

A RETROSPECTIVE OF THE WATER SECTOR DURING NSDSIII

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The conclusion of the NSDSIII on 31 March 2020 marked the end of what can be described as a tumultuous decade for South Africa's water sector. As we embark on a decade of NSDP 2030, we anticipate another challenging 10 years for the sector, but at the same time, we view this as an opportunity to work towards a more sustainable water future for the country.

The last decade has seen numerous global, regional and national policy shifts in an effort to bring water and sanitation services to all South Africans. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gave way to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the National Water Resources Strategy 2 (NWRS) came to life and was supplemented by the Water and Sanitation Master Plan in 2019.

Since the end of apartheid, there is little doubt South Africa has achieved much in terms of broadening service access. This has not only been made difficult by the ongoing drought in Southern Africa, but has also put mismanagement of the scarce resource into sharp relief. Especially repairs and maintenance have been consistently underfunded and disregarded.

As a result, inequalities and unequal distribution of resources, access, and capacity remain; "mirror[ing] apartheid spatial geography" (South African Human Right Commission, 2014, p: 14). Additionally, water quality is increasingly a major concern due to myriad factors, including insufficient wastewater treatment, lack of monitoring, and enforcement.

EWSETA's own decade has not been without challenges. The water sector remains essentially split between two SETAs, EWSETA and LGSETA, respectively. In practice, this means Water Services Authorities (WSAs), the hotspot of many water challenges outlined above, send their primary data and levies to LGSETA while the private sector, and bodies under the Department of Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation (DHSWS) fall under EWSETA. This makes holistic planning, funding, and support difficult.

Additionally, SETAs must balance various competing external priorities with very limited funding.

This has never been truer as in the aftermath of the skills levy break to alleviate business tax burden in the 2020-21 financial year. Since energy and water are the cornerstone of any economy, the demand for a well capacitated sector is enormous. Yet, departments are not always aligned in their approach. Numerous national, sector, and educational strategies are competing for a limited pot.

Naturally, EWSETA has also experienced high points. The establishment of a significant partnership network in the water sector, support for the sector through qualification development, Mandatory Grants (MG) and Discretionary Grants (DG) funding and increased planning capacity have all served to secure the EWSETA's role as an important role player in the sector.

Over the last five years, the water sector levies have steadily increased to R62.5 million in the 2019/20 financial year, dwarfed by the energy sector's levies of R246.5 million. This has come alongside an increase in the amount of levy payers in the water sector to 166 the previous financial year. Among the top 20 levy payers, 13 are from the water sector which has been consistent for several years running.

The next decade will require EWSETA to focus on greater impact and employment for our learners. As a review of the National Development Plan (NDP) nationwide shows, TVET graduates struggle to complete and find gainful, long-term employment (NCP, 2020). Experience from EWSETA's last funding window of 2019/20 also showed that most applications were for National Certificate: Wastewater Process Operations (Level 2), even from large employers who could train a wide variety of skills, such as artisans. EWSETA cannot turn the sector around by itself and needs partners, mentors, institutions, and employers to prepare learners for the world of work.

EWSETA has also embraced its role as Development Qualification Practitioner (DQP) for occupational qualifications and has registered (or is in the process of registering) seven water sector qualifications. While all qualifications are developed in close cooperation with subject matter experts (SMEs), EWSETA particularly



contributed to the Framework Programme for Research, Education, and Training in the Water Sector (FETWater) Phase III under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) International Hydrological Programme (IHP), funded by the DHSWS.

Implementation and sector uptake of these qualifications remains a systemic challenge.

In terms of partnerships, EWSETA signed Collaboration Agreements for the duration of the NSDS III. This has allowed EWSETA to sign with most universities, TVET Colleges, and other stakeholders in the sector. As part of its drive to improve partnership collaborations, EWSETA also developed and implemented its first Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

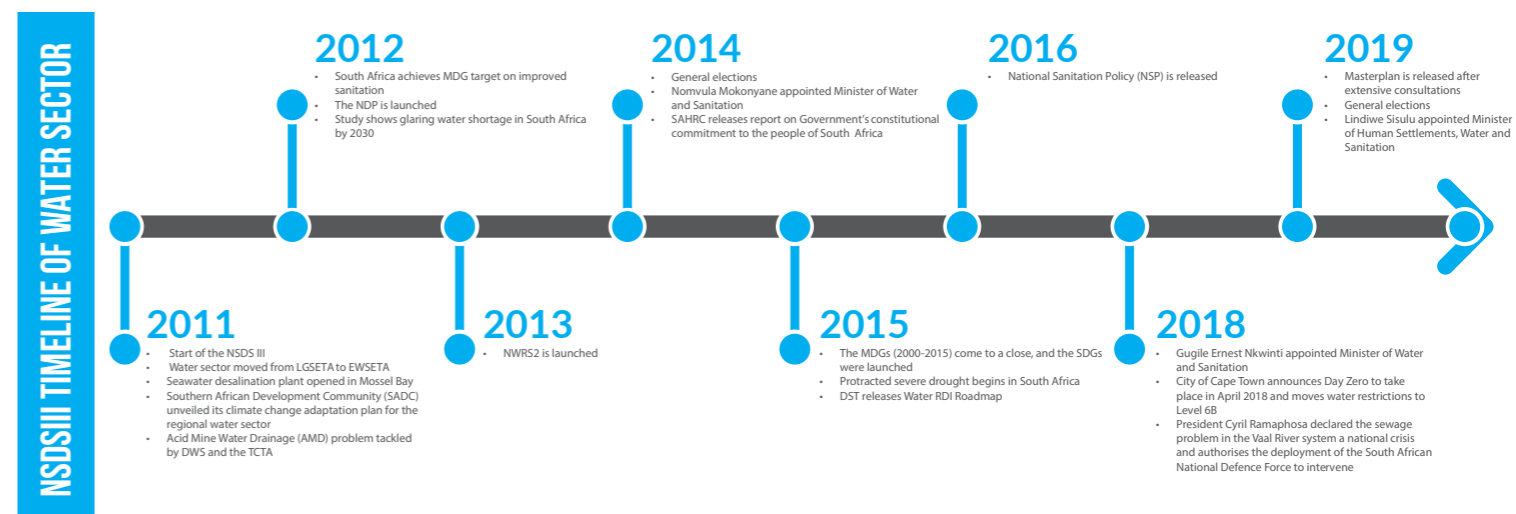
With the end of the NSDS III, these have come to an end and a new Partnership Model is being developed to ensure greater alignment to the NSDP and follow through on partnerships for mutual benefit, transparency, and fairness. For example, SETAs must work much closer with employers to ensure workplace and practical exposure of learners.

Over the past decade, EWSETA has also played a significant role in supporting young professionals, improved skills planning, and sector alignment.

In 2019/20, EWSETA engaged non-governmental organisations and cooperatives in the Eastern Cape and drove greater understanding with levy-payers across South Africa in individual meetings. EWSETA also identified gaps in engagement with sub-sectors (e.g. Groundwater and the agricultural sector). EWSETA will continue to build on expanding its sector engagement with a strong focus on sanitation, cooperatives, SMMEs, Irrigation Boards, and WASH.

Additionally, EWSETA continues to sit on crucial water and sanitation committees, reference groups, steering committees, etc. to create an aligned sector vision informed by our SSP. Only by working together can we achieve a "Sustainable Tomorrow - Today"

As we enter the last decade of the NDP, the SDGs, mounting water and sanitation management challenges, a Fourth Industrial Revolution that is in full swing, an economic crisis of unknown proportion in the aftermath of the COVID-19 lockdown worldwide lockdown, increased consequences of Climate Change, and the objective of ensuring that there is enough water for all, the EWSETA, working closely with its partners in the sector, is required to develop and implement skills development strategies to the benefit of the country and its people.



EWSETA is obligated, and indeed wants to work with all sector stakeholders while fulfilling its core mandates in a tightly regulated environment and annual planning cycles.