

# WATER AND FOOD SECURITY

*Thoughts from the  
water security session  
about both food and water.*

From the water side, there was a clear consensus that, with good management, we do not need to face a water crisis. Water scarcity could indeed provide opportunities for South African innovation to provide water management services both inside and outside our borders. However, the capacity challenge is tremendous and will not be resolved for a decade – and then only if we build active , partner-based initiatives to address it which is not happening yet.

# Water Security

Clearly defined:

“the reliable availability of an acceptable quantity and quality of water for health, livelihoods and production, coupled with an acceptable level of water-related risks.”

- One finding that may be surprising is that water quality is becoming our major water challenge. And it links to the food discussion because one way to deal with municipal waste water is to use its nutrients for intensive agriculture – although often there is someone else who is already using that water downstream and would just prefer to have it cleaned up first!

- Much of the challenge of water supply and sanitation is about improving municipal management. This is an issue that can only be resolved beyond the water sector.

- Most people realise that there is limited water for new farming development – although most of the very limited opportunities for new programmes are not being used. This will only change if agricultural, land and water and development finance organisations begin to work together to coordinate their initiatives.

- The present hiatus in agriculture has seen a decline in production which may be hiding underlying problems. There may be imminent challenges of limited water which could turn into a real conflict between water users if agriculture is rejuvenated. But does it matter if the water flows away from farming to sectors that can create more prosperity, more livelihoods, thereby contributing to food security?

- So the food security question: Do we want jobs, so that people can buy food, and efficient food producers to make sure that there is food on the shelves? Or do we want people to produce their own food? That is also a water security question.

- We could try to get more people producing their own food in small gardens. But, from the water perspective, we were told that there are serious problems in communities where , despite water scarcity, Departments of Agriculture are giving out hosepipes and encouraging gardening which accounts for very high levels of water consumption in many poor communities, at the expense of other users.

- Since there is limited water, we should probably focus on livelihoods and efficient use. But that means that the way in which we organise our agriculture must be efficient as well as equitable. And it comes back to the water management challenge – there are many opportunities that we can take advantage of if we manage our limited resources well ..

# What Next ? SAICE conclusions:

- Open up and collaborate!
  - DWAF is closed to consultation on key issues
- Prioritise!
  - Given capacity constraints, focus on priorities, not “nice to haves”
- Programme!
  - The Act does not require everything to be done at once
- Simplify!
  - Some parts of the Act and particularly the regulations are too complex and need to be simplified to be feasible
- Partner!
  - South Africa still has many highly regarded skills in the water sector. They must be harnessed and fully used

**From Crisis to Opportunity**

## Milla McLachlan's food security conclusions apply equally to water security:

- Engine of economic growth,
- Source of greater equity,
- Focus for regional integration, and
- Foundation for resilience into the future

### REQUIRES

- Visionary, transformative leadership
- Involvement of all levels of society
- Collaboration among public, private and civil society organizations in sectors ranging from agriculture to health and education.