

O PINION

EDITORIAL

RELEASE DIGITAL VIBES REPORT, MR PRESIDENT

IT HAS not taken long for the impact of the Digital Vibes scandal to be felt by South Africans, judging by the vaccine hesitancy that continues to be a major stumbling block.

The scandal has not only cost the country financially, but the company's failure to communicate the government's message on the pandemic, especially on vaccines, has become evident since more jabs have arrived.

First, there were vaccine shortages, and now that issue has largely been addressed, the roll-out has been marred by scepticism and a rise in disinformation and misinformation.

In all, the government's assumption has been that more vaccines will lead to more vaccinations – this, however, is proving to be inaccurate, according to our regular contributor and political economist Siseko Mposha in his opinion piece.

He aptly states: "Seemingly, growing vaccine scepticism has caught the government off guard – the problem is far worse than initially understood. Concerningly, no effective attempts are being made to ease fears over vaccine safety and quell vaccine hesitancy. Instead, the government still chooses to over-communicate its 'aspirational' plans to vaccinate the population rather than reassuring South Africans of the safety and efficiency of vaccines in ways that are easily understandable."

Any government with foresight would have been proactive in planning to counter the anti-vaccine sentiments.

Instead it appears that this crucial responsibility was left to Digital Vibes, which scored the lucrative contract from the Department of Health during then Health minister Dr Zweli Mkhize's stint.

We remind the reader that the communication service Digital Vibes was entrusted with is something that the department was more than capable of doing without outside assistance.

The impact of the Digital Vibes scandal could potentially be a matter of life and death in the long term, and the longer President Cyril Ramaphosa sits on the report on the matter, the worse it becomes for the government's handling of the pandemic.

This then begs the question: Who is the president protecting by delaying its release, and why?

Is this more important than the transparency you promised, Mr President?



Plan to get dam project back on track after many delays

Programme to focus on water resource infrastructure and job creation

COMMENT



PATRICIA DE LILLE

OVER the past few weeks, I have been visiting various infrastructure projects across the country which were gazetted as strategic integrated projects (Sips) on July 24 last year, in line with the Infrastructure Development Act.

I have been conducting the oversight visits in line with my duties as Public Works and Infrastructure minister and chairperson of the residential Infrastructure Co-ordinating Commission Secretariat.

I will be giving feedback on my oversight visit to the new Minister of Water and Sanitation, Senzo Mchunu.

The gazetting of infrastructure projects as Sips sees the project following an expedited path with all three spheres of government and implementing agents working closer together to ensure successful implementation of projects.

The Clanwilliam Dam project forms part of the national Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) Water Resource Programme.

The Sips form part of the infrastructure investment plan which was approved by the Cabinet on May 27, 2020, which also forms a central part of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, which aims to rebuild the economy and assist in reviving sectors such as the construction sector.

The Cabinet also approved the establishment of Infrastructure South Africa, headed by Dr Kgosiensho Ramokgopa, as the administrative arm responsible for monitoring implementation of the Sips and assisting with expediting in addressing project blockages.

This has seen the working relationship with the DWS grow stronger as teams work together to resolve the challenges on this project.

Clanwilliam Dam is part of the Olifants Doorn River Water Resources Project (ODRWRP) with the project value around R4 billion. Work on the dam has not yet started but other support infrastructure works have been completed, such as the construction of roads.

This project is one of the biggest and longest-standing infrastructure projects in the country, and the reason for my visit was to engage the teams on site to hear what the delays are and how we can work closer with them to deal with the delays and get the project following an expedited path.

According to the feasibility study, the dam was originally constructed in 1935 and the sandstone foundation



PUBLIC Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille, middle, flanked by Deputy Minister Noxolo Kiviet, right, and head of Infrastructure South Africa Dr Kgosiensho Ramokgopa. | KOPANO TLAPE GCIS

is fractured, and there has also been concrete deterioration over time.

These aspects are compromising the safety of the foundations, and the technical solutions being considered include the introduction of anchors on the existing concrete apron and deeper foundations to suitable bedrock.

Close to two decades ago, dam safety investigations identified the need for remedial work to the foundation of the existing dam.

The identified remedial works provided an opportunity to further raise the dam wall, improving dam capacity.

The project entails raising the dam wall by 13 metres, while the feasibility study also found that the dam needs to be strengthened.

The raising of Clanwilliam Dam and improving the foundation of the dam is part of the first phase of the ODRWRP.

The objective of the project is to:

- ◆ Increase the yield of the dam by about 70 million m³ a year to augment the water supplies to the Olifants River irrigation scheme in the north-western part of the Western Cape, as well as to assist in the development of resource-poor farmers.

- ◆ Remedial work will also improve the safety of the dam. This would involve major construction works.

In raising the Clanwilliam Dam, the second phase of the project involves using the additional yield of water in the following:

- ◆ Supplying the ecological water requirements.
- ◆ Giving existing water users a

more assured supply.

- ◆ Using the additional water for new irrigation purposes by emerging farmers.

- ◆ Providing for future growth of domestic and industrial water supply, taking water losses into account.

I also engaged some of the local farmers and farmer association representatives on the site about their farming and water needs, and the benefit that this project will ultimately bring to them with additional dam capacity.

The ODRWRP includes the realignment of the N7 national route. This work was completed by the SA National Roads Agency in 2017.

Various other road-related works have been completed and plans are in place for other road-related works still to be completed by the Western Cape Department of Transport and Public Works.

The project includes upgrading and expansion of the conveyance network downstream of Bulshoek Dam by the DWS.

The project implementation is at 12% completion, which includes: site establishment, including access roads, support infrastructure/upgrades to the N7, acquisition of land, design administration and project communication.

It's well known that this long-standing project has seen too many delays and it's vital that we make up for lost time and work harder to ensure that this important water-security project gets back on track so the region can start reaping the benefits.

Another important matter that

needs to be addressed urgently is that the construction team has endured loss of skilled staff due to the delays on the project.

The DWS has appointed the state-owned construction company to deliver the project.

There are ample opportunities for the project to contribute to the empowerment and transformation in the built environment sector through the appointment of additional construction, project management and design team members and sub-contractors.

There are 68 local labour appointments on the project. The total programme can possibly create over 10 500 job opportunities directly related to the capital projects. The type of jobs created so far have included unskilled, semi-skilled, technician and engineering opportunities.

There is a direct link between this project and food security for the region. In the long term, the project will address the risk of the dam collapse which would be catastrophic for the region with a severe impact on South Africa's food security plan.

The programme also contributes to the focus on stabilising the water resource infrastructure and stimulating job creation during the construction phase, and including the operations and maintenance phase.

This is De Lille's edited speech during her oversight visit to the Clanwilliam Dam and irrigation scheme upgrade project.

COMMENT



HILLARY LANE

A little kindness shown to disabled people offers ray of hope for a better world

TWENTY-SEVEN years ago, the National Council of and for People with Disabilities (NCPD) came up with a novel and quite brilliant idea of raising much-needed funds to do its important work.

It launched the annual Casual Day and invited South Africans to show their support by buying tickets – a percentage going to the NCPD and a percentage going to the organisation selling tickets – and by dressing up and attending work in a way that reflects each year's designated theme.

Over the years, this officially recognised event, which is celebrated on the first Friday in September, has raised millions of rand to help the NCPD offer much-needed support to people with disabilities (PWDs), who remain a vulnerable sector of society.

According to the NCPD, Casual Day has become South Africa's largest fundraising and awareness campaign for PWDs.

So, why is it that in 2021, when we can send people into space, we still need money to help NGO's to assist PWDs?

In recent years, much has been done to improve the lives of PWDs. For example, children with disabilities are now being integrated into mainstream schools and there are fewer 'specialised' schools.

Work opportunities and the workplace are becoming more accessible and we see more PWDs participating in different spheres of society. While this is indeed laudable, a lot more still needs to be done, especially during the current pandemic, as the world is having to reshape itself and monies that would ordinarily go to assist these people, are going elsewhere.

It is interesting that the theme for this year's Casual Day is "Courage and Kindness".

This is my take on these two words. As a person with a disability – I have Cerebral Palsy, which affects my speech, balance and hand control – I have had to have an enormous amount of "courage" all my life.

I had to be courageous because I think society has not been kind to PWDs. History can attest to that. We have seen how infants with deformities have been left on their own to die and how children with disabilities have been kept in back rooms so as not to embarrass their families.

Also, some PWDs have been locked up in asylums all their lives because society lacks the wherewithal, patience and kindness to understand them, or at least to try and understand them.

I firmly believe that when we have the courage to understand PWDs, kindness will follow.

So, what is it that society should understand about PWDs?

We need to understand that PWDs fall roughly into two categories – those born with a disability, and those who have become disabled.

Within these two categories, no matter the type of manifestation, you have to learn to be kind to yourself and to others who might lack the courage to "ask" you why you are doing something which they consider not to be "normal".

Being kind to yourself, as I have learnt and am still learning, means realising there are things, no matter how hard you try, you are never going to achieve. For me that would be able to ice-skate.

People with disabilities have shown great courage in overcoming many obstacles on their way to success in different spheres of society. In the process, they have taught us all how a little bit of kindness can go a long way in creating a better world for everybody.

So, in celebration of this year's Casual Day, please show courage and kindness by buying a sticker as a sign of your support: not only for PWDs, but also for the NCPD, which will receive a portion of the sales to carry on with the much-needed work of caring for a sector of society which is still in great need of our support.

Lane is the co-ordinator for the African Network for Evidence-to-Action in Disability (AfiNEAD) in the Centre for Disability & Rehabilitation Studies at Stellenbosch University.

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Editor Siyavuya Mzantsi
Newsdesk 021 488 4716
Advertising 072 585 4396
Subscriptions 0800 220 770
Deliveries 0800 220 770

Mail: 122 St Georges Mall, Cape Town, 8001

E-mail: capetimes@inl.co.za
Web: iol.co.za/Cape Times
Facebook: facebook.com/Cape Times
Twitter: @CapeTimesSA
Instagram: @capetimessa



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