

Water security research expenditure not reflecting scarcity reality

By [Alicestine October](#)

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Researchers at the African Utility Week and PowerGen Africa conference and exhibition in Cape Town last week raised concerns over decreased expenditure on water security research amidst serious drought problems across Southern Africa. There are reportedly more than 2 billion people worldwide in countries with severe water constraints and the African continent is no exception.



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Research fellow at the Nelson Mandela University Dr Hlamulo Makelane told delegates that South Africa is a water scarce country, yet expenditure on research and development for water security does not reflect this picture. Makelane said funding for water research declined over the last five years which is highly problematic. “Funding for research and development declined by 45% the last five years. This is scary because as we speak the country has a water road map and I hope we will be putting up more money.” According to Makelane, research and development have a direct impact on water resource management and promotes training and capacity building in the sector. “It can lead to creative solutions and help influence how people and society behave.”

Intersectoral funding needed

Makelane also stressed the need for intersectoral funding between government and the private sector for more progress towards water security. “We need to encourage collaboration. Government policy on water should be informed by research and development so that we do not end up doing what we have always done. We need creative solutions to translate research into usable information.” In this regard scientific publications in water research should be translated into sector-wide innovation, covering both demand management and new approaches to the management of water resources,” she said. She told delegates there are initiatives under way for policy and science exchanges to help facilitate this.

According to Makelane, water security is integral to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. She said the SDGs cannot be achieved without water security. CEO of Malawi’s Central Region Water Board Gift Sageme in an earlier interview also underscored the importance of water security being integral to all facets of society. He said what surprises him most about

the water sector is the way governments tend to put it behind all other sectors like energy, roads, agriculture and health. "What they don't realise, however, is that without water no sector can survive."

Makelane reminded delegates that South Africa is a water scarce country and to secure water it needs to improve demand management, storage and protect water sources more effectively to not lose the little resources that are available. "This all starts with investing in research because this is how we will know how to plan and decide what dams and reservoirs to build where."

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