

**Feedback session on a Telematic Pilot Project by Stellenbosch University
on Water and Waste Water Treatment Plant Supervisory Management Skills**

**Hosted by the Development Bank of Southern Africa,
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**Keynote address by Prof H Russel Botman,
Rector and Vice-Chancellor of Stellenbosch University**

Good afternoon, everyone. Thanks for the opportunity to say a few words.

I am very impressed with this project – for a number of reasons. The first is that it involves a partnership between key role players, including DBSA, the Department of Water Affairs, the Western Cape Provincial Government and its Departments and Local Municipalities – with Stellenbosch University as knowledge partner.

The challenges we face in our country are complex and varied, and partnerships are the smart way of tackling them. I believe this partnership has been so successful that the project is now being up-scaled nationally to 20 centres across the country. So, well done to everyone involved.

The second aspect that I like about this project is that it is tackling priority areas affecting the lives of millions of people, namely the provisioning of potable water, as well as the treatment of waste water.

In 1996, South Africa got a new Constitution – a document that proclaims in its preamble that it was adopted to “improve the quality of life of all citizens”.

The Bill of Rights in the Constitution protects civil and political rights, but it goes further – it also protects socio-economic rights, including the right to “sufficient food and water”.

Now, we know that a constitutional right is not a magic wand; it takes huge resources; a lot of hard work and plenty of dedication to realise a right in practice.

It also takes a well-trained cadre of officials and workers at local government level – where potable water is being supplied and waste water being treated.

And this is where this project comes into its own – as a smart delivery mechanism of management skills training, utilising the facilities and expertise of Stellenbosch University’s Division of Telematic Services.

The Division forms part of Stellenbosch University’s HOPE Project, which – in a nutshell – is about being the best and most relevant university we can possibly be, to the benefit of society.

Let me use two examples. The first is another project by our Division of Telematic Services – the Virtual Learning Support that is being provided to schools. It is being run in partnership with the Western Cape Education Department [If Mrs Penny Vinjevold, Head of the Department, is present, acknowledge her]. And 14 000 learners in 120 schools are benefiting from the extra classes being beamed to them on weekends.

The second example is the “tea bag” water filter invented by Prof Eugene Cloete of the Stellenbosch University Water Institute. Last year, it was hailed a “World Changing Idea” by *Scientific American* magazine.

The filter, which looks like a tea bag, is fitted into a compatible drinking bottle. It is made of biodegradable material, which is coated with a thin film of hollow nanofibres filled with biocides.

The biocide is used to kill most disease-causing bacteria. Bacteria cannot move through the fibres, and are killed so that they do not concentrate inside the filter.

The bag is filled with active carbon granules to remove certain chemicals and chlorine.

It is most suitable for cleaning running river water in rural areas where there is no contamination from heavy industrial development or pollution from untreated sewerage. The filter cannot desalinate seawater, nor can it clean acid mine drainage.

It has been licenced to a South African company, Aquacure, for development and manufacturing – so, as they say in the classics, “Watch this space”.

Ladies and gentlemen, these projects – and yours – are examples of science for society. They bring hope in situations where despair would otherwise have threatened to overwhelm us.

They are in line with how we see our role as university – to use the knowledge generation (research) and knowledge transfer (teaching) and knowledge sharing (community interaction) that we do to help make the world a better place for all.

To our partners – the DBSA, the Department of Water Affairs, the Western Cape Provincial Government and its Departments and Local Municipalities – thank you for joining us in this endeavour.

And to Professor Tom Park and his team, congratulations with a job well done.

May the partnership between the various parties represented here today go from strength to strength, and may it grow and inspire similar ventures across our country and continent.

Thank you for your hospitality.