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| SOWETAN | | |
| Page | Date | AVE (ZAR) |
| 21 | Fri 26 Mar 2021 | 22605.32 |



People need to place more value on water they use

By **Larry Crisp**

When I was 12 years old I wanted to own a bicycle more than anything in the world. My parents did not buy it for me despite numerous requests, but I came up with a plan to make my dream a reality.

I did menial tasks to raise funds to buy the bicycle for myself. I washed sneakers, washed dishes, cleaned the yard at home and for friends and neighbours for a fee. I saved what I earned and a year later I could finally afford to buy my shiny new steed.

My bike became priceless to me because I knew the cost of getting it. My cousin once borrowed the bicycle and returned it with a malfunctioning brake lever and I regretted lending it to him.

The moral of the story is that we do not value things the same way, especially if the person does not know the cost of attaining them.

SA is a water-scarce country with a high unemployment rate. Many SA households live on or below the poverty line and cannot afford to pay for basic services such as water.

However, municipalities make provision for these indigent people by providing six megalitres of free basic water.

Many households can make it through a month without having to buy more water to supplement their allocation. It is, nonetheless, concerning that there is no value attached to the water received.

Driving through neighbourhoods on any day, one can see how water is being used carelessly. In the middle of the day, gardens are being watered, someone is randomly spraying the driveway with water and children are left to play with water without supervision. In some areas, you will find a stream gushing

through the streets, be it from a leaking pipe or blocked manhole.

We are quick to blame government, rightfully so in some instances but we fail to also take responsibility. We witness unlawful activities in our communities, like a neighbour connecting a water pipe to bypass the municipal water meter or throwing foreign materials into manholes but we fail to take action against them.

When there are blockages we then expect the municipality to act swiftly to unblock manholes or repair damaged pipes.

Water is free from the moment it is formed in a cloud and the rain falls down. However, that changes from the moment a drop hits the ground and picks up all the dirt as it rolls to the stream, river or dam. It has to be transported and treated for you to enjoy the clean water that comes through the tap.

Free basic water is not really

free. Someone has to pay to get the water from the river or dam to our taps. There are many costs involved in purifying water. Infrastructure such as pipes and water treatment plants, as well as chemicals cost a lot of money.

Ageing infrastructure needs to be constantly repaired, and municipalities also need to buy bulk water, treat it and clean it before it can be provided to the community.

This is done using the revenue generated from those who pay for their services.

Communities need to place more value on water. Vandalising water and sanitation infrastructure has to be reported because it benefits a few individuals, to the detriment of the many. This year's theme for water week is "valuing water", as that is exactly what we need as a society.

■ Crisp is a communicator in the department of water & sanitation