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We must all save precious water resource

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THE challenge of water scarcity facing South Africa hampers the government’s ability to fulfil the fundamental right of access to adequate, clean and safe water, and negatively affects the enjoyment of other interrelated rights in the Bill of Rights.

However, nothing impedes the right of access to water more than a lack of appreciation and value for our ever-depleting water resources.

Access to water is one of the inalienable rights which severely affects the public. This is especially so now during this time of the catastrophic Covid-19 health crisis. It is through access to water that other rights are enjoyed and it should therefore be held as a sacrosanct right by the government and the public. It is in this context that the Department of Water and Sanitation will use March to observe Water Month. The department

annually celebrates National Water Week (NWW) which is commemorated throughout the month. This year, the NWW is from March 15 to 22, against the backdrop of World Water Day on March 22.

Under this year’s theme “Valuing Water”, awareness campaigns to educate the public and stakeholders about the importance of water and conservation will be carried out across the country. Building on the previous years’ themes, the one for this year is aimed at understanding how people value water economically, socially, culturally and the role it plays in their lives.

Through the activities, the department also seeks to highlight the role of the public to safeguard and protect the country’s limited water resources in order to support the goal of access to adequate and safe water for all.

The right of access to clean water has a specific impact on the right to

health. It is, therefore, crucial that access to water should come with responsibilities for those who enjoy it. For instance, an obligation should be placed on everyone to refrain from using water without thinking about those who do not have access to the life-giving resource. A feeling of repugnance should be engendered against those that are demanding the right to access water while failing to take responsibility for using water with care and continuing to pollute a vast number of water sources.

The drought in parts of the Eastern Cape, the Northern Cape, the Free State and Limpopo is a telltale sign of the gravity of the bleak future we face. The dire situation makes it more crucial for the public to appreciate the gravity of our water shortages so that we avoid ending up facing an intractable problem.

In a semi-arid country where some communities go without water, the

extent to which we value it should serve as a barometer to gauge not only the government’s commitment to provide water, but also the public’s obligation to use it with the utmost respect. So dire is the impact of the lack of access to water on communities that it not only impairs the dignity of their people, but also leaves them exposed to all sorts of hardships associated with the lack of the resource. Communities that do not enjoy the right to a proper water supply stand little or no chance of being protected from diseases such as Covid-19.

Water is vital for growth and development, thus the department, in partnership with citizens and civil society organisations, celebrates Water Month by calling on everyone to value water resources by conserving and protecting them.

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