

Rural water service provision by municipalities and CBOs: Performance milestones and KPIs

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Abstract

The advantages of using Community Based Organisations for the provision of water services in rural areas have been advocated for some time. These benefits have always been intuitively known, however there is little documentation assessing the real experiences of applying this model of service provision on a large scale within the South African context. This paper describes a process of identifying appropriate targets and monitoring standards that have been implemented in a number of areas in the Eastern Cape where a co-operative approach between Municipalities, CBOs and the private sector has been adopted.

In the absence of readily available performance and costing benchmarks it has proved difficult to compare the tender proposals and indeed the delivery of services from all role-players. A series of cost estimating tools and responsibility milestones have been developed through an empirical process of critically analysing our experiences and developing an operational model from first principles. These milestones are defined in terms of developing the CBO to take on more and more responsibility, as far as is possible, while ensuring an appropriate and cost effective level of service.

The paper will present a number of options that take into account the relative capacity of municipalities and any development process that they may be planning for their own organisation. Critical to the model is that effective delivery of service must be ensured from the start and that any transition as milestones are reached, should be as seamless as possible. Furthermore a series of operational performance indicators and benchmarks are proposed.

Introduction

The widespread use of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in the operation and maintenance phase of water supply services in rural areas of the Eastern Cape has been hampered by a number of issues:

- Legislative requirements and procedures for the appointment of Water Service Providers (WSP's) (see section 78 of the Municipal Systems Act)
- A lack of readily available information pertaining to key performance indicators and costing benchmarks to implement this model.
- Some suspicion as to the effectiveness of the model.

The Alfred Nzo District Municipality (ANDM) adopted a CBO approach on a pilot basis in 2000 and implemented universal coverage of all water schemes in their area of jurisdiction in July 2002. This approach has enabled them to apply a policy of "free basic water" to a total population of 390 000 people at 130 schemes consisting of small stand standalones with populations of less than 500 people through to regional schemes with populations in excess of 20 000 people.

Area	Schemes	Pop. est.	Cost per capita
Umzimvubu South	36	90 400	R2.71
Umzimvubu North	40	190 000	R1.58
Umzimkulu	56	112 000	R3.16

Note: Figures for Jan 04

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The ANDM approach consists primarily of utilising CBOs to fulfil as many of the O&M tasks as possible, particularly day-to-day operation and maintenance (O&M) and reporting. Support Services Agents (SSAs) are in place to provide technical and training input as required.

Maluti Water and Mattcomm, as a result of their experiences as one of the SSAs on this programme, identified a need for clear goals and targets to be set in terms of the roles and responsibilities of all service providers. As a result of this a series of Key Performance Areas (KPIs), milestones and benchmarks have been developed for the ANDM in the provision of water services to rural communities.

Once such targets, milestones and benchmarks have been defined and adopted it is a simple process to develop a Quality Management System (QMS) that can then be used to ensure continuous improvement of the service delivered and indeed the institutional development of the organisations involved, including CBOs.

A number of generic publications are available that offer guidelines on the use of CBOs in the provision of water services (WRC, 2003). The purpose of this paper is to share our experience from involvement in the ANDM O&M programme over a period of two years. It is hoped that this will assist other Water Service Authorities (WSAs) and other role players in identifying the most appropriate and cost effective service option to fulfil the water services provider responsibilities. The paper further notes some of the key benchmarks that have been identified and developed through the programme. It is anticipated that these benchmarks will be updated from time to time as service provision improves.

The use of CBOs in water service provision

The ANDM was the first WSA in the Eastern Cape to implement the large-scale use of CBOs in the provision of water services for their rural schemes. An operational plan was developed, known as the Village Level Action Plan (VLAP)(Alfred Nzo District Mu-