



MINISTRY
COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA BRIEFING STATEMENT

09 FEBRUARY 2018

The outcomes of the Inter-Ministerial Task Team meeting on Drought and Water Scarcity held on 30 January 2018

Ministers
Deputy Minister
Directors General
Government officials
Members of the media
Ladies and Gentleman

Good Morning

Our country still remains gripped by the drought situation with all the Cape Provinces (Western Cape, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape) currently declared disaster areas and some parts of the KwaZulu Natal and Free State. These drought conditions are evidently having profound negative implications on the economies of the affected provinces.

Recent reports indicate that the tourism sector in these areas is feeling the shock particularly in the Western Cape. These points to the multi-dimensional negative impacts of the prevailing drought and the negative effects it has on our developmental aspirations. Government can therefore not sit idle while the situation deteriorates.

To this effect, the Inter Ministerial Task Team (IMTT) on drought and water scarcity (as established in 2015) has been actively championing integrated efforts to ensure that the country responds effectively to the drought situation. This IMTT reports and provides updates to the relevant Portfolio Committees regularly.

The IMTT has been seized with the task of engaging various stakeholders on issues of drought. Our meeting of the 30th January 2018 followed a number of such meetings and consultations. These meetings are primarily geared to devise measures that can ensure heightened national coordination in response to the drought across the country, with special emphasis on the City of Cape Town.

Since January 2018, the IMTT has already met twice on 30 January and 06 February 2018 to receive reports on the status of the drought situation, consider integrated measures being put in place to mitigate the situation and provide political leadership on heightened measures necessary to arrest the situation.

In both meetings, we were joined by some of the MECs of CoGTA from the Provinces who shed light about the situation in their respective provinces and the work each one is doing to mitigate the impact of drought on communities and farmers.

These measures are a testimony that government values human lives and places the interests and welfare of the people above all else. As we know, water is a constitutional right of all South Africans and thus these challenges of drought are threatening to make it difficult for government to realise this important provision in our Constitution.

Even as we are seized with the challenges of drought, it is important to note that there are three categories of our people that must be served equitably as part of the transformation agenda, notably:

- a) Those that are yet to receive water
- b) Those that have just received water – albeit minimal
- c) Those that have access to water

Above all that has been said, the drought situation cannot be examined in isolation from the primary development challenges facing the country. In particular, it is critical to analyze the daily development challenges which either increase vulnerability to drought or increase its severity and which are the factors we as the collective leadership must work tirelessly in a concerted manner to address. These factors border on institutional and resource conditions of our municipalities as well as the challenges around inter-governmental relations in the context of planning and delivery of services.

The cases of all the affected areas are clearly an indication of the need for a national coordinated approach and response to this unfolding challenge. This will have to take into account the national drought forecast and indicators which point to the fact that summer rainfall areas have also not sufficiently recovered from the drought situation which started in 2014.

Additionally, the forecasting systems indicate that the affected Provinces may still experience drier than normal conditions. The Standard Precipitation Index (SPI) for the 24 month period indicates areas of mild to extreme drought categories across SA as a result of 4 consecutive seasons of low rainfall. SAWS indicate that 2017 was the worst year in terms of rainfall as almost the whole country has received below normal rainfall. This denotes that the country as a whole has not recovered from the 2014 drought, with the Western Cape Province experiencing the worst drought in years.

This challenge of drought shows a decline in various human activities such as farming, irrigation or domestic uses of water are affected and this might have a negative impact and exacerbate:

- a) Poverty
- b) Inequality
- c) Unemployment

Notable also is that even though the month of January 2018 received reasonable amounts of rains, this did not cover the whole country as it was limited to the central and eastern parts.

The reports that the IMTT has received thus far pointed indicate that the situation is deteriorating with dam levels falling week on week and the current national dam levels depict the following picture as on 07 February 2018:

Province	Dam Levels as at 07th	Dam Levels last week
Eastern Cape	60,7%	59,9%
Gauteng	94,6%	95,0%
Free State	64,9%	64,4%
Mpumalanga	76,9%	76,8%
KwaZulu-Natal	52,6%	50,8%
North West	67,4%	66,6%
Northern Cape	76,2%	80,5%
Limpopo	65,3%	64,4%
Western Cape	23,7%	24,5%
National	59,6%	58,8%

Fellow South Africans, while we acknowledge that the drought has become a huge challenge, a number of measures have been implemented nationally and are bearing fruits.

Those measures include:

- a) Issuing of early warning messages on a regular basis;
- b) Drilling and equipping of boreholes across all provinces;
- c) The application of water restrictions to regulate use of water;
- d) The provision of animal feed and fodder;
- e) Water tankering in areas of severe need;
- f) The promotion of the use of drought resistant cultivars;
- g) Reduction of water usage by industries and other users such as crop farmers;
- h) Change of timing of cultivation and irrigation, etc.
- i) Desalination
- j) Water conservation and demand management
- k) Re-use optimisation

In addition, an amount of R74.8 million was given to the Western Cape Province in August 2017 to deal with the situation. The only challenge is the slow pace of using the allocated funding that are geared to alleviate the impact of drought on particular sectors.

At this stage, CoGTA through the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) is currently in the process of considering requests from the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape provinces for funding of response and recovery measures.

Currently, efforts are underway to classify the drought as a national disaster. This process will be finalized on or before 14 February 2018. This will legally assign the responsibility to the national executive to coordinate the disaster, while a declaration is being considered to be finalized within a period of a month. The declaration will empower the Minister or his Delegate to issue Regulations and / or Directives in dealing with the drought disaster. We are convinced that this will enhance current measures to deal with the disaster. It will also ensure that provinces, which are not currently declared, can be covered through measures to prevent and mitigate against the drought situation.

In 2015, the Municipal Infrastructure Support Agent (MISA) entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the National Treasury's Office of the Chief Procurement Officer on Framework Contract. The objective of the MOA is for MISA to rollout of infrastructure procurement and delivery standards and framework contracts for Infrastructure Goods and Services in Local Government. MISA has prioritised framework contracts for water infrastructure goods and services in the light of the current drought. This will contribute towards addressing challenges within the Supply Chain Management in municipalities, accelerate services delivery and alleviate disputes arising from tender processes derailing the acquisition of infrastructure assets critical for effective delivery of services. Municipalities will also save time by avoiding the restart of procurement process each time they need to purchase infrastructure goods and services.

Going forward, the IMTT will regularly consider reports received from the National Joint Disaster Coordination Committee on measures being put in place to improve coordination and deployment of resources for response and recovery from the drought disaster and regularly report to the Portfolio Committees as was the case yesterday, 07 February 2018.

The DWS will continue to monitor the levels of the 214 major dams, as this information is critical in understanding the situation around availability of water in the systems.

The IMTT will continue to communicate through various platforms and channels to inform communities about the effects of climate change, drought and provide water saving/conservation tips. These communication messages on drought are disseminated with the intention of educating and creating the necessary awareness amongst citizens. The role played by media in promoting our integrated public awareness, education and advocacy programmes is commendable and will definitely go a long way assisting to effect the necessary change.

In conclusion, it should be put on record that, since the outbreak of this drought, the leadership of the country, the broader citizenry and civil society formations have pulled together to save this important resource.

To this effect, we are making progress as water usage shows a marked reduction and this is definitely commendable and shows that if we work together, nothing is impossible.

In the same context, government appeals to all South Africans and our visitors to help in save water. We request all of us here today to also play our part to save water and also urge our constituencies and communities to do likewise.

As South Africans, we are stronger when we are tested and together we can prevail over this challenge.

Working together, we can save water.

I thank you.