

## NEWS

# South Africa struggles to meet water and sanitation goals as municipalities fail to maintain infrastructure

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*South Africa's water and sanitation struggles threaten achievement of sustainable development goals*

*Image: Oupa Mokoena / Independent Newspapers*

The Portfolio Committee on Water and Sanitation expressed grave concerns regarding South Africa's progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 by the year 2030.

The committee's apprehension primarily stems from the evident weaknesses of water services authorities, coupled with the alarming inability of municipalities to maintain and operate essential water infrastructure.

"The diagnosis has always been clear; what is needed is a focused programme of action to change course and improve the quality of water for South Africans. While the National Water and Sanitation Indaba 2025 has made commendable resolutions, the inability of municipalities to correct course will render the recommendations futile," said Chairperson of the committee, Leon Basson.

SDG 6 aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

However, the committee highlighted a disturbing trend: the ongoing pollution of river streams, a direct consequence of municipalities failing to adequately operate and maintain their water and sanitation infrastructure.

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While the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) holds the reins regarding policy directives for water management, the committee acknowledges the crucial roles played by sister departments, notably the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta).

Basson urged an immediate and coordinated response.

"It is important that the resolution taken by the water and sanitation indaba for the DWS and COGTA to engage with National Treasury to review water and sanitation conditional grants with a view to addressing the challenge of maintenance of water and sanitation infrastructure is urgent and must be implemented without delay," he said.

The committee also underscored the potential for innovative solutions, advocating for water services authorities and providers to build partnerships with the private sector.

Drawing on the support of the Water Partnerships Office could prove beneficial, especially given that current fiscal constraints hinder the government's ability to adequately address infrastructure needs within the water sector.

Moreover, the committee emphasised the necessity of top slicing the equitable share allocated to municipalities to manage the debt owed to water boards effectively. In doing so, they aim to ensure a functional cash flow throughout the water value chain, which is essential for addressing ongoing challenges.

Notably, amidst the crucial efforts made to enhance access to water and sanitation services, the committee highlighted a distinct lack of assurance regarding the quality of available water.

This alarming reality necessitates that government departments collaborate effectively with Statistics South Africa to ensure well-informed infrastructure planning – an essential step towards safeguarding the future integrity of water and sanitation services across the nation.