

Science must be at the centre of water policy formulations

Policymakers in the water sector have been urged to put science at the centre of their policy formulations to ensure informed decisions are made that will propel the country to greater heights.



Image source: Julia Volk from [Pexels](#)

The appeal was made by Water and Sanitation Deputy Minister, David Mahlobo, who was speaking at the opening of the 50th Congress of International Association of Hydrogeologists, currently underway in Cape Town.

The congress, taking place from 19 to 22 September 2023, brings together speakers from several institutions across the globe and groundwater experts who are engaging on alternative water sources, particularly surface water and underground water governance and charting a way forward on water security.

In his address, Mahlobo warned that a country that does not invest in science will perish and emphasised that South Africa needs to improve on this aspect.

“As scientists and engineers gathered here, you need to make your mark and direct future policy positions of the water

sector, particularly the use of groundwater as an alternate measure that will ensure universal access.

“We need you to guide us and take us to task to come up with policies that will get us into finding lasting and sustainable solutions to the water challenges around the globe,” Mahlobo said.



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Challenging the delegates, Mahlobo said the weeklong convergence should not be just a talk shop, but come up with solutions that will benefit generations to come.

Mahlobo reflected on South Africa's progress in meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 6, which focuses on clean water and sanitation for all.

He said the country has attained a lot in redressing the dignity of people who were previously unserved, while acknowledging that a lot still needs to be done.

The country has achieved almost 90% of its target of ensuring access to water, and the Deputy Minister emphasised that access to water should have meaningful impact in terms of economic benefits to the country, food security, social and environmental benefits, among other things.

Mahlobo admitted that the country still has enormous challenges, including assurance to water supply which has declined due to a number of factors.

“Communities can go for days on end without water supply, and this is caused by our neglect of operation and maintenance of our infrastructure. Because we have not invested in operations and maintenance, we are experiencing a lot of water losses in our system which is between 30% to 45%.

“The other challenge is the lack of investment in our infrastructure that matches the population growth and migration from other countries and people moving from rural to urban areas,” he pointed out.



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Work is underway to ensure more funds are sourced from the private sector and other private partners to build more infrastructure across the nine provinces.

In addition, the department is addressing the issue of skills shortages that has hindered the efficiency of the water sector to ensure that all systems function optimally, and communities have reliable and uninterrupted water supply.

The Deputy Minister called on the department, as a regulator of the sector, to bite more and take to task all the mining companies that are degrading the quality of groundwater.

The International Association of Hydrogeologists is a scientific and educational charitable organisation of more than 4,000 scientists, engineers, water managers and other professionals working in the fields of groundwater resource planning, management and protection. It was founded in 1956.

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