and health services; or schools within reasonable distances. Others go to their homes with heart-warming food and belly-filling drinks. This is the reality of South Africa. Inequality is the big white elephant in the room.

I say this very cognisant of the great strides the 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 March 22.

In a handover event of a national non-revenue water management training programme from the Japanese government to South Africa, I was gutted to hear that South Africa, a water-scarce country, loses close to R10 billion each year due to water losses. This was attributed to burst or leaking pipes. Leaks due to illegal connections were also flagged as major contributors to the loss of this precious resource.

I found myself reflecting on the 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 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.

I want to borrow this phrase and ask you: “Are we Free or are we Dom” to let water go down the drain, especially in the midst of climate change? Is this the kind of freedom the class of 1994 fought for? To waste water?

Freedom Month celebrations offer all of us an opportunity to reflect on the progress being made to move South Africa forward in transforming society, while also examining our challenges. 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 stop being passive learners.

We owe it to the next generation to preserve the little water we still have left. We have seen significant rains in this rainy season for the inland provinces. This does not mean we now have a licence to abuse the resource. .

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.

Maseko works for the Department of Water and Sanitation. She writes in her personal capacity