



water & sanitation

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Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPINION PIECE

Returning people's dignity

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The provision of proper toilets is a constitutional imperative that governments cannot, and should not, shirk.

The eradication of the bucket system in Gauteng, which has long demeaned the dignity of many a community, has given substance to the core constitutional right to human dignity.

Proper sanitation is at the heart of addressing past inequalities and restores respect to communities who have gone on without this basic necessity for a long time.

Not having proper sanitation meant that the dignity of many communities was degraded. Although some may be tempted to think that the provision of proper sanitation pales into insignificance when compared with other pressing challenges, such as the right to access to food, this right ranks as one of the unassailably important rights.

The infringement of the right to proper sanitation can have a negative impact on other areas of life. For instance, the health of communities is at risk of being immensely affected by all sorts of diseases associated with exposure to unhygienic conditions.

The right to proper sanitation is therefore intricately linked to other human rights, such as the right to health. Denial of proper sanitation can lead to health hazards with a devastating impact on the social and economic prospect of the communities.

Therefore, meeting this foremost challenge is one of the critical areas that contribute towards protecting the lives of people.

By eradicating the bucket system in Gauteng, the department of water and sanitation reaffirmed the people's right that this basic necessity is not arbitrarily denied where resources are available to better the lives of the people.

This further underscores the fact that if basic necessities of the people are not met, there must be a rational and sound reason for it not to be provided. Equally



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accurately, this symbolises the constitutional imperative that the right to dignity must of necessity lead to its inviolability.

This took a greater significance when the Lesedi local municipality, the last municipality with a backlog of the bucket system in Gauteng, was completed.

In Ratanda, about 58 households were affected and some households had to share toilets. The sanitation situation in Ratanda was addressed, thanks to the provincial Water and Sanitation Forum, the object of which is to manage water and sanitation challenges including the eradication of all bucket system backlog in the province.

This underlines that partnerships between various sectors in the community can go far in the direction of ensuring that concrete development takes place. The re-establishment of the dignity of the people can easily amount to an abstract but, in this case, the practical actions taken in various areas have given meaning and content, in a demonstrable way, of how developmental projects are keenly pursued.

The kind of progress made in Gauteng serves to indicate the singular important fact that, moved by the conditions under which the people live, the ability to work together is of prime importance.

There should not be anything that devalues the currency of cooperation in order to optimally use the constrained resources that are meant to address a myriad of developmental challenges.

The provision of basic services in communities must therefore be seen as a step forward to adhere to the constitutional mandate and the prime obligation that every citizen should expect from government.

By Hosia Sithole

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