

Signing a Shot in the Arm for Skills Training

The signing of an education & training agreement between the Department of Water Affairs & Forestry (DWAf) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) promises to go a long way towards building much needed capacity in the South African water sector. Lani van Vuuren reports.

Phase II of the Framework for Education and Training in Water (FETWater) came into being earlier this year. FETWater is a programme for effective cooperation in research, education, training and capacity building initiatives to achieve integrated water resources management (IWRM) in South Africa. It provides institutional support and financing in the form of seed funding to encourage the creation of training networks as a method for co-operation between universities, research institutions, as well as public and private sectors in the country.

The programme was first established in 2002 as a response to a 1998 study by DWAf, UNESCO and the World Meteorological Organisation which revealed a marked lack of human resources and competencies in the local water sector. This deficiency not only jeopardises the implementation of the National Water Act, but also hampers the country's ability to conform with, and take advantage of, global trends in IWRM.

In her speech, read by former DWAf DG Jabu Sindane, Minister of Water Affairs & Forestry Lindiwe Hendricks said that The FETWater programme was one of the avenues explored by her department to alleviate some of the capacity constraints plaguing not



UNESCO representative Dr Claudia Harvey and Water Affairs Minister Lindiwe Hendricks at the signing of Phase II of the FETWater programme.

only government departments but the private sector as well. She added that DWAf had also been engaging with selected institutions for higher learning. Partnerships had been established with eight universities which were currently administering bursaries to students studying in engineering, science and technical fields.

The signing of the latest FETWater agreement follows on the successful implementation of the first phase, which saw the establishment of six networks focusing on themes such as resource directed measures, groundwater, the beneficial use of water, and expertise development in catchment management. While FETWater provides financial and structural support, these networks identify particular needs in their field of expertise and develop specialised content

for training courses that build the capacities of students, practitioners, water management professionals and industry stakeholders.

To date about 400 professionals and students have received training through the programme. The programme is funded jointly by the Flemish government, UNESCO, DWAf and the Water Research Commission (WRC). The WRC is also the local implementing agent for the programme.

Signing the agreement on behalf of UNESCO, Dr Claudia Harvey, Director: UNESCO office in Windhoek, said that the study of water resources and their optimum management were vital for the well-being of people in any country, as water constitutes a basic need. "Other than its potable use, its application in agriculture, energy generation, sanitation and environmental sustainability make it more expensive in many parts of the world than gasoline."

"Trained professionals contribute to water resources management which, in turn, allow ordinary citizens to use their resources in a sustainable manner," she continued. "We hope FETWater Phase II will surpass the accomplishments of the first phase."