



24 March 2020

The South African water crisis persists

South Africa has experienced significant water shortages since 2014, with heavy restrictions still in place in many parts of the country.

The country faces a global phenomenon where water is constrained from both an availability (quantity) and fitness for use (quality) perspective. This is driven primarily by:

- Rising water demand coupled with rapid urbanisation
- Inadequate investment and maintenance of water infrastructure
- Capacity constraints within water authorities, including a shortage of priority skills
- Droughts driven by climatic variability and climate change

This situation is worsened by virtue of South Africa being a water-scarce country that receives roughly half the world's average rainfall.

Although the current summer season has been fairly wet, with flooding incidents in some parts of the country (i.e. KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng), other provinces have faced persistent drought over the last 5 years (particularly the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Limpopo). Many residents in Limpopo Province, for example, live in a silent 'Day Zero' situation, where a lack of water has become the norm. Below is a snapshot of some of the water restrictions reported in early 2020 across the country:

- **Makana Municipality:** Following an initial halting of water supply on weekends, domestic water supply in Makhanda has now been rationed on a 2-days-on and one-day-off basis. Residents have been urged to save water and use only 25 litres of water per person per day.
- **Sol Plaatje Municipality:** Water restrictions in Kimberley have reached Level 5 in the last 12 months, with weekend and nightly water shutdowns in place.
- **Polokwane Municipality:** In early 2020 the municipality implemented water shedding in the city and its surrounding areas, with water supply cut daily between 20:00 and 04:00. Spokesperson for the Limpopo Premier's Office, Kenny Mathivha, has further indicated that "there is no area where there is not a water crisis in Limpopo".

In many cases drought and inadequate infrastructure have been exacerbated by mismanagement. The water challenges in Maluti a Phofung Municipality, which was placed under administration in 2018, are well documented, with the woes and citizen-based revival of towns such as Harrismith making both national and international news.

Thus, while we face real concerns over public health through the spread of the corona virus, we cannot afford to divert our attention from the water crisis at hand. As predicted in the NBI's CDP water analysis of 2017, the prospect of a 'perfect dust storm' is being realised in many parts of the country.



Business as usual will not guarantee running taps to communities; hence the NBI, alongside its member companies and partners, is focusing on key collaborative initiatives.

The Department of Water and Sanitation's **Master Plan** (2019) emphasises that "South Africa can avoid a projected 17% water deficit by 2030 by taking bold action today". In the face of a looming supply deficit, we need to combine forces and explore previously underutilised approaches to ensure water availability.

Since 2016, the NBI has made great strides in driving partnerships in the three main economic hubs of the country (the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng). Below are some of the highlights of these initiatives:

1. The NBI is a co-convenor of the **uMhlathuze Water Stewardship Partnership (UWASP)**, which works to reduce water risk in the Richards Bay area. The partnership has made considerable strides in supporting improved water conservation and water infrastructure management in the catchment. Our key partners in this programme include GIZ, WWF South Africa, the City of uMhlathuze, DWS and NBI members Mondi and Tongaat Hulett.
2. The NBI, alongside the Water Research Commission (WRC), the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), is currently providing targeted support to two catchments in South Africa, focusing on restoring ecological infrastructure for the benefit of water security. This is being done because many of the country's ecosystems are severely degraded at present, and healthy catchments are essential for the engineered water system to function.
3. At the end of 2019 the NBI launched the **Gauteng Water Alliance**, given the challenges facing the Integrated Vaal River System, which supports 60% of the national economy including the Gauteng Province. Currently the Gauteng region needs to reduce its average water consumption by 3% annually, even as the Province's population increases by 400 000 people per annum. The Alliance's work commenced in 2020 focusing on driving action with industry and addressing water leakage in the system, with some important opportunities already developing.
4. During the Cape's severe water crisis in 2017/18, the NBI initiated the **Western Cape Drought Task Force**. The key successes of this collaboration between business, civil society and government included the identification of critical private sector infrastructure to be managed under a 'Day Zero' scenario; the establishment of new relationships between business and government; improved drought communications and support on company procurement, risk management and strategic planning.
5. In 2020 the NBI water team commenced engaging with targeted municipalities to identify locations where retired experts can be mobilised to strengthen water service delivery capacity, under the NBI's Technical Assistance, Mentorship and Development (TAMDEV) programme.

6. The NBI alongside its partners GIZ, the Strategic Water Partners Network (SWPN) and the Royal Danish Embassy, annually hosts the national Water Stewardship Conference, as a key platform for showcasing best practice, building networks and catalysing collaborative action on water.

Despite these important gains, there is clearly much more to be done. In these difficult times we must remember that water is everyone's business.

Many companies large and small are facing significant constraints as a result of water shortages, hampering our economic growth. Safe, reliable water access is also key to good hygiene practices and essential for the provision of medical care. Just as we work collectively to tackle new virus strains, so we must adopt the same ethos in fostering a healthy water sector. Water is life, after all.

Key NBI Water Resources and Partnership Updates

A range of NBI water materials such as reports, presentations and infographics can be accessed below, to support organisations in their water stewardship journey. Key partnership background documents and updates are also provided below:

1. [Unlocking Water Investment in South Africa: The Findings of Kopano ya Metsi \(2019\)](#)
2. [The uMhlathuze Water Stewardship Partnership \(2016 to present\)](#)
3. [CDP Water: Executive Summaries and Infographics \(2010 to present\)](#)
4. [Water Stewardship: Theory and Practice \(2014 to present\)](#)
5. [The Western Cape Drought Task Force \(2017-2019\)](#)
6. [The Gauteng Water Alliance \(2019 to present\)](#)

Getting in Touch

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Further detail on cited water restrictions available here:

<http://www.makana.gov.za/water-supply-update-5/>

<https://www.kimberley.org.za/kimberley-stage-5-water-restrictions-implemented/>

<https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/water-shedding-limpopo-polokwane-crisis/>

<https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/more-than-r2-billion-needed-to-solve-maluti-a-phofung-water-crisis-sisulu/>

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