



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

INTERNET ARTICLE

South Africa – Cuban agreement forges ahead

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South Africa and Cuba are going ahead with their agreement for engineers and geo-hydrologists work with South Africa to tackle its possible water infrastructure challenges. This is despite misconceptions around the deployment of Cuban water specialist engineers to South Africa and amidst inaccurate reports and commentary about the contents and intention of the bilateral agreement signed with Cuba on Monday, 09 September 2013.

The agreement is part of a wide-ranging recruitment drive by the Department of Water and Sanitation to find skilled professionals to deal with South Africa's water problems.

South Africa is at present losing 36.8% of its water through bad infrastructure management, mainly the result of an extreme shortage of skilled water professionals. The wastage costs the country more than R11-billion a year. This figure constitutes an astounding amount of our clean, drinkable water being lost through leaking pipes, dripping taps and other inefficient ways of using water.

There is also a challenge with the way municipalities handle water issues, i.e. failing water schemes, unreliable infrastructure at municipalities nationwide, and insufficient efforts towards efficient water use. Skilled professionals are needed for the maintenance of facilities and infrastructure like water treatment plants, dams and reservoirs.

In rural areas, the department is still grappling with challenges of access to water and sanitation due to sparsely arranged households, rugged terrain and topography, aged and poorly maintained infrastructure, absence of piped water systems, unavailable water resources and storage, as well as lack of sanitation infrastructure generally. Skilled personnel are needed for planning, designing, siting, drilling, testing as well as equipping boreholes. Provision of hand pumps, wind mills, electric and diesel-driven pumps to households is also needed.

The department's national water resource strategy, published in July 2012, shows that South Africa needs about 3000 engineers and about 7200 health and hygiene, or environmental health practitioners in the medium term. The country also needs 23000 managers, of whom 1400 are required immediately. This figure includes 246 construction project managers, construction managers, engineering managers and technical project managers. There is also an urgent need for 4000 artisans and technicians.

The department's spokesman, Themba Khumalo had earlier indicated that DWS intended to pave the way for the recruitment of 34 Cuban engineers on two-year contracts. He said the agreement was one of many to be signed with a number of countries in a bid to deal with the water challenges of the country.

The agreement has led to the deployment of specialists from Cuba who include hydrologists, water resources and water supply specialists, engineering services and geo-hydrologists to augment the skills capacity in the sector and to work mainly in rural and disadvantaged areas where there is a dire need for such specialist technical skills. The Cuba co-operation makes provision for the pairing of the Cubans with young South African engineers that will be sourced



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directly from university as part of skills transfer. In addition, the plan is that by the time the Cubans leave they would have developed enough capacity to close the gap that exists currently.

The Cuban engineers would:

- Provide geo-hydrology and engineering services;
- Assist in the exploitation of water resources;
- Maintain water-supply infrastructure;
- Help with capacity building through training and support of local staff; and
- Manage water supply.

Thabang Molai

Issued by the Department of Water & Sanitation

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