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Project works to repair vandalised plumbing in some of city's schools

Ntsikelelo Qoyo

After being plagued by vandalism and deteriorating infrastructure, the department of water and sanitation in 2020 identified schools as a major contributor to leaks in drought-stricken Nelson Mandela Bay.

To mitigate this, the department partnered with businesses through the National Business Initiative (NBI) to pilot a school intervention project.

Eight schools were adopted and their sanitation facilities revamped.

Pendla Primary in New Brighton was one.

In 2020, the school was left in a dire state when it suffered unprecedented vandalism during the first Covid-19 lockdown, rendering one of its ablution facilities unusable.

More than a year ago, the destroyed block was completely redone with new cisterns, basins and taps.

The cherry on top was a dedicated plumbing team that does repairs and maintenance for the school whenever needed.

"It has completely changed our lives," principal Nontobeko Ntshininda said.

"There was a time we had to take turns as teachers to clean what was left of the block.

"There is no way to overstate how much it has improved life here at the school for us teachers and the pupils."

The team of plumbers, which was deployed to the eight schools, was part of a mentorship programme funded through the partnership between the department, NBI and the Eastern Cape co-operative governance department which trained 15 candidate plumbers through the expanded public works programme.

On Thursday, the candidates received certificates.

The NBI through Business Leadership SA also funded a mentorship programme with the Nelson Mandela Bay department of infrastructure and engineering.

During an oversight visit at the KwaNobuhle pump station, municipal water and sanitation boss Barry Martin said the mentorship programme had been critical in the training of young engineers which brought new perspectives to the metro's drought response strategies.

"You can appreciate that for



ALL SORTED: Pendla Primary School in New Brighton is part of a pilot programme, where along with the fixing of toilets, community members were trained as plumbers to maintain them. Back, from left, National Business Initiative CEO Shameela Soobramoney, US consul-general in Cape Town Todd Haskell and Business Leadership SA CEO Busi Mavuso look on while Amanda Dyasi, front, shows the skills she has learnt

Photograph: WERNER HILLS

over 10 years we have been in drought mode, so supervisory staff like myself are in constant crisis mode," Martin said.

"What NBI has afforded us is an opportunity to provide strategic training to our young graduates.

"Our graduate programme has brought many young, talented and innovative engineers into the metro.

"Tutoring has always lacked, and this is exactly what NBI and the businesses community came on board to do," Martin

said. Through NBI stakeholders such as the Beyond Advocacy Fund, Business Leaders SA (BLSA) Vodacom and USAID all came on board to contribute towards the programme.

BLSA chair Busisiwe Mavuso said the safeguarding of water and the necessary infrastructure was important, because it ensured the continued operations of businesses, as well as securing livelihoods.

"It helps with sustainability which helps with investment,

which then helps to make a dent in the huge unemployment number we have as a country," she said.

NBI CEO Ruth Troskie said while the programme did not come without challenges, the fact that all stakeholders played their part helped them.

"We invited the business community to see how other projects with metros can work and now that there is a workable model, we can solicit more support from businesses," she said.