

By working together, we can overcome water challenges

by David Mahlobo

Moments that stay with me most during the water crisis in Gauteng are the visible doubt, disappointment and worry on the faces of people in my neighbourhood when the taps run dry.

These experiences have reinforced the reality millions of South Africans face, and have strengthened our resolve as the ministry of water and sanitation to approach water challenges with urgency, humility and a clear commitment to doing more to support the communities that carry the heaviest burden of unreliable water supply.

What disheartens me is how a basic human necessity is being politicised.

Pointing fingers may generate headlines, but does not repair pump stations, replace ageing pipes or replenish reservoirs.

In the context of a government of national unity, cooperation is not optional but essential. Within the ministry, this cooperation is not theoretical.

As leaders from different parties, we're working together daily to stabilise systems, coordinate emergency responses and accelerate long-term reforms. This collaborative approach is particularly crucial in Johannesburg, where infrastructure backlogs, rapid urbanisation and rising demand have converged into a complex and fragile supply environment.

Urban growth has outpaced upgrades. Maintenance has too often been reactive instead of preventative. Financial and governance weaknesses at the municipal level have compounded the strain.

Acknowledging these realities must not become an excuse for paralysis; it must drive reform.

In the short term, stabilisation remains critical. Soft water restrictions, reservoir load shifting, intensified tanker deployment and daily coordination between municipalities and provincial authorities are technical interventions designed to protect system pressure and prevent wider collapse.

SA requires sustained, large-scale investment in national water resource infrastructure while ensuring existing assets are properly operated and maintained. This investment must be supported by a capable institution able to raise finance responsibly and manage assets efficiently; and the establishment of the SA national water resource infrastructure agency is central to this.

By merging the Trans Caledon Tunnel Authority, the water trading entity of the department and the department's infrastructure branch into a single entity, the agency will own national water resource infrastructure, operate and maintain major dams, collect revenue from raw water sales and raise funds.

This integrated structure will create an entity with a substantial balance sheet and predictable revenue streams, placing it in a far stronger position to attract long-term capital for infrastructure.

Water security is a socio-economic imperative; every investment in a reliable supply protects jobs, supports growth and strengthens investor confidence in cities like Johannesburg.

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