

Statement by the Inter-Ministerial Task Team on Drought and Water Scarcity

Ministers

Deputy Minister

Directors-General

Head of the National Disaster Management Centre

Government officials

Members of the media

Good Morning and thank you for joining us for this briefing.

The drought in South Africa is, in some provinces, showing no signs of abatement.

In the State of the National Address (SONA), the State President, His Excellency Mr Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa noted:

“For several years our economy has not grown at the pace needed to create enough jobs or lift our people out of poverty. Agriculture made the largest contribution, by a significant margin, to the improved growth of our economy in the second and third quarters of 2017”

Noting that water security is one of the key agricultural and economic growth enablers and a significant contributor to reducing poverty, the State President further pointed out that:

“The country remains gripped by one of the most devastating droughts in a century, which has severely impacted our economy, social services and agricultural production. The drought situation in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape (provinces) has been elevated to a national state of disaster. This gives national government the authority to manage and coordinate our response nationally with support from all provinces. This will ensure that we also heighten integrated measures to support the provinces that are hardest hit. We are looking at activating the necessary extraordinary measures permitted under the legislation. We call on everyone in the country to use water sparingly as we are a water-scarce country that relies on this vital resource to realise our development aspirations”.

Reports show that draught and water scarcity has had a negative impact on all sectors of the economy such as livestock production, crop production, industrial and processing, tourism, food

security, water supply, trade balance to mention but a few. It is on this basis that in 2016 the Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy noted that the impacts of drought conditions cannot be considered in isolation from global markets and the wider macro-economic environment in which the country's agricultural sector functions.

As the InterMinisterial Task Team reported during the last media briefing held on 08 February 2018, the severity of the drought is evident in all the Cape Provinces with pockets of drought and water scarcity conditions being evident in other provinces. Three provinces which are extremely affected - Western Cape, some parts of the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape provinces are not yet showing comforting signs of improvement.

The manifestations of the drought can still be discerned in hydrological, agricultural and socio-economic impacts, driven by declining meteorological conditions, which are recorded to be the lowest since 1926. At this stage there is no indication to support rainfall that is more than twenty five millimeters (25mm) for the Western and Northern Cape provinces, except perhaps a low likelihood along the south coastal areas.

The Western Cape is a winter rainfall region. It is expected that some rains will start coming as early as April. Measures taken to mitigate the situation in the province have notably started to bear fruit; these include curtailment and restrictions.

According to the report released by the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), South Africa's dams have last week, 06 March 2018, seen an improvement by a fraction of a percent (0.2%) compared to their levels a week before. The Department indicated that the "the levels went up from 63,2 percent to 63,4 percent".

The report shows that the drought-stricken Western Cape maintains the lowest dam levels in the country at 25,5 percent, having dropped from 26,1 percent the previous week. Despite the scarcity of rain, Gauteng has the highest dam levels at 92,8 percent, followed by Mpumalanga at 77,9 percent and Northern Cape at 67,9 percent. These levels do not however imply that these provinces are out of the woods in terms of drought conditions as water scarcity remains a common condition of most of our communities calling for a change of behaviour and the safe use of water.

From the Western Cape front, it is notable that the dire water situation has prompted various municipalities to impose stringent water restrictions to cope with acute water shortages. Last month, the City of Cape Town introduced Level 6B water restrictions to ensure the amelioration of the drought situation.

The Department of Water and Sanitation will continue to monitor the levels of the 214 major dams. This information is critical in understanding the situation around availability of water in the systems to facilitate timely and fit for purpose interventions.

It is worth noting that there are underlying factors which exacerbate the drought situation and which we must join hands to confront. These are measures government is working hard to address including, but not limited to, weak intergovernmental relations arrangements in development planning and implementation, ageing infrastructure, lack of operations and maintenance of infrastructure, capacity constraints particularly with regard to technical expertise, governance challenges within the water services authorities as well as infestation by alien invasive species, such as Prosopis, which draws sizeable amounts of ground water particularly in already stressed areas, such as in the Northern Cape province.

It is important to therefore underscore the fact that, while disaster risk reduction remains the primary objective of the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC), it is crucial to adopt integrated planning and coordinated implementation to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall drought response effort. In this regard, the National Joint Drought Coordinating Committee (NJDC), convened by the National Disaster Management Centre was established to provide the technical platform for cooperative governance by providing a forum for coordination and management of the drought by a wide range of stakeholders. This forum is meeting from today to tomorrow (13–14 March). Notable is that similar provincial and local coordination structures are in operation and reports to the national structure.

We wish to emphasise as well that disaster risk management is a shared responsibility, fostered through partnerships and cooperative relationships between the different spheres of government, the private sector and civil society. In this regard, the Inter-Ministerial Task Team (IMTT) on Drought and Water Supply Shortages is already providing the political mechanism for the application of the principle of cooperative governance enshrined in the Constitution, by bringing together political representatives from the three spheres of government. The forum has to date provided guidance and political direction on sizeable measures for enhanced response and recovery to the drought situation. One of the notable measures is that the current drought situation has been classified as a national disaster in terms of the provisions of the Disaster Management Act (Act No. 57 of 2002).

As announced on 08 February, the reclassification of the drought as a national disaster was done by the Head of the National Disaster Management Centre, under Government Notice 107/2017 published in Government Gazette 41439 on 13 February 2018. The reclassification of this drought as a national disaster designated the primary responsibility for the coordination and management of the disaster to the national executive who must act in close cooperation with the other spheres of government to deal with the disaster and its consequences. Today we are announcing the declaration of the drought as a national state of disaster.

In the case of the prevailing drought, the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs has the legal authority in terms of the Disaster Management Act 2002 to declare a national state of disaster through notice in the Government Gazette, which is expected today - 13 March 2018 around 10h00. Accordingly and in an effort to augment the arrangements that have already been put in place and following the recommendations of the IMTT, as the Minister responsible for Disaster Management, I have recognised that special circumstances exist, and have decided to declare the drought as a national state of disaster, in terms of Section 27(1) of the Act.

I will also in due course and in consultation with relevant Ministers, consider making regulations, issue directions, or authorise the issue of directions concerning the matters listed Section 27(2) of the Act, when existing legislation and contingency plans no longer adequately provide for the national executive to effectively deal with the disaster. This will be done only to the extent that it is necessary for the purpose of assisting, protecting and providing relief to the public; protecting property; preventing or combating disruption; or dealing with the destructive and other effects of the disaster.

As a matter of clarifying the distinction between a DISASTER CLASSIFICATION and DECLARATION OF A STATE OF DISASTER, it is important to note that if a disaster has been classified but not declared, then the responsible sphere of government (municipal, provincial and national) must deal with the disaster within the parameters of its existing legislation and contingency arrangements. However, should these arrangements not be adequate to deal effectively with the disaster, or there be other special circumstances, then a state of disaster may be declared by the relevant authority.

It is also important at this point to indicate that the declaration of a state of disaster at any level is not primarily aimed at requesting funding. It is aimed at activating extra-ordinary measures, which might include funding, based on the need and other relevant conditions to address the impact of such a disaster. Resources, both technical and financial, should be mobilised by all spheres of government, private sector, Non-Governmental Organisations and communities to implement intervention measures and consider recovery in the long term.

Accordingly, this declaration must be used by all levels of government to mobilise resources to ensure urgent interventions in order to realise medium term relief and long-term recovery from the drought conditions.

From the perspective of government, the following actions will therefore take place to ensure heightened drought interventions across the country:

1. The National Joint Drought Coordination Committee (NJGCC) will meet monthly and continue coordinating integrated multi-sectoral intervention measures to address the drought situation in the affected provinces.
2. All sectors will mobilise their resources and implement relevant sectoral programmes to deal with drought in an integrated and coordinated manner to avoid duplication of efforts.
3. The development of an integrated water conservation model will be pursued through multi-sectoral engagements under the auspices of the Inter-Ministerial Task Team on Drought and Water Scarcity.
4. The country will work hard to enhance the weather forecasting capacity to ensure impact-based early warning services to enhance public knowledge and safety from weather related incidents. This will be done under the leadership of the South African Weather Services.
5. A team of research experts will be constituted to carry out on-going research and provide evidence-based interventions taking into account the prevailing and emerging disaster risk scenarios;
6. National and provincial government will continue to work with municipalities to respond effectively to the water crisis.
7. COGTA will strengthen its Back to Basics programme to support municipalities to improve water management. This includes intensifying maintenance programmes to reduce water losses as well as the refurbishment and replacement of infrastructure.
8. The sectors will continue activating their climate change adaptation strategies and plans to support municipalities within the provinces.
9. We will continue with the implementation of the “War on Leaks” programme where communities report all the water leaks. Municipalities must act by repairing the leaking pipes.
10. The IMTT will continue to 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 to provide political guidance.

With regards to funding, Government stands ready to provide financial assistance where necessary and subject to legal prescripts.

During the Budget speech, the Minister of Finance stated that:

“A provisional allocation of R6 billion has been set aside in the 2018/19 financial year for several purposes, including drought relief and to augment public infrastructure investment. Government is concerned about the potential job losses in vulnerable farming communities because of the drought. We are therefore exploring strengthening existing government programmes including the option of

partially mitigating losses by temporarily increasing personnel intake in the Working for Water programme. To provide short-term assistance, the budget includes disaster relief grants for provinces and municipalities worth five hundred and one point two million rand (R501.2 million) in 2018/19. Other conditional grants can also be reprioritised in response to drought in line with applicable prescripts”.

I hereby wish to report that measures are being put in place to ensure that requests for funding are being considered as received from the provinces and we will report progress in the next briefing.

Ladies and gentlemen

South Africa is a water-scarce country. Our climate is changing. The western parts of the country are expected to become drier and the eastern parts of the country may become wetter under climate variability. Despite this, we are rated among the highest levels of daily domestic water consumption levels per person in the world. We also have some of the highest levels of inequality in reliable access to water.

We are at the same time encouraged at the progress being made in saving water as we note that there is marked reduction in water usage. This commendable and demonstrates that if we work together, nothing is impossible.

In the spirit of service, as espoused by the President in the State of the Nation Address with the #Thuma Mina/Send Me clarion call, we urge all South Africans to continue pulling together to save water and to manage this scarce resource wisely.

We will regularly report on progress with response and recovery measures being undertaken under the status of a declared national state of drought disaster.

We call upon each citizen to save water and ensure that we all move from commitment to action in ensuring the success of the country’s development aspirations which have water as one of the indispensable commodities.

Society must inculcate this culture of saving water as it is the only way future generations will deal with the declining water resources and growing demand for both human consumption, agricultural and industrial utilisation.

We also invite media houses to continue the good work of disseminating educational and awareness messages to enhance disaster risk reduction and drought response and recovery.

I thank you.

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