



Keynote Address by the Sedibeng District Municipality Executive Mayor, Cllr. Mahole Simon Mofokeng on the occasion of the World Wetlands Day 2010: *“Caring for Wetlands - an Answer to Climate Change”* held at the Zone 3 Sebokeng, Ward 40 on Wednesday, 23 February 2010, Sedibeng

Programme Director, Sedibeng District Municipality MMC for

Environment: Cllr. Dorcas Ralitsela;

Emfuleni Local Municipality Members of Mayoral Committee: Cllr. Thulo, Cllr. Moepadira, Cllr. Vundisa;

Ward 40 Councillor Hlanyane;

Representatives from the Department of Water Affairs, Gauteng

Department of Rural Development; Gauteng Department of Education and Gauteng Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Environment;

Our Stakeholders: Rand Water, SANBI, MONDI;

Officials from within the District and Local Municipalities including Metsi-a-Lekoa;

All Learners present;

Ladies and gentlemen

Ke a le dumedisa baahi bohle ba Sebokeng le Sedibeng ka bophara. Ke motlotlo hore ebe ke na le lona kwano tsatsing la kajeno. Tsatsi le bohlokwa haholo maphelong a rona. Ke letsatsi leo ka lona re shebang morao ho hopola le hona ho keteka lemo sa bo 13 sa World Wetlands Day ho tloha ka 1997. This is a day that has **Environmental and Social importance in our lives**

We will recall that until today, we enjoy the fruits of wetlands as they continue to offer great value for a variety of plants and animals which human beings depend on for their livelihood. The significance of this day is highlighted worldwide through a variety of activities which we must all observe in keeping with our commitment to protect wetlands against Climate Change

The Deputy Minister for Water and Environmental Affairs, Mme Mabudafhasi at the World Wetlands Day celebration in Pretoria on the 2 February this year said that about 115 000 wetlands covering over four million hectares in South Africa are part of our natural infrastructure for gathering, managing and delivering water for human use.

It is therefore imperative for all of us to ensure that in all we do, we do not negatively affect our wetlands. We must avoid and stop dumping at the wetland sites to conserve the animals and plants which regard these areas as their only know habitat

World Wetlands Day is being celebrated around the world today under the theme *“Wetlands, Biodiversity and Climate Change”*. This annual event marks the date of the signing of the Convention on Wetlands on 2 February 1971. It represents a unique opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands, particularly at this time when the world, including South Africa, is experiencing a change in global climate.

As we get ready for the spectacular 2010 World Cup in our country, we must also prepare ourselves for any eventuality as a result of the changing climate. In fact, 2010 is a big year for Biodiversity - this year has been proclaimed by the United Nations as the International Year of Biodiversity.

In 2002, at the Convention on Biological Diversity, countries of the world agreed *“to achieve a significant reduction of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of all life on earth by 2010”*. We are part of this commitment as a country.

This year’s theme, *“Wetlands, Biodiversity and Climate Change”* and the associated slogan *“Caring for Wetlands: an Answer to Climate Change”* highlight the impact of climate change on wetland ecosystems and the role wetlands play in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

May I remind you, that Sedibeng has been identified as National Priority, as a result of the poor State of Air Quality in this region. This is because of the direct emission of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, both by industries and from our domestic coal burning.

That is why the District Municipality will continue to rollout Basa Njengo Magogo (Clean Fires Campaign). For 2010, we are targeting 20 000 households – in partnership with Central Energy Fund. This is our contribution to reduce the amount of chemicals that end up in the atmosphere.

We must all agree that this year's theme captures the sense of urgency we all feel about the need to address the potentially disastrous consequences of global climate change as quickly as possible, particularly in the wake of the Copenhagen meeting late last year. It emphasizes our belief that the role of wetlands in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change must be central in all future debates about the way forward.

The Sedibeng District Municipality recognises the same urgency. We urge our communities to work close with our officials from the district and local municipalities, to deal decisively with all environmental challenges that are facing us as a region. Air Quality is but one! The District Municipality will continue to foster partnership with other government sectors like Indaloyethu, through the Department of

Environmental Affairs. Through this partnership, we will be involved in Buyisa: Eco-town Programme with Emfuleni Local Municipality in waste management, greening and beautifying our area during the next three years.

So this is an appropriate time to look in some depth at wetland biodiversity and how it is doing, as well as its role in wetland (and of course human) health.

Unfortunately, wetland systems are very vulnerable to changes in both the quality and quantity of their water supply. It is expected that climate change will cause additional damage to these natural systems. The loss of wetlands, accelerated by climate change will also affect the many species that depend on wetlands as their habitat and the communities living near these very important natural systems.

It is incumbent upon us, as a district, as local municipalities, and as communalities, including private sector, to foster partnerships in dealing with a range of environmental challenges facing us. Let us work together in ensuring the following:

- A creation of a healthy environment that is not harmful to our people, as required by the Constitution of SA;
- Stop illegal dumping of waste and keep our environment clean;

- Consider developing a clear plan on the use of Alternative Renewable Energy sources like Solar;
- Ensure community involvement in environmental management and conservation of our natural resources;
- Stop polluting our wetlands and water systems like rivers and lakes; and
- Protect the environment for the sake of future generations.

In conclusion, to all learners, the environment that we continue to use today will still be waiting for you to use in future. You have the responsibility, as much as we do, to protect it, so that your children can also enjoy the benefits in future. A healthy environment is necessary for a healthy mind.

For you to learn more efficiently and better, you need to make sure that your own environment is clean. I have full confidence in you, that you will protect these wetlands. Also note that Climate change is a reality.

I thank you!