

Water as a key to socio-economic development and poverty eradication in North-West Province, as projected for the entire South Africa

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Abstract

President Thabo Mbeki stated in his inaugural speech of 27 April 2004 that in our land of gold and diamonds the one which is born poor must not die poor by decree. The purpose of our lives is not just the accumulation of wealth. He made us aware of our higher purpose of life. The challenge of this paper is to propose possible solutions for eradication of that poverty in an institutional, systematic and sustainable manner through a basic/essential commodity of life: "WATER". With the following Founding Principle: "To find a practical institutional arrangement to address the provision of adequate, affordable, and reliable supply of water to be made available for water services, particularly for poor rural and peri-urban settlements, as well as water for local economic development (LED) of the previously disadvantaged rural areas of South Africa (possibly through cross-subsidisation, loans and leveraging funding for water services infrastructure in rural areas)"

"...viewing mankind as one entity" we must "subordinate every particular interest, be it personal, regional or national, to the over-riding interests of the generality of mankind, knowing full well that in a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no lasting result can be achieved by any of the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are neglected ..." (Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p.vi)

Introduction, description of the challenge

Historically the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWA), as a national body, had been the Water Services Authority until November 1997. Water boards (19 of them, and not covering the entire South Africa) and a few large cities fulfilled the role of the Water Services Provider for a major part of the previously advantaged population and major industries of South Africa. The water services in the rural areas (majority poor "black" communities) were largely underdeveloped or ignored. The National Government developed a policy framework, in 18 September 2000, to kick start a process of bringing about Free Basic Services to the POOR families, which included 6 000 ℓ of free basic water to every poor family per month. The newly formed municipal councils, just elected in 5 December 2000, were charged with the implementation of the policy. A task team was developed by the Provincial Department of Developmental Local Government, North West Province, to facilitate the development of a systematic strategy of the process of delivery of basic services, including water, under chairmanship of MEC D. Africa.

The challenges in order of the priority were the following:

- Provision of Basic Water Services to the poor families in a sustainable manner
- Provision of water as a stimulus for the Local Economic Development and Poverty Eradication
- Development of a Bankable/Sustainable provincial water and sanitation development plan which addresses the infrastructure backlog

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- Development of an institutional arrangement, which will facilitate implementation of plans and is acceptable to all stakeholders.

Major findings

The process started with gathering of information, which was presentable in GIS maps. It was noted that the present infrastructure was serving a previously advantaged minority in the major cities. The unemployment was higher in the West of the Province while the population density was lower therefore the cost per capita in the development of infrastructure was higher. The existing bulk infrastructure was also less in the West of the province. It was however noted that the GGP and economic activity was sufficiently high enough in the East and South East of the province, which is mainly gold and platinum mining, to allow cross subsidisation. It was noted that five Water Boards operate within the province in a fragmented manner. The water boards operate on the water catchment basin basis. No serious thought had been given by the water boards in having a board to manage more than one water management areas (Rationalisation/amalgamation of water boards). It was noted that Catchment Management Agencies (CMA) are being formed in terms of the Water Services Act, it is also established that 11 out of 19 water management areas in South Africa are in need of water transfers, which meant that the old logic of establishing one water board per water management area was not holding any water any more (so to say). The areas of service of the individual local and district municipalities were too small to enhance the economy of scale for an efficient water management institution (21 Local Municipality, 4 District Municipality).

It was noted that 600 000 Kℓ/d of bulk water was consumed in the province (500 000 kℓ/d in the East and only 100 000 kℓ/d in the West of the province). The local economy of the West of the province was under developed due to the lack of infrastructure including water infrastructure. More than 80% of bulk water