



INTERNET ARTICLE

One-on-one interview with Minister Nomvula Mokonyane

4 September 2014

In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the 2014 World Water Week, Minister Nomvula Mokonyane took time off from her busy schedule to catch up with SABC senior journalist **Manqoba Mchunu (MM)** in Stockholm.

The Minister at the helm of South Africa's Water and Sanitation Department shared her views on how South Africa plans to deal with water management challenges, and how services are going to be improved at municipal level.

MM: Minister, research indicates that a lot of countries in sub-Saharan Africa will be facing severe water shortages by the year 2020. Given that South Africa is part of the region, what are the plans to deal with this problem at home?

NM: If water resources were managed properly, we wouldn't be dealing with this particular challenge. Water wastage in sub-Saharan Africa and the lack of access to information are both factors. The realities of climate change have resulted in huge wastage of water, where you find potable water being used for agriculture, and water that is being recycled getting contaminated by chemicals. Over and above climate change challenges, there are historic challenges, which we are now dealing with.

We have formed organisations across sub-Saharan Africa and the continent [such as the AU and SADC], where countries work together. Within nation states, we all have water management plans; but the most important thing is ensuring that we get everybody on board – including business, communities, the agricultural sector, the mining sector – to deal with the issue of water shortages. We are also using research, science and technology to come up with solutions.

MM: Let's talk about one of the projects South Africa is involved in with neighbouring country Lesotho -- the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. What impact will its spin-offs have on South Africa and Lesotho?

NM: Historically, the treaty was signed between the Kingdom of Lesotho and the then apartheid government. In those years, the treaty gave South Africa access to Lesotho resources, without benefit for the people of the kingdom. Post 1994, the democratically elected government reworked the treaty. The treaty now ensures there is sharing of economic benefits for both countries. More importantly, the project ensures there is energy generation for Lesotho and there is water for South Africa's water challenged provinces.

In the old days, people would see infrastructure being laid out through their villages but we are aware that you can't do that without people benefiting. We have changed the old treaty to make it a win-win for both countries.

MM: We are now in the second phase of the project, which is expected to deliver water and hydroelectricity generation in 2022. What else can we expect from it?



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NM: It's going to increase the volumes of water that we are getting from Lesotho, and in turn, increase the energy benefit for Lesotho. We are also looking to increase the business beneficiation for Lesotho, which used to be solely for South Africa in the past. President Jacob Zuma, Lesotho Prime Minister Thomas Thabane and the King of Lesotho agreed that we need to look at the treaty's structure so that accountability can fall on both parties, and that business opportunities are created in Lesotho. We can't take resources out of Lesotho and not leave anything for the Basotho. This is about our commitment as the ANC government to make sure that prosperity goes beyond our borders.

MM: We know that most of the problems with water service delivery happen at municipal level. What is going to be done to turn around the situation?

NM: One of the good things about the fifth democratic government is that President Jacob Zuma announced the setting up of the new Department of Water and Sanitation. This was an acknowledgement of the challenge that we are facing. In 2000, government introduced the Municipal Systems Act, which gives municipalities the authority to uplift communities socially and economically. The problems that you find are usually a reflection of what's going on in local government. On the other hand, national government, in the main, was focusing on bigger projects, allocation of budgets and the development of policies. But out of the 20 Year Review, we have reviewed the Water Services Act.

Most importantly, we are revisiting the powers, functions, roles and responsibilities. The Constitution of South Africa actually puts it on the central government to carry the responsibility of providing water. What has been a problem is that many municipalities do not have human capital that can do the job. On the other hand, money that has been pumped into municipalities is unable to fulfil the demand because of ageing infrastructure. In some instances, it is because of neglect of operation and maintenance. In other cases, it is because of corruption. In some cases, rather than investing in maintenance and rolling out infrastructure, we outsource the responsibility.

There is nothing wrong with bringing in the private sector in the supply of water and sanitation, but the most important thing is to make sure that government has the capability to drive that.

There is no point in us not looking after our water treatment works, and then going out to look for VIP toilets. That is not the right solution. You should rather maintain your water treatment works and sort out your sewer pump stations. Some of the problems that you find are caused by people who want to benefit from providing water and sanitation services, where they buy some of our communities to destroy our infrastructure.

Together with Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Minister Pravin Gordhan, we have agreed that there is a need to move away from a one size fits all approach to municipal solutions.

Already, we have intervened in the provinces. For instance, in the North West, we will prioritise Madibeng, Ngaka Modiri Molema and resolve the Bloemhof situation. We are, however, doing good work in provinces like KwaZulu-Natal, with [eThekweni Water and Sanitation getting an international award in Stockholm](#). In instances like Makana in the Eastern Cape, it has a lot to do with corruption, lack of accountability, political interference and the lack of maintenance. There are no early warning systems to avoid situations like the pipe that burst there.



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But when all is said and done, we have managed to reduce our backlog in water and sanitation, albeit these challenges.

MM: What lessons are we going to take back to South Africa from Stockholm?

NM: Cooperation is very important; decisive leadership and accountability on how water is being used is important. Government resources are limited, so the role of the private sector in driving innovation is very important.

It's time for Africa to find solutions that are good for us. While we appreciate international support and funding, there must be skills transfer to Africa.

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For more information contact: Sputnik Ratau at 0762195380

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