

# Trusting consumers: Involving communities in municipal water service decision making in Durban, South Africa

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## Abstract

*The Constitution of 1996 sets out the government's responsibility to provide the public with the opportunity to be involved in government decisions that affect their lives (R Kasrils, Former Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, 2001)*

Participation is a guiding principle of South Africa's post-apartheid water sector reforms. Yet studies indicate that substantive and effective participation has been difficult to achieve. In an effort to develop sustainable and creative dialogue with consumers, the University of KwaZulu-Natal in partnership with eThekweni Water and Sanitation (EWS) piloted the establishment of community-based focus groups in 3 different types of communities. The goals of the project were to build trust, generate social capital and widen the store of available methods for enhancing dialogue between service providers and consumers. This paper details the methods used. This pilot formed part of a larger strategy to develop and refine a methodology to be used in a municipality-wide research and engagement strategy involving a diverse selection of wards. At the time of publication, research in 6 wards and one similar study with people with disabilities were complete.

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