



MEDIA STATEMENT

Deputy Minister Seithloho lauds the upskilling of young engineers to improve water and sanitation service delivery in municipalities

17 May 2025

Water and Sanitation Deputy Minister, Mr Sello Seithloho has commended the skills training that is being granted to young engineers in the water sector as it will improve service delivery of water and sanitation services at municipal level. He was speaking at the at a 5-year celebration of the Young Engineers Changemakers Programme (YECp) organised by Water Research Commission (WRC) in partnership with the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT).

The YECp was launched five years ago to empower a new generation of municipal engineers in efforts to contribute to sustainable service delivery.

It also provides opportunities for young South African engineers to partake in testing potential innovative water and sanitation solutions in real world sites and to gain the necessary skills required to drive municipalities of the future which are sustainable, liveable and builds socio-technical infrastructure and services.

Up to date, 50 young engineers from 21 municipalities around the country have been trained over the last five years.

The Deputy Minister congratulated the young engineers and further reminded them that their core purpose is to make a positive contribution in arresting the decline of engineering skills in the municipalities.

“We meet here to celebrate both the milestone of this important programme as well as to take stock of its potential and future in helping us address the challenges which threaten to cripple our democracy. We cannot fix South Africa without fixing municipalities. For us to fix municipalities, requisite skills and capacity should be taken into consideration and should be prioritised. It is for this reason that we should acknowledge the joint efforts by the WRC and DSIT to empower the engineers,” said the Deputy Minister.

Deputy Minister Seithloho indicated that the country is in the midst of failing infrastructure, and that a great cause of these failing infrastructure is due to lack of capacity and skills in municipalities, particularly engineering skills.

He also highlighted that the municipal water and sanitation services are deteriorating, as it was revealed by the recent Green Drop, Blue Drop and No Drop assessment reports released by the Department of Water and Sanitation.

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67 out of 144 Water Services Authorities (WSAs) scored 'critical' on average across their water supply systems and/or wastewater systems in the 2023 Blue Drop and 2022 Green Drop assessments.

"This is a bleak sign that municipalities, constituting a majority of WSAs, are in crisis. If the state of governance in municipalities does not improve and we do not capacitate municipalities with skilled engineers and planners, we will face a crippling water crisis. And unlike with our electricity crisis, water is a resource that cannot be replaced", he said.

Deputy Minister Seithloho said the YEPC is a positive initiative that will help turn things around because municipalities are in dire need of capacity and skills. He said the Department of Water and Sanitation and other sector role players will continue to provide targeted support to local government through various support and intervention programmes aimed at improving water services.

"We must continue to make every effort to fund, support and incentivise such programmes to ensure that we harness the skills we need to improve the state of our municipalities," added the Deputy Minister.

Deputy Director-General of the DSIT, Dr Mmboneni Muofhe the partnership with DWS's entity WRC to upskill the municipal engineers will improve service delivery on water and sanitation at municipal level. He appealed to the young engineers to not only empower themselves with education but to also make a difference to their communities.

"Our primary objective in our partnership with WRC is to build a capable state, and that cannot be achieved without water. Water management has significant socioeconomic impacts that can affect domestic hygiene, public health, and economic development. We are therefore proud as the Department to have partnered with WRC to skill municipal engineers who will make a difference in society with regards to service delivery of water and sanitation to vulnerable communities, especially those in rural areas with limited access to water and sanitation infrastructure", he said.

Dr Jennifer Molwantoa, Chief Executive Officer of the WRC said they will continue to venture in partnerships to ensure that water and sanitation issues in the country are addressed.

"There is now a cohort of 50 young men and women engineers who have been trained over the past five years since the inception of the YCEP. This achievement cannot go unnoticed although 50 is not enough. Through their taxes, people of this country have invested for your skills training and empowerment to change the lives of the people. We will continue with the programme to ensure that more engineers are trained", she said.

END

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