



## water & sanitation

Department:  
Water and Sanitation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

### Opinion Piece

#### More steps to ease water shortage

#### Youths are trained to step up the war on leaks as plumbers, artisans and agents

*Thursday, 10 December 2015 - The New Age*

*The last time it rained in Ficksburg was in September and the locals started to prepare for heavy summer downpours. Truth is they were little prepared for a severe drought that soon gripped the Free State and some parts of the country.*

*To mitigate against the effects of the drought, the Setsoto Local Municipality introduced water restrictions in the town and Meqheleng township. Consequently, tourism took a plunge and livestock started dying. The situation was exacerbated by blocked sewerages whose effluent flowed in the streets and the yards in parts of Meqheleng.*

*Nestled between the rolling Maluti Mountains on the border of Lesotho, the usually vibrant town of Ficksburg suddenly had deserted streets as locals stayed indoors to evade the searing heat wave.*

*Municipal officials scrambled for help and they contacted officials of the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS). DWS officials swung into action and sent engineers to the area to assess the impact of the situation and together with the municipality, to find possible solutions.*

*Head of the department in Free State, Dr Tseliso Ntli captures the problems succinctly by saying: "The Caledon River which is the main source of supply of water to Ficksburg was running dry and thus not meeting the demand of the locals; because of the drought, water levels at Meulspruit Dam became dangerously low. The bulk pipeline from Meulspruit Dam to a local water treatment needed to be increased in order to cope with the local demand. There was also a further issue of asbestos-made pipes that burst regularly in the area.*

*"We needed to have a proper diagnosis of the problem if we hoped to address it properly," said Ntli.*

*Engineers from the department and municipality put their heads together and upgraded the water treatment plant from a capacity of 16 to 32 megalitres a day. This included the completion of a 10 megalitres' reservoir and a dedicated water supply pipeline to Meqheleng. The leaking pipes and reservoirs at Meqheleng were quickly fixed and water was restored in major parts of the township. In addition, the water conservation and demand management policy was intensified among the local communities to educate them about the importance of using water responsibly.*

*"You have no idea how much the interventions helped us to have water again in the area," said a white businesswoman who owns a popular guesthouse in Ficksburg.*

*Although water supply has been restored in the town it is not enough to meet the local demand, forcing the Setsoto Local Municipality to introduce water restrictions in the area. However, the reliable availability of water supply in the area has restored the vibrancy of*



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*Ficksburg. Streets are bursting at the seams and the Basotho nationals who are shopping for Christmas have become a common sight.*

*When Minister Nomvula Mokonyane visited Meqheleng recently as part of the government's Imbizo Focus Week she was met with jubilation by local residents. At a public meeting held at Meqheleng New Stadium they queued for the microphone to express their frustration with water-related problems. Mokonyane, who shared the platform with Free State MEC BhutanaKomphele, heard sordid tales of vandalism of infrastructure at Meqheleng. The problem is compounded by the rampant stock theft of cattle which are allegedly herded across the border to Lesotho. However, Mokonyane urged the residents to form street committees to protect their infrastructure.*

*"Minister we like you for getting things done. Were it not for the intervention of your department we were going to die from thirst. You seem to be having an influence on nature as well," a pensioner who receives water in her yard told Mokonyane. She was referring to a heavy downpour that occurred a day before Mokonyane's visit*

*Minister Mokonyane said her department has put aside a sum of R63 million to address the water woes in Ficksburg. Officials indicated that a lot still needs to be done to meet the minimum demands of water and sanitation. Through its Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant (RBIG) the department has transferred R8 million to the local municipality to deal with the problem of bucket eradication.*

*In collaboration with the Thabo Mofutsanyane District Municipality and Setsoto Local Municipality the department has committed itself to the eradication of buckets as a form of sanitation in the area. This year alone 300 of 969 bucket toilets have been replaced with flushing toilets. The officials hope to eradicate the remainder by the end of 2015.*

*Another key solution to the water woes of Ficksburg lies in the training of youths as plumbers, artisans and water agents. In August President Jacob Zuma launched the War on Leaks (WoL) programme, a flagship of the Department of Water and Sanitation to train 15 000 unemployed youths throughout the country as plumbers, artisans and water agents. On the completion of the course the recruits will be deployed among various municipalities to fix leaking taps and burst pipes in their own areas, as well as do the necessary advocacy work amongst communities. The exercise will save South Africa an estimated R7 billion annual loss through non-revenue water (water that is not accounted for).*

*At the community meeting Mokonyane promised as a final point, to engage the Premier of the Province, Ace Magashule, with a view to recruiting 1 000 more youths in the Free State to join WoL.*