

**LOGAM/MWSSU: Water sector support programme**

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WHEN THE NEW Government came into power Local Government was at a crucial moment of change, challenge and opportunity. The government was grappling to find effective solutions to the complex, apparently intractable problems, which affected South African Citizens and their local communities in the aftermath of the apartheid regime.

Problems such as - a population that is growing faster than both the economy and labour market, unemployment, massive unmet needs for basic necessities, backlogs in education, an increase in crime and fears of HIV and other health epidemics - meant that for many people in South Africa, daily life was filled with uncertainty, and deep fears about how to meet basic human needs.

Apartheid fundamentally damaged the spatial, social and economic environments, in which people live, work, raise families, and seek to fulfill their aspirations. Local government had a critical mandate to play in rebuilding local communities and environments, as the basis for a democratic, integrated, prosperous and non-racial society.

Apartheid was not the beginning of geographic, institutional and social separation at the local level. Segregation was already a policy by the time apartheid was introduced in 1948.

1984, uprising gathered momentum, communities started to organise. Their rallying cry was the appalling social and economic conditions. For the first time people began to protest against the way human settlements were spatially and economically distorted.

The crisis in local government was a major force leading to the National Reform process that began in 1990. National debate about the future of local government took place in the Local Government Negotiating Forum, alongside the national negotiating process.

The Local Government Negotiating Forum framed the agreement on finance and service writing off arrears to Black Local Authorities. It also negotiated the Local Government Transition Act (LGTA) of 1993. The LGTA did not provide a blueprint for local government system but simply sketched a process for change.

The LGTA mapped three phases of transition:

- The pre-interim phase
- The interim phase
- The final stage

We are now at the end of the interim phase. The LGTA has effectively deracialised the systems of local government through the amalgamation of former racially based structures. However, transformation has yet to occur.

**Current state of local government**

The existing, soon to close, interim system of local government comprises a number of different municipal institutions, namely; Metropolitan Councils, District Councils, Transitional Local Councils and Rural Councils.

A number of these institutions are experiencing problems arising from the transitional process. Costly and complex reorganisation has tended to focus municipalities) capacity inwards, rather than towards their constituencies and delivery. Prolonged uncertainty about powers, functions, areas of jurisdiction and a host number of other matters affecting local government have added to the problem.

At the same time, municipalities have faced increasing demands and expectations on delivery, often without an increase in the resources to deal with these demands. While grappling with inherited inefficiencies and inequities municipalities have also had to put in place a system of democratic and equitable governance often in the face of resistance from a range of local players who benefited under apartheid.

The transition process resulted in a local government system consisting of 843 municipalities. Approximately one third of these face serious financial difficulties and administrative problems. To date consideration has been given to reducing the number of municipalities and councillors to enhance the viability of local sphere.

**Development local government**

It is in the interest of the nation that local government is capacitated and transformed to play a developmental role. The national government has committed itself to providing support to enable municipalities to be more developmental. Developmental local government is one that intends to have major impact on the daily lives of South Africans.

**Characteristics**

South African Constitution enshrines the rights of all people in our country to dignity, equality, freedom and security. Our Constitution commits government to take reasonable measures within its available resources, to ensure that all South Africans have access to basic level of services.

Developmental local government plays a central role in protecting human rights and meeting our basic needs. It focuses its efforts and resources on improving the quality of life of our communities. Developmental local government in South Africa rests on four pillars:

- Maximized social development
- Integration and coordination
- Democratic development
- Leading and learning

### **Local government association of Mpumalanga (LOGAM)**

The Local Government Association Mpumalanga (one of the nine South African Provinces) is an association of municipalities recognised in terms of the organized Local Government Act as the representative voice of Organised Local Government in South Africa. Its mandate is to transform and protect the voice of local government and represents all categories of Municipalities in the Province.

LOGAM, in collaboration with DFID, Provincial Department of Local Government and Department of Water Affairs are key stakeholders and major implementers of the:

### **Department for International Development's (DFID) Water Sector Support Programme**

DFID the United Kingdom government department responsible for overseas development is supporting the South African Government through its Water Sector Support Programme, which commenced, in this current phase, in 1998.

The overall goal of the programme is to ensure 12 million previously disadvantaged South Africans achieve access to sustainable basic water services. This highly ambitious target will be met through collaborative processes and co-ordination between this programme and others (whether funded by the South African Government, or donors) with the same mandate.

The main focus of the water sector support programme is the demonstration and support of the assumption for effective authority by municipalities of managing sustainable services through collaborative processes and projects between the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG), Department of Water Affairs (DWAF) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA).

### **Outputs of the programme**

- Frameworks and vehicles for improved collaboration, integration and alignment among DPLG, DWAF, SALGA established and supported ,
- Sustainable and replicable provider customer partnership established in selected areas and customer entrenched among stakeholders
- Local government and communities providing and sustaining sanitation and health promotion services

Provincial implementing structures of the project were established in, Mpumalanga, the Northern Province, and Pretoria called the Water Sector Support Units. These Units

act as a neutral forum for improved cooperation between DWAF, SALGA and Local Government operating at provincial level to facilitate a wide range of issues around the assumption of responsibility for water services by local government and the relinquishing of this responsibility by DWAF. The Units also manage a series of pilot projects addressing water services issues for municipalities, facilitating the identification, implementation and monitoring phases.

### **Pilot projects**

The Mpumalanga Water Sector Support Unit MWSSU, is currently managing 4 pilot projects, two others are in a planning phase.

#### **1. Ekulindeni TLC cost recovery project**

Non-payment for water by consumers led to a near collapse of the service. Rural South Africa is littered with examples of fast track delivery of water services to the previously disadvantaged that have resulted in non-viable, unaffordable schemes. In addition, nonpayment for services under the former apartheid government was a form of protest by communities.

The project aims to achieve sustained, affordable and equitable water supply and sanitation throughout the TLC area. This will be achieved by the following

- Creation of a cost recovery plan and customer care system to be approved and implemented by all stakeholders,
- A capacity building programme implemented from the water services authority to ensure sustainable provision of water
- An effective and sustainable operational and maintenance system established,
- A sanitation health and hygiene business plan developed
- Co-ordination and integration of local economic development initiatives through water as an entry point.

#### **2. Sango Informal Settlement Health Promoting School**

Some of the poorest of communities in South Africa live in "informal settlements" that are often marginalized and overlooked for any development initiatives. In recognition of this the project will bring together all relevant government stakeholders to work in an integrated manner to address the water and sanitation problems within this area.

The project aims to develop and implement a health promoting school to improve the environmental health conditions of the Sango community. This will be achieved by the following:

- The provision of efficient, adequate and equitable water services
- A functioning health promoting school
- A model/replicable approach

### 3. Ikangala Water Board District Advisory Forums

Ikangala Water Board was established in Mpumalanga Province after an intensive 2year consultative process. Their area of operation covers 15 TLC's and serves 1.53 million people in the former kwa-Ndebele Homeland area.

Poor levels of payment for water services and the low priority to the maintenance of water systems throughout the service area of Ikangala Water Board mean that water services in this area are in jeopardy of collapsing. The board acknowledges that water services will be sustainable only if communities are informed and empowered to take part in the decision making process. District Advisory forums (or consumer groups) are therefore required to be established, to provide local solutions regarding appropriate local services management models for water service authorities.

The project aims to achieve improved water services management in the service area of Ikangala Water Board through a community consultation process.

### 4. Theatre programme to raise awareness around water services issues

The culture of non-payment for services, the misuse and wastage of water, the high incidence of informal water connections are just some of the issues that have a negative impact on water services provision in South Africa. The use of theatre as a methodology to raise awareness around issues is being tested through this project across the province. It is acknowledged that theatre, as a tool alone will not change attitudes overnight, hence the integration of the approach with other cost recovery, and water conservation initiatives.

The project aims to enhance the changing of perceptions and attitudes towards nonpayment for water services through the use of theatre as a communication method and the establishment of community water educators.

### Lessons learned

The pilot projects are all in their early stages of implementation, however at this point preliminary lessons from the programme and the pilots are apparent.

1. The relationship between stakeholders seconded to serve on the MWSSU was not clearly defined.
2. From programme inception models of stakeholder participation and expectation from the programme should have been developed collaboratively
3. The MWSSU has to be perceived as a neutral support unit for Municipalities first and foremost - this was not the case, as it was seen as a Department of Water Affairs driven initiative, or worse still a consultant driven programme
4. District Councils were unable to dedicate staff to be fully involved in project (raising the questions around did they see the potential use of such support? Did they have an understanding of what the project was trying to achieve?)
5. It will take time for seconded staff to become key drivers of project implementation
6. There needed to be more emphasis on staff development
7. Project management responsibility for seconded staff needs to be supported by training
8. Pilot areas were selected on the basis of request and commitment from LGA and a participatory planning/design phase was applied
9. Pilot projects have taken far longer than expected to get to implementation phase, due to the participatory nature of the planning
10. Involving the LGA and community has resulted in full commitment to the projects
11. Poor lines of communication between MWSSU and other project stakeholders have meant very little sharing of experience
12. Little feedback on progress reporting or strategic direction has meant to a certain extent the MWSSU works in isolation from the main national programme.

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