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Water and Sanitation in the News

Energy, water crisis to top agenda at SADC meeting

The energy and water crisis sweeping the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region will be the focus of a high level meeting of ministers to be held in Gaborone, Botswana, on Monday. The meeting will also be attended by representatives of national energy and water regulators and utilities, research and training institutions as well as development finance institutions.

The meeting will be seeking to find ways in which the bloc can cooperate to mitigate these challenges. South Africa's energy crisis of 2015 has been an important factor in plunging the region in crisis. Countries such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland were heavily dependent on power imports from their larger neighbour which was unable to meet its own demands.

The drought sweeping the region has also served to exacerbate the situation as some countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe rely heavily on hydro-electricity.

Context

With South Africa being a water-stressed country and the recent drought propelling the country into a panic, there is an evident necessity for more efficient application of water conservation and management. The availability of water, or lack thereof, affects various sectors that consequently affect the country's economy. This is due to a sturdy relationship between water and energy, and a further nexus with food. All three components ultimately have an effect on the environment and thus a synergistic approach to managing the sustainability of these limited resources is crucial.

Towards the end of 2015, the Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) launched a green paper titled Getting to grips with the water-energy-food nexus at Oxford University to dissect the contribution chemical engineers have in providing sustainable solutions to the water-energy-food nexus issue.

Andy Furlong, director of policy and communications at IChemE, stated that, “Chemical engineers recognise the importance of considering all three components of the nexus – water, energy and food – together when devising integrated solutions for a more sustainable future.” He further said, “We are confronted by a multi-pronged dilemma that includes population growth, increasing urbanisation, the need to improve living standards, and climate change. The situation is multiplex and any solution to the world’s water, energy and food challenges must be based on a **holistic, integrated perspective**.”…

Appreciation of how interfaces between water, energy and food are moulded by environmental, economic, social and political fluctuations can assist in better managing the synergies and trade-offs among them. When observing the nexus in the African context, one has to also consider, as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) accentuated, the internal challenges facing African countries which include unrelenting poverty, high levels of unemployment and the degradation of natural resources which are decisive for economic activity. These challenges, however, can also be recognised as introducing opportunities for change and innovation.

The notion of a green economy has been established as an approach to framing a myriad of opportunities that emerge from this impasse. Obstacles such as these, together with the mentioned nexus, are key entry points into the discourse on the green economy. South Africa, like many other countries, has committed to transforming into a green economy which can generally be described as “a set of economic activities that result in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities”. As a country dealing with environmental degradation and climate change, South Africa certainly needs an inclusive green economy which considers, amongst various key areas, the creation of green jobs…

Sources: SABC, 20 June 2016; Bizcommunity, 15 June 2016