

## **WATER IS LIFE**

*By Ms Sonam Mansingh: intern, Centre for Constitutional Rights*

On 11 November 2016, Communications Officer Megan Dick, and CFCR interns, Kiah Murphy and Sonam Mansingh had the opportunity to visit the soon-to-be-completed Welvanpas Water Treatment Works purification plant in Drakenstein Municipality.

South Africa's aging water system infrastructure, heavy economic dependency on agriculture, and the increasingly extreme effects of climate change on the environment have made it almost impossible for government to progressively realise the right to water, expressed in section 27 of the Constitution. Many municipalities have been forced to implement water restrictions to ensure that the country does not suffer an irreversible water crisis. The Drakenstein Municipality in Paarl was one of the first areas to announce restrictions at the beginning of 2016. Since then, a combination of government and community efforts, as well as passionate investment from expert engineers, has vastly reduced water loss in the area.

In 1999, water loss in Drakenstein stood at 34% and was steadily rising. The municipality prioritised projects to curb this loss and introduced a 20-year project plan, which included various water-loss prevention initiatives. The initiatives focused on sustainable pipe replacements in order for the supply to run effortlessly, tariffs to encourage less water use and public awareness over the importance of water conservation. These projects have brought down water loss to 13% for the 2015/2016 year. The most anticipated project is the Welvapas Water Treatment Works which is still under construction. The plant will purify an average of 10 million litres of water a day, but will have the capacity to pump 20 million litres in the near future.

This is a model example for other struggling municipalities - to invest in sustainable schemes in an effort to realise the basic human right of clean water. South Africa is currently experiencing a natural resource crisis with insufficient energy and dwindling mineral resources, and thus people often overlook the importance of water loss. Water is life and the reality is dawning upon government that positive action must be taken. The present generation needs sufficient access to clean water in order to improve their standards of living, as well as to guard against future generations suffering intolerable conditions that could have been avoided.