

# Why a knowledge sharing platform is vital to address SA's water security challenges

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The question of information sharing around innovations in the water sector is a contentious one, with very murky lines that have to be navigated through to identify what can be classified as novel innovations.



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In the same breath, amidst a vast array of research publications and journals published by institutions of higher learning, water utilities, municipalities and research institutions, such as the Water Research Commission (WRC), to name a few, one can only imagine the innovative possibilities to be found, some attempted, some achieved and some still laying buried in text, waiting to be scrutinised and brought to life. This begs the question still, because maybe, just maybe the thinking on accounting for information and novelty has to take a different approach.

## Opportunity of a “share space”

Let us interrogate how information and novelty on water security can be shared nationally and internationally. The opportunity of a “share space” that is safe to manage, monitor and assess information without the risk to intellectual property or a collapse to our existing policies and structures, glares at us with illustrations to similar successful platforms in industry. Let’s just imagine for a moment that you could go to a verified portal that holds information to the water challenges and issues that we face. A place where you can search for a specific subject around water innovations. That a click of a button could prompt a display of information through various phases of research development, technology demonstration, innovation market readiness and fully commercial water innovations. A place where you can access journals, publications and articles that link to a specific search that provides you challenges, actions taken and possible solutions through a high dashboard.

The minister of water and sanitation, Mr Gugile Nkwinti, cited at this year’s financial year Budget Vote speech the challenges in the different municipalities throughout the country and shared his experience following visits at various water management sites. Out of the speech the commitment is to implement numerous priority activities to address wasteful expenditure, poverty alleviation, direct investments, establishment of a water trading entity, completion of outstanding bulk and reticulations projects to name a few. Nkwinti said, “The architects of such a state cannot just be government alone. It is the people themselves, together with their public representatives, participating in policy development, implementation and

evaluation of progress.” Though the speech did not explicitly talk about innovation or research around water security, there was no ruling out the implication that knowledge and innovation sharing have a key function in reinforcing the processes of strengthening the water systems and infrastructure.

## **Need to actively stay a step ahead of water challenges**

Recent challenges on flooding and drought throughout the country and globally have dared the water sector to take things a step further, with so much interest nationally and internationally on water security. The paradigm on the possibilities has shifted and the quest for a new thinking around opportunities is at our door step, ready for us to leap beyond the metaphysical boundaries. We can no longer react to water security issues. We can no longer wait for disasters to debate what was predicted or react to disasters by sifting through a basket of shelved technologies like what happened when Cape Town faced the water challenge and coined the phrase “day zero” to correct a problem that was picked up and forecasted over ten years ago. Our best option now is to actively stay a step, if not ten steps, ahead of any future water challenges. The best way to do that will be to share the wealth of information and technologies developed for the water sector. A platform of information technology intelligence that gives possibilities to break away silos and create synergies to strengthen existing efforts to address the challenges that we are facing around water in South Africa. Better yet, a platform that exposes us to solutions from other parts of the world that could just be the right answer to our pressing water issues. A portal that creates ease of access to information, creates linkages and allows for collaboration and opportunities to professionals, academics, entrepreneurs and government and closes the gap created by distance and access to information.

## **WADER**

The Water Technologies Demonstration Programme (WADER) housed at the Water Research Commission emanating from a funding partnership with the Department of Science and Technology is a programme that aims to provide such a platform for the water sector. Working closely with an existing international platform called [LIFT Link](#) which serves as a highway of interaction among municipal and industrial water, wastewater, and stormwater agencies, technology providers, consultants, academics, investors, federal agencies, NGOs, and others for advancing innovation. LIFT Link also plays a facilitation role for its users to find new technologies and research needs.

In South Africa, WADER has enabled technology innovation funding for technologies in water that range from water leak detection, rainwater and greywater harvesting, water re-use, low-flush toilet solutions and other water-saving to go through the processes of technology development and prototype development. The programme also plays an advisory role to water technology entrepreneurs who would like to establish whether there is a novelty in their innovations. Though there is still a lot of preparatory work being done to getting a WADER platform in place to achieve information technology intelligence and facilitate a space that all key players can access and share information, WADER is surely headed in the direction to find an answer to the possibilities on water knowledge and innovation sharing for the South African water sector.

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