**REPORT ON COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE SESSION:**

**WATER SECURITY – ARE WE HEADING FOR A CRISIS?**

**Summary**

This report presents the proceedings of a Community of Practice session titled *“South Africa water security – are we heading for a crisis?”*, held on 30 September 2020. The session was meant for sector practitioners to share their understanding and knowledge on the state of South Africa’s water security, including reviewing if there is an imminent water crisis.

Water is a precious resource that sustains nations. It connects every aspect of life, supporting agriculture, energy, industries, livelihoods, and the environment. Each country needs sufficient water of the right quality to meet diverse and competing requirements. However, several parts of the world, including South Africa, face serious water shortages to a point of failing to fulfil their needs – a situation that may be described as a water crisis.

Several factors were used to review the state of water security in South Africa and informed the highlights of the session. It was understood that South Africa is a physically water scarce country, ranked globally as the 29th driest country in terms of total renewable water resources per capita. Its average rainfall is a low 450 mm/yr, translating into limited surface water resources. Also, the session learnt that South Africa faces growing water requirements from multiple users. The country also needs to address historical inequalities in water access. This is worsened by spreading water pollution, particularly in rivers receiving sub-standard municipal effluent.

The session also observed that the country has serious water management issues particularly in local municipalities. These institutions lack both managerial and technical capacity, compromising efficient water management. About 35% of input water is lost as system losses through leakage or theft. Other drivers identified as impacting national water security are reduced capital investment and limited attention to sound operation and maintenance. The country’s water infrastructure is also aging. These factors were viewed as collectively impacting the country’s water security, suggesting the imminence of a water crisis if no sound countermeasures are instituted timeously.

While applauding the sector progress made so far, the session concluded that the country needs to do more to avert a crisis. The session implored the country to address institutional weaknesses, raise public awareness on efficient water use, and partner with the private sector to broaden water infrastructure investment. Considerations to broaden the water resource pool were also suggested.