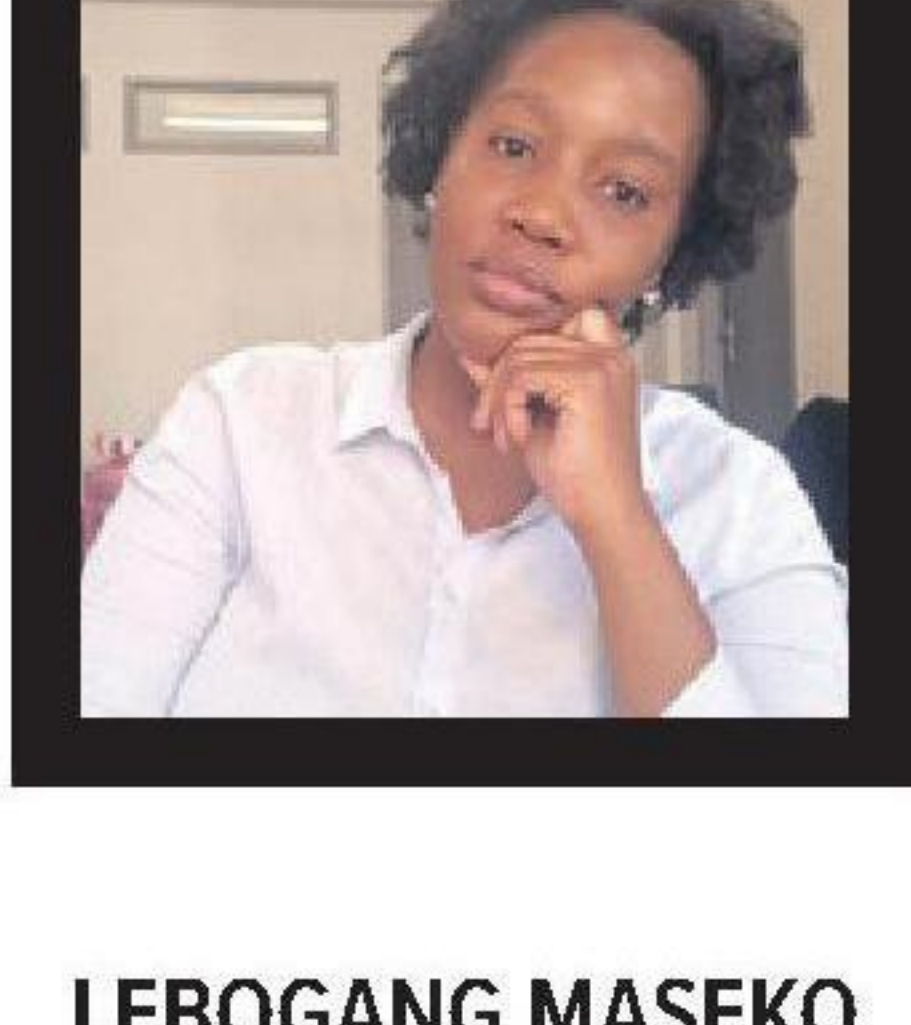


OPINION



LEBOGANG MASEKO

Hammanskraal's water challenges

I WAS born and raised in Hammanskraal, in a small village once known as Stinkwater, north of Pretoria. Growing up, I heard that the name came from the first residents who shared water sources with animals, leading to an unpleasant odour in the water. Fortunately, I never experienced this first-hand. Today, the area is called Refentse, meaning "We have conquered." But the battle for clean and reliable water is far from over.

Working for the Department of Water and Sanitation, I am often asked when Hammanskraal's water challenges will be resolved. I frequently attend meetings discussing water security, including updates on projects aimed at addressing Hammanskraal's water issues. And so, I try to offer honest and realistic answers based on the information that I would be privy to. A difficult task if you ask me!

I understand the frustrations of unreliable water supply, and I also see the complexities involved in implementing large-scale water projects.

Water scarcity and unreliable supply have adverse impacts on communities, affecting health, dignity, and development. In Hammanskraal, some areas face severe water shortages, while others, like Refentse, have yard taps and relatively good water quality. However, the challenges in Suurman and Sekampaneng, for instance, are stark reminders of the urgency needed to solve these issues.

That said, I think it is important to commend the progress that has been made thus far in the different parts of the country to ensure water security. South Africa's water sector has seen significant achievements, such as capturing 75% of available surface water through dam infrastructure and constructing 18 new dams over the past 30 years. Access to at least a basic water service has also improved from around 60% in 1994 to nearly 90% to date. Last month, the Hammanskraal Intervention Project reached a significant milestone by flushing and testing the water reticulation system to ensure compliance with SANS 241:2015 drinking water standards. The completion of the first module of the Klipdrift Water Treatment Package Plant in October 2024 now provides safe drinking water to areas served by the Babelegi reservoir.

While this progress is promising, the journey is far from over. The ongoing upgrade and refurbishment of the Temba Water Treatment Works and the dysfunctional Rooiwaal Wastewater Treatment Works are crucial for sustainable water access. Currently, the first phase of the Klipdrift Plant supplies 12.5 million litres per day to selected areas, but other parts of Hammanskraal still rely on water tankers. To meet the community's needs, the remaining three modules must be fast-tracked, which will eventually bring the total supply to 50 million litres per day.

The Department of Water and Sanitation, together with all stakeholders, must work diligently to avoid foreseeable delays. This is not merely about infrastructure; it's about restoring dignity and protecting public health.

Additionally, the water challenges in Hammanskraal highlight a crucial truth about our country, that we are water scarce. Even as clean water starts flowing in some areas, the journey toward sustainable water security continues. This is why water conservation is critical. Residents must embrace a culture of water stewardship to ensure that this precious resource is preserved for future generations, not just in Hammanskraal, but across the country.

Yes, progress has been made, but much more work remains.

It is my hope to see the Department of Water and Sanitation, alongside all stakeholders, conquer the water challenges facing Hammanskraal, just as my hometown conquered its past and embraced the name Refentse.

Maseko is a communicator at the Department of Water & Sanitation. Maseko writes in her personal capacity.