

**Aqua-Enviro Youth Summit Award Ceremony**  
**Speech by Ms TR Mabudafhasi, Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs**  
**University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Gauteng**  
**03 July 2009**

Programme Director  
Honourable Ministers present here today,  
Honourable MECs  
Members of the Provincial Legislature  
Honourable Mayor  
Councillors  
Head Masters  
Educators  
Learners  
Ladies and Gentlemen

***“High quality water is more than the dream of the conservationist, more than a political slogan: high quality water, in the right quantity at the right place at the right time, is essential to health, recreation and economic growth.”***

These opening words taken from ES Muskie was cited way back in **1966**, when many of us here today were as young as the learners amongst us and most of us were not yet born. Yet Muskie’s words are as relevant today as they were four decades ago.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the hard work, creativity and innovativeness of the vibrant voices and bright young minds in our country. As you all know, this year we have decided to integrate and consolidate all our youth based competitions in line with the Government’s Programme of Action, and have particularly chosen June, the Youth Month, whose historical significance we all know, to recognise the role of youth in the Water and Environmental Youth issues.

As you are also aware, this is a culmination of a week long intensive programme wherein the youth were engaged in various activities. The activities have been centred around water literacy programmes, innovation and research to influence and stimulate the youth interest on the water sector careers as a response to the challenge of scarce skills. This being the first Aqua Enviro Youth Summit, also envisaged to continue annually during the youth month, has been aligned to this year’s theme of the recently launched National Youth Development Agency states, **“Celebrate a Vibrant Youth Voice”**

The youth programmes are aligned to the *2020 Vision for Water and Sanitation Education Programme* and its key categories include our vibrant voices of the Baswa-le-Meetse groups; the South African Youth Water Prize; the Aqua-Enduro; Invasive Alien Plant Educational Programme and the Forestry Youth Advancement Programme.

As I have indicated when launching the summit earlier this week, this programme serves as a practical application of the words once said by the Senegalese ecologist, Dr Baba Dioum in 1968, that education is a critical response to achieving behavioral change to issues of natural resource management. I quote, *“In the end we will conserve only what we love; We will love only what we understand and; We will understand only what we have been **taught.**”*

Therefore the *Aqua-Enviro Youth Summit* is part of my Department's broader Public awareness programme of educating our society about the importance of preserving and protecting our natural water resources.

By now, we all know that South Africa is a semi-arid country, therefore protecting; conserving and efficiently managing the little water resources we have is an imperative that should be institutionalised in the formal fabric of our daily water use behaviour – and we dare not falter. As the National Geographic stated in its October 1993 issue, "**All the water that ever will be is right now**".

We have seen a number of key messages during the week and have been reminded by these young and vibrant voices that access to water and sanitation is vital for sustained livelihoods and in particular for reducing child mortality and under-nutrition. In addition, school girls are especially likely to spend more time in school when they spend less time fetching water or have to stay at home to look after the sick. The youth here have through their creative minds demonstrated the link between access to services and hygiene and rather emphasised that this link is also an indispensable part of the equation. The simple act of hand washing can have significant implications for school children's health. Health experts argue that it can reduce instances of water-borne diseases significantly – up to 40%.

This clearly requires us as Government and communities to work hard – and together – to ensure that we respond appropriately by educating our children and by ensuring that we provide the necessary facilities to prevent the spread of diseases.

In recognising that infrastructure alone will not help, we intend to strengthen the 2020 Vision for Water and Sanitation Education Programme, where, together with the Department of Education, we will provide enough resources for learners and educators in all learning areas and education and training bands. This venture underlies the core principle of the 2020 programme, which is to educate children from an early age and to use them as conduits for community-wide education. We are also partnering with the Department of Health and local municipalities to rollout awareness campaigns to promote hand washing at schools and in our homes.

I now turn to the competitions' prizes which is the main reason we are today:

### **Baswa-le-Meetse Award**

The Awards particularly targets Grade 6 learners through using the art forms of drama, music, poetry, praise singing and poster design. Being nothing short of innovative and inspirational, the young people from Grade 6 from participating schools across the country bring honour to themselves and to their schools.

I must commend the extraordinary submissions we received from schools across the nine provinces. Our scholars' artistic expressions and interpretations of the theme through drama, poetry, traditional dance, praise singing and posters-as-media again surpassed all our expectations. It is a proven fact that the arts transform the learning environment and turns schools into places of discovery for learners.

Our Department clearly recognises these benefits, and know that the arts play an important and effective role in contributing to the intellectual, emotional and aesthetic growth of our children. The Music, dance, drama, poetry, praise singing and drawing creates an environment rich with colour, sound and movement to delight the senses of young audiences, making active learning fun and entertaining – what we popularly call *edutaining!* This we have experienced throughout the week. You may have walked through the exhibitions and witnessed the posters that these young minds articulated.

We are therefore using these art forms to supplement the spoken word as a medium for communicating with young minds.

### **South African Youth Water Prize**

The SAYWP is designed to empower the youth to come up with technical and economically viable innovations of saving water and other resources. It is a strategic programme placed to positively influence learners create awareness within their communities about water-related problems such as water conservation, water quality, infrastructure development, appropriate technology, and others, undertaking action research where they acquire practical research skills and propose solutions which have been found to be suitable for application beyond their immediate community environment thus contributing to our national and global responses to water resource challenges. We are proud that this is one of the programmes that has put us on the global platform for some years now and have demonstrated that we can stand against all countries. We have won twice the Stockholm Youth Water Prize in 2003 and 2005 respectively and still believe that our quality of work is of international standards and stand a good chance to bring the trophy home. We are again participating this year and to learners we say "Yes we can, Go for it"

### **Aqua-Enduro Bursary Award**

Aqua-Enduro is a project that revolves around World Water Monitoring Day which is on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October each year. Issues of Drinking Water Quality are the core business of the programme. The aim is to develop interest in learners who are between grade eight and eleven in order for them to pursue careers in the Water Sector and thereby address the skills shortages in the Water Sector. Again we acknowledge the intellectual and physical demonstrations in response to any given scenario affecting drinking water quality. We had a number of excursions and activities during this week to further expose the learners to the actual realities around drinking water quality management. These awards are therefore not based on a once off activity but on a process of nurturing and assessing the response of learners over time and we are proud to award those who demonstrated these qualities.

### **Invasive Alien Plant Educational Programme Bursary Award**

This category focuses on raising awareness about the impact of Invasive Alien species on our national resources. The programme allows for activities that seek to transfer content knowledge to learners in a practical manner.

This involves outdoor activities that allow learners to identify the invasive plants and learn about the threats of these invasive species. We are proud to present that practical demonstration on responding to these Invasive species to ensure a brighter tomorrow.

### **Forestry Youth Advancement Programme**

Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry this is now your domain. However let me acknowledge the firm framework that this project has and am very confident that it will go a long way in advancing the youth of our country.

I thought it was important to stress those few issues to ensure that our learners, educators and community members understand our appreciation of their hard work and the contribution these programme have to our sector challenges and why exactly we have the Awards and so everyone can hopefully see the bigger picture that Government has.

This is not a day for speeches as that will only be a repetition of what has been communicated to us by our youth, therefore I will be preaching to the converted. In that regard, this occasion remains a prize giving ceremony, and so I must talk about the prizes, as well. Here I must stress that the prizes are meant to contribute towards changing the lives of our communities' as part of our Government's bid to "*Make a Better Life for All*". We are therefore here to specifically congratulate the prize winners of each of the categories. These prizes serve to motivate learners and educators to know more about

water resource management issues, how to improve their school environment and create model schools that practise good hygiene.

It is worth noting also that the prizes were an effective stimulus towards the participation and entries we received. As youth we all aspire to win an overseas trip and exposure through our achievements, win media class rooms and play pumps for our schools, but mainly what matters most is pure recognition whether is through actual prizes, certificates or trophies etc

I am humbled by the unwavering support from our multi-year sponsors, despite periods of uncertainty around the global economy, and want to acknowledge MTN. The annual contribution of awarding our first prize BLM winners with state of the art media classroom is highly appreciated. What is more encouraging is the fact that these facilities reach our most rural communities. I am also aware that our recent plans to hand over ceremony the media class room at the Mbodleni school, Eastern Cape is still outstanding and I am committed to finalize this matter in due course.

ABSA, our multiyear sponsor has played a significant role in enabling environment towards the installation of our play pumps over years. I again appreciate your support this year in sponsoring and financing our prizes. I am informed that you are engaged with my officials in exploring other means of poverty alleviation initiatives with this Department and am hopeful that exercise will proceed well and help in collective efforts to address and develop our country

The Water Research Commission, has been instrumental in supporting our research and innovation, again a multiyear sponsor. I am particularly moved by your commitment to explore alternative solutions towards sustainably resources and by realising potential of young minds and the needs to stimulate innovation.

We had a long rich history with play pumps being awarded as prizes to our BLM winners through various organisations, I am pleased to note that this year, we have "Play pumps International-Water for All" as sponsor and I must say that we have had recent engagements with similar organisations that have pledged support to our schools programme and are looking forward for further partnerships in this area.

Sedibeng Water and Avis have voluntarily expressed interest to sponsor this summit and I am humbled by their initiative in doing so. I am humbled by the depth of the contributions they have made respectively, and this has relieved certain elements of our logistical challenges.

I am not making closing remarks, but feel moved by the level of support I have received from these partners. This serves as living testimony of the importance of private sector involvement in such government efforts and this demonstrated their commitment to their social responsibility programmes.

It is a known fact that, government cannot do it alone; and that the private sector is an integral part of our communities. We hope that our partnership with all of you will continue and call for further partnerships

The venue of University of the Witwatersrand has added a great value toward the vision of our youth. I am sure some of our learners have imagined themselves being varsity students, not only here but at any other university. To drive home the point about the importance of educating our children, I wish to quote OR Tambo, late President of the African National Congress, when he said:

***"A country, a nation, a people that does not care for its children (and youth) has no future and deserves none"***.

Sector departments that are here, Educators and learners, the private sector and civil society, together we can make it. I want to appeal to all to spread out the message to all our communities that

we all have a responsibility to take care of all facilities and resources and lets all take responsibility to sustain them.

In closing I want to repeat what I said earlier this week that Let us not just write and sing and draw about water – let us also care for and protect our water – so that issues of water, sanitation, health and hygiene do not remain the preserve of our politicians and technicians, but become the responsibility (and right) of every citizen of this country, and particularly the youth, who are the future of this country!

To the youth, let me say the sky is the limit, with perseverance and hard work we can make it, YES WE CAN!

*Let us applaud our youth for taking today the initiative to govern tomorrow*

Thank you.