

Budget Vote of 2009/10

Speech by Ms TR Mabudafhasi, Deputy Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs

Old Assembly Chamber, Cape Town, Western Cape

24 June 2009

WATER IS LIFE

Honorable Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee
Ministers and Deputy Ministers
Honorable Members of Parliament
CEO'S of Public Entities and NGOS
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Honourable members, water is a very precious resource, without which there would be no development, nor life itself, yet we take it for granted. There is no doubt that water is the most fundamental and indispensable natural resource necessary to meet socio-economic needs of South Africa as a developmental state. As a department, we therefore have a responsibility to ensure that we provide water to support all development objectives our country has set, especially poverty alleviation and rural development.

South Africa remains one of few countries in the world that regard water as a basic human right to realize development and improved quality of life for all. We have made significant progress in backlog. The number of people who had no access to water is reduced from 15 million down to 3.4 million by April 2006, thereby achieving MDG eight in advance.

While acknowledging existing programmes and successes, we share the same concern with our sister Department, Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional affairs, that the country meets two primary objectives namely, ensuring that the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) are met and that all South African have access to safe drinking water and sanitation services.

We therefore need to strengthen our support to local government and regulate the water sector to ensure that future generations have water resource to meet growing needs.

Within the context of poverty alleviation which is one of the critical challenges facing the country, the notion of water for development alludes to the role of water in the alleviation of poverty and community's constitutional rights to have access to a source of safe and reliable drinking water. The Department is deeply concerned about the persistent backlogs in particular parts of the country, where communities are vulnerable to water borne diseases like cholera.

In the past few years, before the global recession set in, our country experienced growth in economic activities. All of these required adequate water at the right place and of the right quality. On the other hand, this growth and development challenges come at a time when global climate change is negative. We are therefore in the process of developing a response strategy that will ensure that the vulnerable poor are protected to the harsh realities of climate change.

Despite progress made, one significant trend has been the increased poverty of women, the extent of which varies from province to province. Migration from rural to urban areas has had an impact on infrastructure in our urban areas, and also deepened rural underdevelopment. Our Department is therefore looking at reformulating policies and restructuring programmes to address such trends.

In order to achieve the social objectives that our country has set, we will restructure our programmes in such a way that they create more jobs and have a real positive impact on the lives of the poor. Job Creation will be central to all our programmes, particularly programmes like Working for Water, water conservation and Water allocation Reform. My Department is also looking at mechanisms of creating more jobs in building of infrastructure at local government level by planning well in advance and using very labour intensive methods. We have already started this initiative in our big infrastructure programmes like building of big dams, like the De Hoop Dam.

Our department has committed to a policy of continuous improvement of the management of the infrastructure, guided by best international practice. In response to the President's directive for developmental projects, our department will spend in the region of R30 Billion in the next 5 – 8 years to rollout construction and establishment of mega water resources targeting more vulnerable areas. Work has begun on twelve (12) dams already and we are satisfied with the progress so far. The rolling out of additional bulk infrastructure and technical advice to municipalities will help reduce the level of non-compliance on sanitation, especially the compliance to set standards on sewage treatments plants.

The Department has an obligation to ensure equitable and sustainable use of water resources and has a responsibility to implement effective Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement (CME) structures to ensure lawful water use. To this effect the Department will be submitting in a no distant future.

Honourable members, it is a well established fact that in the rural areas, women and children are central in the collection of water for their households from sources located at long distances. This is despite that domestic water is used for processing and preparing food, for drinking, bathing and washing, for irrigating home gardens and watering livestock. Women know the location, reliability and quality of local water resources. Effective gender mainstreaming is therefore our priority as we recognize that women have to play a central role in development.

Our strategy to address this challenge includes involvement of women and the youth in our programmes. We have organized a week-long youth summit scheduled to officially start next week on the 29th of June up to the 3rd of July 2009. These dates are strategically selected, in consultation with the Department of Education to ensure that schooling is not disrupted and therefore fall within the schools holiday period. The key objectives of the Aqua-Enviro Youth Summit are to align activities and messages to those of the National Calendar and activities planned by the National Youth Development Agency during the month of June and to integrate youth education programmes within this Department.

Another program targeting young people is 2020 Vision for Water & Sanitation Education Program. It is a research based multi-competition program aimed at educating learners about efficient use of water, protection of water sources, health and hygiene for a healthy life and eradicating invasive alien species. This initiative will produce young knowledgeable ambassadors who will safeguard water and pass on the expertise to future generations.

In this era of economic recession and collusions on price-fixing by big companies resulting in unaffordable food prices, our department found it fitting in the interest of food security and responsible water usage to assist communities and emerging poor farmers who own land with resources and capacity building in their developmental stage.

This is done on the basis of understanding that the majority of poor people in South Africa live in rural areas and their livelihood is sustained by subsistence farming which relies on irrigation schemes. To supplement communities' initiatives, the department has introduced a support program which provides assistance such as Grants for bulk water supply infrastructure, financial, sanitation and rain water harvesting. The long term objective is to enable them to take charge of their situations by firstly allowing them to provide the basic food requirements of their families, and then moving on to become independent and eventually full-scale commercial farmers.

To cite an example the Moletele community in Limpopo is a beneficiary of such support program. This community reclaimed 97 516 ha and benefited infrastructure amounting to R26 million from this support. In turn, it managed create 198 permanent and 755 seasonal jobs respectively. On the basis of these socio-economic benefits, we intend to replicate this nationally for other poor communities. There is no doubt that the potential to reduce poverty through these initiatives is substantially. As department we are going to continue supporting similar initiatives.

Honourable members, in the past few years, there have been reports of non compliance, pollution of our rivers, abstraction of water, unauthorized construction of dams, discharge of waste into water resources and pollution incidents. Last year, we ran a very successful Blitz Week where the department clamped down on the transgressors. This intervention led to successful cases of dealing with non compliance across the sectors, industries, individual farmers, municipalities and other illegal

users. We continue to intensify these programmes as already indicated by Minister Sonjica in her speech.

The creation of Water and Environment department is a wise move which now bring crime fighting capacity of the Green Scorpions and the envisaged Blue Scorpions in the former DWAF under one roof. We believe the sharing of expertise will bring more criminals to book and also increase the rate of prosecution.

We cannot achieve all of these objectives if the public does not have a full appreciation of issues at hand. Our well known and successful programmes like 2020 Vision play an important role in educating members of the public by conveying educational messages. Key messages amongst others are that water is a scarce resource which requires collective effort to conserve.

It is in our interest as a Department to play a leadership role in ensuring that we invest in building skills to manage our water. Our Water for Growth and Development framework amongst other things, calls for an effective and relevant sectoral education and training as a response to the current skills shortage in the water sector .We will intensify programmes that will attract the youth in water related careers to ensure sustainability of both infrastructure and water resource.

Acknowledging that Water is Life, our Department is committed to ensuring that we manage this strategic resource water for the benefit of the people of South Africa and that we can achieve better if we work together.

Thank you.