



INTERNET ARTICLE

Reforestation essential for efficient water management

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It is forests to the rescue!

Reforestation and rehabilitation of natural forests is essential to promote and ensure sustainable management of water.

The aim of forest management, according to the Minister of the Department of Water and Sanitation, Nomvula Mokonyane, should be to allow different uses for different communities without impacting negatively on forest resources. "This calls for a balanced approach to food, water and energy security nexus because indigenous knowledge remains critically important to the sustainable management of forests," noted Minister Mokonyane.

The Minister was delivering a keynote address at the XIV World Forestry Congress (WFC) held at the iNkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre (ICC), Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) on Tuesday, 8 September 2015.

The congress is themed "Forestry and People: Working for a Sustainable Future" and Minister Mokonyane addressed the audience on the topic titled "International Forests and Water Dialogue".

The Minister explained that there is no doubt that a close relationship exists between forests and our water resources, adding that water is the most vital element of all natural resources. As such, she added, it is essential to life; however, sustainable forest management is there to ensure the supply of good quality fresh water, to provide protection from natural hazards such as flooding or soil erosion including safeguarding the aquatic species.

She reiterated that South Africa is a water scarce country as evidenced by the very little rainfall, skewed water distribution nationwide and low water levels in storage, i.e. dams and groundwater aquifers. This challenge posed by nature is often exacerbated by the human induced impacts such as unsustainable use of resources, pollution due to incorrect land-use and by climate change impacts.

Various users compete for access to water against the backdrop of the fact that South Africa is a developmental state with resource-based economy, poor communities that historically did not have access to water for livelihoods and water for the ecosystem including the forest ecosystem.

Forests reduce greenhouse gas concentration in the atmosphere, thus enhancing resilience to climate impacts. There is also the need to implement measures for reducing the negative impact of climate change on forest ecosystems. Further research is needed in this regard.

She explained that as government and private sectors, we both must contribute and support these innovative ideas geared towards adapting to climate change over and above mitigation. She again noted that countries should become more resilient to climate change by finding ways of financing adaptation programmes and strengthening of institutions to manage water wisely.



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The Minister added that in South Africa people distinguish between the management of natural forests and plantations. Plantations introduce invasive alien species which pose a direct threat to the country's biological diversity, water security and ecological functioning of natural systems.

She made members of the audience aware that the control of invasive alien species is therefore essential. As such government introduced the Working for Water (WFW) Programme which in turn created jobs for the local communities. The use of pesticides and herbicides in controlling alien species must be exercised with caution, to manage their impact on water quality.

Minister Mokonyane pointed out that Africa has become the fastest growing continent in the world, which is important for governments to ensure that urbanisation and industrialisation do not encroach on our forests, noting that how we manage our spatial development programmes should become instructive to these imperatives.

She concluded that the current generation owes it to future generations to whom the baton would be passed on to manage the planet. Therefore, social mobilisation and, in particular, the involvement of young people and women, becomes key to the preservation of the country's forests and water resources.

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