



Water is Life by Jonasfortheart

A water perspective feedback based on South Africa's DWS ministerial session on the Transformation of the Water Sector held on the 15 February 2019

The recently held ministerial session was done in overt good faith so as to gauge the mood of water sector stakeholders after the progressive collapse of the DWS, Department of Water and Sanitation, over the past decade or so. So congratulations for the first step in being conciliatory, transparent and consultative. I am always hopeful that solutions to our collapsed water sector are not only available but about to come to fruition.

So operation Phakisa for the water sector has been launched, what does this mean? Well Phakisa means "Hurry Up" in Sesotho. Operation **Phakisa** is therefore a results-driven approach, involving setting clear plans and targets, on-going monitoring of progress and making these results public. This is what I took away:

- Government has seen the need of synchronising land and water reform
- Focus is on water security for South Africa by 2030
- Integrated planning of the water sector is the only way forward
- Acknowledgement of the need of a stand alone water regulator
- Government is examining the integration of water and solid waste at local municipality level

- SALGA very clearly presented their stance in that economic growth is unlocked via water security
- Service delivery mechanism are not functioning adequately and have to be re-examined according to SALGA
- SALGA stated that DWS should consider ownership of desalination bulk water provision as opposed to local municipalities, SALGA also stated that the District and Local municipality model is not functioning satisfactorily
- DWS has not completed the water demand verification and validation process
- Irrigation infrastructure is generally under capitalised resulting in serious constraints in the agriculture sector affecting food security and land transformation
- SA Association for Water User Associations (SAAFWUA) stated that they represent some 48% of all irrigation, this is therefore 29% of all water consumed in SA, more than all of our water boards put together
- The DWS Minister currently has twenty five or so departments reporting to him and the ministry is currently planning to rationalise to seven units
- DWS is undertaking water sector legal reform to reflect what is needed today

There is therefore a demonstrable acknowledgement that the water sector architecture is not relevant for current South African conditions. That the circular economy needs to be embraced is starting to surface, albeit very slowly. That water is a serious economic enabler, the opposite being true also, is starting to percolate through the corridors of government and business.

One of the clear themes of the day was the abject lapse in governance over the past years resulting in the chaos experienced in many sectors such as agriculture, local government and industry and this was voiced by many in this interactive session. In South Africa we have water technologies, we have an abundance of private equity waiting for investable projects and only require good governance to make the sector investable and work towards water and food security whilst using water as an economic enabler. The establishment of an Independent Water Regulator will assist greatly in making the water sector attractive to funders and developers whilst aligning land and water reform initiatives.