



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPINION *PIECE*

Providing water to all the people of the land

THE NEW AGE

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South Africa, a water-scarce nation, is experiencing drought in some parts of KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo at present, but this does not mean citizens should panic.

Water availability in South Africa varies greatly in space and time. While the west is dry, with rainfall only during summer and as low as 100mm, the east and south-east receive rainfall throughout the year with an average of up to 1000mm. Total annual surface runoff is estimated at 43 to 48km squared, depending on the source.

South Africa is one of the few countries in the world that enshrines the basic right to sufficient water in its Constitution.

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) always has in place effective and efficient mechanisms ensuring constant and sustainable delivery of water to even remote parts of the country.

Infrastructure required to connect water resources over vast distances with internal bulk and reticulation systems is managed by DWS's chief directorate: water services bulk infrastructure.

Despite temporary water shortages in some parts of the country, there is hope that resources are available and will be delivered to every community by the government.

These programmes are known as the Regional Bulk Infrastructure grant, municipal water infrastructure grant, accelerated community Infrastructure programme and the water services operating subsidy.

The government, through DWS, has made a strong commitment to high service standards and to high levels of investment subsidies to achieve these standards.

Since then, the country has made some progress with regard to improving access to water. It reached universal access to an improved water source in urban and rural areas.

The share of those with access increased from 66% to 79% from 1990 to 2010.

South Africa also has a strong water industry with a track record in innovation. Two distinctive features of the South African water sector are policy of free basic water and the existence of water boards, which are bulk water supply agencies that operate pipelines and sell water to municipalities.

In May 2014 it was announced that Durban's water and sanitation department won the Stockholm Industry Water Awards for its "transformative and inclusive approach."



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The city has connected 1, 3 million additional people to piped water and provided 700 000 with access to toilets in 14 years. It was also South Africa's first municipality to put free basic water for the poor into practice.

Furthermore it has promoted rain water harvesting and mini-hydropower, including desalination, a programme gaining momentum in KZN and other parts of the country.

Service quality is good but highly variable. In 2003, 63% of municipalities were not able to say if they met drinking water quality standards or not. DWS introduced in 2008 the "blue drop" incentive-based water quality regulation strategy. Under the strategy municipal service providers are certified with a blue drop if they fulfill certain requirements.

KEY POINTS

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