

Strategy in place to improve bulk water supply

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BOLD plans to improve bulk water supplies in KwaZulu-Natal – with considerable emphasis on rural areas – are being put in place by Umgeni Water, says its chief executive, Mzimkulu Msiwa.

Msiwa said his board had made about R3 billion available to improve bulk potable water supplies and about a third of the money would be targeted at rural development.

He said Umgeni Water aimed to supply 75 litres a person, a day to those living in rural areas, three times the 25-litre standard set by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). “We are trying to bring in schemes in rural areas that will significantly enhance rural livelihoods,” he said.

Msiwa spoke of his organisation’s commitment when taking part in the *After Eight Debate*, an SAfm panel discussion programme.

The debate was broadcast from the International Convention Centre in Durban, where a summit was being held on water and energy supplies.

His plan to treble the 25-litre RDP standard in rural areas was welcomed by another member of the panel, Professor Karthy Govender, constitutional law specialist at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

“That is a massive improvement and will impact markedly on the lives of people,” he said, adding that the availability of piped water was an “amazing indicator” of the inequalities in a society. “And it impacts dramatically on the quality of people’s lives.”

Govender said some progress had been made in recent years with the supply of potable water to those in need. In 1994 about 12 million people lacked a water supply.

“In 2006 that figure was reduced to 8 million,” he said. “Obviously, while the figures are still very high, there is movement in the right direction.”

It was also important, he said, to ensure that the supply of water was maintained. There had been reports of supply being cut in rural areas with severe effects on hospitals and schools.

“So it is a sustainability issue as well that needs to be discussed, and the ability to have skilled personnel at local government level – as well as other places – to ensure a constant supply of water,” he said.

