INTERNET ARTICLE

Water Sector Anti-Corruption Forum Launched to Safeguard South Africa's Water Resources

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The Special Investigating Unit (SIU), in partnership with the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), has launched the Water Sector Anti-Corruption Forum (WSACF), a collaborative initiative aimed at strengthening the fight against corruption and safeguarding South Africa's water resources.

The forum was established following findings from 16 SIU proclamations involving the Department of Water and Sanitation. To date, nine investigations have been completed while seven remain ongoing, highlighting the urgent need for a coordinated and sector-focused response to corruption within water management.

The WSACF is anchored in the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, particularly Pillar Six, which focuses on protecting vulnerable sectors and strengthening integrity systems. Through a risk-based approach, the forum will drive investigation, prevention and enforcement measures aimed at protecting the country's water resources from corruption, fraud and mismanagement.

The forum also aligns with South Africa's long-term development priorities under the National Development Plan 2030, which emphasises water security and ethical governance. In addition, it supports Sustainable Development Goal 6, which aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of clean water and sanitation for all.

By adopting what the National Anti-Corruption Strategy describes as a "whole-of-society approach," the forum brings together a wide range of stakeholders from across society. These include law-enforcement agencies, Chapter 9 institutions, civil society organisations, private sector representatives, organised labour, regulators, traditional and religious leaders, environmental groups and government departments.

This collaborative model is designed to strengthen accountability, close governance gaps and implement measurable prevention strategies to combat corruption across the water value chain.

According to Leonard Lekgetho, Acting Head of the SIU and Chairperson of the forum, corruption in the water sector poses a direct threat to service delivery and community well-being.

“As South Africa experiences water shortages in various parts of the country, we must ensure that we draw lessons from our investigations. Water affects every living being, making it imperative that the fight against corruption becomes a collective effort,” Lekgetho said.

He added that the launch of the forum marks a decisive step in protecting one of the country’s most critical resources, warning that corruption undermines both service delivery and public trust.

Minister of Water and Sanitation Pemmy Majodina emphasised that corruption in the water sector has severe consequences for communities.

“When corruption infiltrates the water sector, it does not simply distort procurement processes or inflate invoices. It dries up taps, delays infrastructure, contaminates rivers and erodes public trust,” she said.

Majodina warned that in a water-scarce country such as South Africa, corruption is not a victimless crime, as it diverts resources needed to repair infrastructure, expand water supply systems and protect freshwater ecosystems.

The SIU’s investigations have already uncovered significant financial losses linked to corruption in the sector. The unit has recovered R569 million in cash and assets, while preventing potential losses of R717 million.

In addition, investigators have set aside contracts worth R1.1 billion, referred 270 cases for prosecution, and initiated civil litigation valued at R6.2 billion.

The Water Sector Anti-Corruption Forum builds on similar sector-specific initiatives established to combat corruption across government, including forums in the health, infrastructure, local government and border management sectors.

Through enhanced cooperation, stronger investigations and preventative measures, the forum aims to protect water resources, improve service delivery and strengthen public trust in institutions responsible for managing South Africa's water systems.

As Majodina emphasised, protecting water from corruption is both a constitutional duty and a moral responsibility.

"Water is life," she said. "And corruption in this sector threatens both life and dignity."

Maria Lebese