



## water & sanitation

Department:  
Water and Sanitation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

### OPINION PIECE

#### **WATER CRISIS: Gauteng is not out of the woods**

23 June 2016, Boksburg Advertiser online

The dam levels in Gauteng are lower than they were this time last year and, although they are not part of the provinces that were recently given the status of disaster because of the continuing drought, it remains a concern.

Since Gauteng has not been declared a disaster area, it may be construed by some that the province is no longer facing water shortages.

The reality, though, is that we are not out of the woods yet by a long way. The dipping of our water resources to critically low levels calls upon us to adapt to new circumstances, which will assist in warding off potential crises.

Efforts aimed at changing our patterns of behaviour should be increased at community level. The declaring of other provinces as disaster zones does not mean that Gauteng is immune from being declared as such.

The only way that, as communities in Gauteng, we can assist in efforts to ensure that we remain out of the disaster status is if we adhere to strict ways of conserving water resources. The consistency of water supply in our taps may give way to communities trivialising the extent of the problem that is faced by the province.

At the same time, it should be said that many communities are acutely aware of the threat posed by the ongoing drought and, in this regard, they have done their utmost best to ensure that our taps do not run dry, by exercising prudence when using water.

The rationing of water is a last resort to try to counter any downward levels of water and to maintain consistency in the supply of this precious commodity to communities. The bleak situation of our water resources is reflected in the current levels of the major dams which are part of the Vaal River System, which serve mainly Gauteng, Sasol and Eskom, that are at 62 per cent compared with 62.5 per cent last week.



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This accounts for a drop of 0.5 per cent for this week. The system was at 81.8 per cent last year. This calls for everyone to start taking issues of water conservation seriously. The Katse Dam, now at 59.1 per cent, has decreased by 1.1 per cent from the previous week. The Vaal Dam is down to 39.3 per cent, which means a 0.6 per cent decrease week on week. This is the ninth consecutive week we see a fall-off in the Vaal Dam. The Sterkfontein Dam has increased by 0.2 per cent to 89.2 per cent and the Grootdraai Dam decreased by 1.5 per cent and is now at 83.2 per cent.

We need, therefore, to make sure that we do not face the same issues in the other provinces, which impacts food prices, which may be detrimental to the lives of the communities. Because our current water levels fall desperately short of what we need, we must treat the idea of conserving water as an enterprise on which we all depend. Our primary preoccupation at this stage should be to use whatever means we have available at our disposal to limit the impact of water shortages.

As the levels of our water resources are not in an ideal state and are continuing to deplete, the support of each and every person in the community will, in some way, help to sustain our water levels.

In every problematic situation that people face at any given time, there is always a price to pay. For the communities of Gauteng Province this is behavioural change. Clinging to traditional ways of doing things in an abnormal situation, as the one we are faced with, is only a means of hastening the destruction of our communities.

As communities we, therefore, have to adapt to the reality that the current situation is not normal and we have to change our behaviour in order to survive. The obligation to conserve water resources does not fall on the shoulders of any particular person, but on all of us, to act now in a resolute manner.

The enforcement of the right to access to clean water can only take place in the context of members of the community voluntarily acting together. At all times community members should be agents of change and should advocate for behavioural change towards conserving our water resources, to enhance their social and economic progress.

**By Hosia Sithole**