



Women managing the water supply project

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HOPEWELL IS SITUATED 30km south west of Pietermaritzburg in the province of KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. This community falls within the area of operation of Umgeni Water. It is a trust land with land owners and tenants. The population is 5750.

Background

As it has been mentioned that Hopewell is a trust land, land owners had their own committee which is called the Advisory Board where the chief of the area, who is also a landowner sits. It should be mentioned that the initial meetings were held with the committee, Umgeni and the Advisory Board where the landowners gave the blessing of the project and said that they will need no compensation for their land to lay pipes. They stated clearly that they were donating their land so that there can be development in their area.

After some time this scheme collapsed because of poor management. This scheme was operational for about three years, but during this time there were problems. After the first few years it became worse. One would find that there was no money to pay for electricity or repairs or chlorine.

The committee that was in place was consisting of men who ended up thinking of themselves only. They misappropriated fund which were collected from kiosks and towards end of the 80's and early 90's the scheme collapsed completely and people had to go back to the river. Since we are now aware that they need to use Jik and bleach to kill bacteria in water, some were doing that and others were not.

Hopewell had only one source of local water, the Mlazi river that runs along on the western side of the area. There is potential for ground water. During the drought in the early 80's, the then Department of National Health Population and Development implemented a scheme which was pumping from the river into five reservoirs which had payment kiosks. The reason for this implementation was the outbreak of cholera in the area because before people were drinking water straight from the river.

The women took over the committee of men. These women got the full support of the community even from the previous committee because they took over in a very respectable manner. Discussions took place before the actual take over. This scheme was involving cost recovery, payment of Eskom for electricity, for pumping water, repairs and pump operation. With the assistance of Umgeni Water the scheme was rehabilitated and successfully operated for two years.

In pursuit of high level of service the committee approached Umgeni Water for a bulk supply.

The interim scheme

This scheme, rehabilitated by Umgeni Water was successfully operated by women for two years while the consultants were busy with the feasibility report for the bulk scheme.

This scheme consisted of five reservoirs, water kiosks, chlorination, electric pumps and cost recovery. The committee was responsible for the operation and maintenance included repairs to pipe bursts, switching on and off of the pump, ensuring that the quality of water is of acceptable standard. For all this to happen they needed to be an element of cost recovery.

A system of water tokens was used. This was done through the local shop and tuckshops. There was a person that was employed to take tokens to the shops and then the community will buy tokens from the shop and to with the tokens into the kiosks. Each token was 5c/25l. Each kiosk attendant had to bring all the tokens to the committee member allocated for that duty. The attendants were paid according to the amount of work they have done. Each of the attendant brings in tokens, they were recorded for each day in a register. At the end of the month, all the tokens that have been bought for the month were calculated and determine the amount the attendant earned for that month.

To ensure that the quality of water was suitable to human consumption, Scientific Services Division of Umgeni Water was taking water samples regularly. The person who was responsible for purifying water was taught on the quantity of chlorine to be poured into the reservoir for purification purposes.

This scheme operated successfully for two years and there were no cases of waterborne related diseases reported during this period.

Feasibility study

As has been mentioned the committee wanted a higher level of service. In pursuit of this the committee approached Umgeni Water for bulk supply. From the community meetings that were held, the committee stated that everybody in the area would like to have individual meters.

Community meetings were held where Umgeni Water representative was present. Everything was explained on how Umgeni Water operated and what was said by the committee, that everybody wanted individual connections was endorsed. By then the committee had also asked the community to start saving for connection fees although they did not know how much connection was going to cost.

Umgeni Water then appointed a consultant to do the feasibility study. The consultants were first introduced to

the committee and in this meeting it was emphasised as well that everybody wanted an individual meter and there was no need for public standpipes. The scheme was then designed in such a way that everyone was in a position to have an individual meter.

The houses in the area were laid out very well in such a way that it was easy to design the scheme and no houses were affected by the pipe layout.

The committee participated fully in the detailed design. The consultants tabled the preliminary design in front of the committee. After this lines were walked and pegged with the committee present. The landowners were also involved. There were no extensions required e.g. extending and rerouting lines. After this the detailed design of the layout was completed and it was ensuring a fair level of service to all.

The community was informed of all the developments that were taking place during this phase.

Construction

The scheme was approved and construction commenced. The contractor needed to be allocated a site and labour to be provided. The site was allocated to the contractor. During the first day the contractor was introduced to the committee and the provision of labour was discussed. Since the labour issues had been discussed in previous meetings and the date of commencement of construction was known, the labour that was required initially was readily available. Women were also included in the labour force.

Recruitment was done fairly and labourers were obtained from all sections of the area. There was a list compiled and people were employed according to that list. The committee ensured that not more than one person was employed in each family so that everybody could get an opportunity to be employed.

The committee allocated duties to themselves. There were those who were responsible for looking after the site, to see to it that things were going well on site and attending to problems. Others were checking on the crews that were at work also checking problems and ensuring that everybody is satisfied and work was progressing well. The committee did this in order to monitor progress and be able to identify problems at an earlier stage. It should be mentioned that there was no need for a night watchman at the site camp because everybody in the community was one and no material losses were recorded.

During construction there were people who were trained in basic plumbing skills, and these people were given tool boxes on completion of their training as well as certificates. These people were identified by the committee and they were trained by the SAFCEC through the contractor. After completion they received hands on training by installing the first 25 meters during construction. Some of them are now employed by the water committee to install meter boxes.

Meter installation

After completion of construction the committee requested that they carry out meter connections by employing their

local plumbers. They registered as a contractor at Umgeni Water and were employing the plumbers.

Branch office

Umgeni Water built a branch office where all the administration was administered. The chief of the area donated land where this office was built. The branch officer was identified by the committee and she received training from Umgeni Water's Finance and Administration section.

In this office applications for individual meters were filled in, payment for water, problems and queries were being attended to. It should be mentioned that this office can be used by other service providers in the area.

Cost recovery

Almost more the three quarters of the population have been connected and people are paying for water consumed. The committee also is encouraging people to pay in such a way that if a person does not pay the committee talks to him and request him to pay. The committee monitors cost recovery to such an extent that they take it upon themselves to tell the people that if they do not pay that they, the committee, will cut them off.

The community is very supportive because the committee always keep them informed. This is shown by the fact that they all pay and those that do not get statements come to the office to report.

Conclusion

It should be noted that this was not an easy road. There were problems that were experienced, but because the community was always kept informed of the developments, solving the problems was not difficult because there was the support of the community. Keeping the community informed is very important. Communication is the key to the success of the project.

The challenge that is facing the committee is that of running the scheme on their own. This has been discussed with them and they have shown enthusiasm. This will be done in phases so that they can be able to assess whether they manage, but they are looking forward to it.

This committee of women also successfully motivated the construction of a crèche in the area which is registered with the Department of Social Welfare and Pensions, electricity supply has been installed at their request and roads have been upgraded and telephones installed.

There is good atmosphere in the area and this is a stable community. It should be mentioned that this paper has been prepared together with the committee member, Mrs Sikhakhane.

References

BERGMAN, B.S., and PARTNERS, 1993 Feasibility study of Water Supply to Hopewell Report.

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