

Parliamentary Budget Vote Debate: 36 Water and Sanitation
By
Hon AM Mpontshane, MP

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Honourable Chairperson,

Water is the literal lifeblood of any nation. Its availability ranks as foundational on the hierarchy of needs yet through sustained incompetence and ineptitude, our water supply and its sustainability hangs precariously in the balance.

This is largely due to neglect of infrastructure maintenance and general departmental attitude of “tomorrow is another day”.

In April of 2013, I wrote to the DDG of Water and Environmental affairs and alerted him to the fact the Phemula water scheme at Jozini, which was established by former President Mandela, had become dysfunctional and that the taps had run dry for residents in the area, who now had to walk great distances to obtain water from polluted wells. This crisis continues to this day and is but one of many instances of water supply failure in our country.

A government report released towards the end of last year, stated that approximately R293bn would need to be spent over the next five years, if we were to stave off a looming water crisis. Where is the budget for this amount of spending?

We see South Africans using more water than is available. Flushing 9 litres of potable water down the drain every time you use a toilet, is not sustainable. If we continue to use these old flushing methods we are putting huge pressure on our scarce water resources and the environment into which we flush our waste.

We agree that we need to generate new sanitation solutions that are sustainable and will meet our current and future needs.

Figures indicate that we are already using 98% of our available water supply, and 40% of our waste water treatment is in a “critical state”. We simply need more water yet we are reckless with the water we do have.

It is reported that 37% percent of our clean, drinkable water is being lost through inefficient ways of using water such as leaking pipes, dripping taps – in reality the figure is probably much higher.

South Africa has 931 water systems within its 153 municipalities which as at last audit in 2012 found only 98 of those systems receiving Blue Drop approval.

Acid Mine Drainage is another serious and compounding challenge to our water supply. It takes five to seven litres of good quality water to make one litre of AMD water usable. This issue was raised initially in early 2000 but was laughed at by ministry officials. We now sit with a situation of some 6000 abandoned mines with AMD. Government’s solution to date has been to dilute and neutralise the AMD with clean water. But we are running out of clean water. Do we have an alternate strategy?

In conclusion I paraphrase from an EU report on water sustainability which warned that the status quo is unsustainable, and that if social and economic issues were addressed separately from environmental issues, ecological and social collapse is certain.

Minister, you cannot absolve yourself from responsibility in this crisis, you cannot simply wash your hands of this; there is no water!

I thank you.