



Promoting community-based management of rural water schemes

D Mnisi, South Africa

MVULA TRUST WOULD like to share its experience on embracing community-based management of rural water schemes in South Africa. The proposal is to provide support to local Municipalities, by guiding them in making use of community based structures to serve as the most suitable water service provider option for small water scheme. The rationale of this program is also to embrace the principles of demand responsive approaches and the involvement of all relevant role players in discussions, decision making, planning, implementation and monitoring & evaluation.

This paper is based on the program that was implemented in the Northern Province, South Africa. The Province consists of 2 district Municipalities and 36 local Municipalities which were formed after the 1994 Local Government elections. Out of the 36 local municipalities, 80% of them are characterized by low income, lack of human resources, inadequate infrastructure & poor administration systems.

Furthermore, before the Local Government elections, there was no clear legislature to guide the provision of water and sanitation services, that is until recently in 1997 when the National Parliament adopted legislation such as the Water Service Act as a major tool to use in the water & sanitation sector. Over and above the mentioned constraints, the Local Municipalities are still expected to take up their obligations as Water Service Authority (WSA) and indeed they are not responsible to supply water & sanitation only, but they are faced with other development initiatives. Mvula Trust has secured an amount of R382,020.00 from the EU/NGO funding to help the local Municipalities formalize the relationship between Water Service Authorities (WSAs) and Water Service Providers (WSPs).

Methodology

Consultative discussions were made to involve the community as much as possible. Both the community and the Municipality had to understand and accept the project before they could enter into a formal contract. Participatory workshops were used to merge the level of understanding of both the community-based organization and the Municipality. The program was spread within the 4 districts known as Lowveld, Western Bushveld, Southern and Northern. Out of the four districts at least one Municipality has to select two villages to form part of the pilot study.

Objectives of the project

Mvula Trust's role is:

- to facilitate, provide guidance and support to the Community Based Organisation and local Municipality to formalize a partnership which will specify both parties' roles and responsibilities, with the Community Based Organisation as water service provider (WSP) and the Municipality as water service authority (WSA).
- to assist both parties to develop & document and service contract which outline their roles as WSA & WSP.
- to raise awareness on legal the framework for both WSA & WSP, so that their services are in line with the National Act.
- to assist the Municipality in developing the Water Service Development Plans.
- for all relevant role players, to monitor and evaluate the process.

Mvula Trust intends to strengthen its relationship between themselves and the local Municipality, as Mvula Trust started to implement projects long before the local Municipalities came to existence. Through this programme, Mvula has created an enabling environment, bringing together all relevant stakeholders; these are the Department of Water Affairs, Department of Local Government, the District councils and Community Based Structures - to bring them on board with the project (sharing a common understanding and to avoid duplication of services).

Key indicators

- Workshop on the legislative & policy framework for the 4 districts
- Identification of one Municipality per district
- Selection of two villages in each Municipality
- Mvula obtain written resolution from both the Municipality and the community
- Workshop on the Service contract
- Skills & infrastructure audit for both community based organisation and the Municipality
- Resolution by both parties to enter into a contract
- Official signing of the contract
- Monitoring & evaluation.

What went well

During the workshops it was helpful to outline the roles & responsibilities to the WSA as follows:

- Understanding the constituency’s interests and translating these into service
- Developing Water Services Development Plans (WSDPs) for their area of jurisdiction
- Regulating water services (bylaws and tariffs)
- Acting as a channel of funds from provincial government
- Providing water services and establishing contracts with various water service providers to fulfil this function
- Monitoring performance of WSPs
- Resolving disputes between WSPs and customers

It was also very crucial to outline in depth the responsibilities of the WSP as follows:

- Customer relations
- Revenue management
- Day to day operation

It was also necessary to outline the various options that the Municipalities could use as the water service providers, specifying both the advantages and disadvantages of all the possible options. These include:

- Water boards as WSP
- Water service authority as WSP
- NGO as WSP
- Private company as WSP
- Community based organisation as WSP – this was the major point of focus.

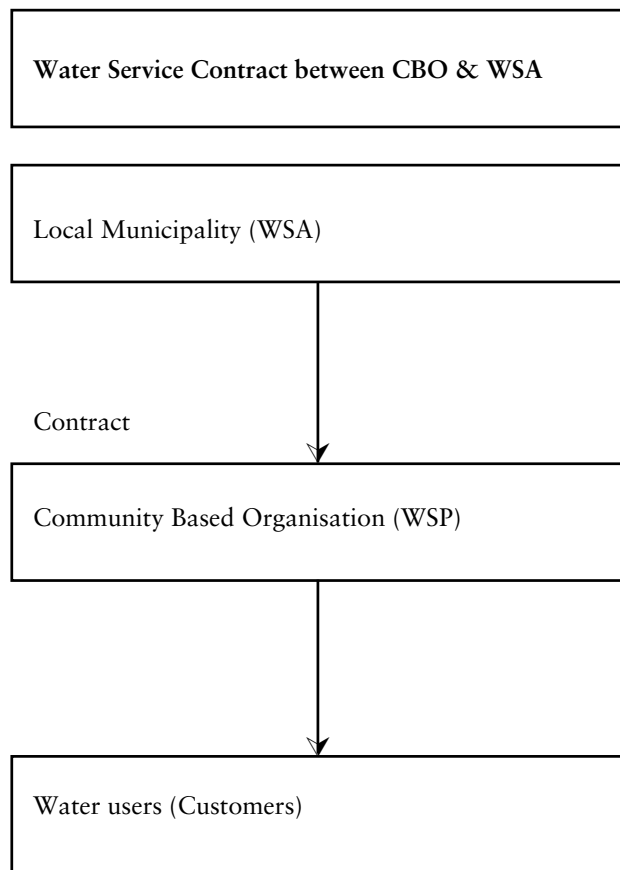
Deliberation on the model service contract by both WSA and WSP, to make it suite their own needs. Both parties were involved in reworking the model contract, which finally looks as follows:

A formal contract was signed between the Lowveld district (Drankensburg Maroleng Municipal) and the Calais Community based organisation (Village water committee).

Another contract was signed between Thohoyando/ Malamulele Municipal and Makuleke community based organisation (village water committee).

What did not go well

- Two Municipalities, Blouberg & Fetakgomo requested Mvula to put the project on hold, as they were busy preparing for the local government elections. They felt that it wouldn’t be fair for them to commit the incoming Municipality to this agreement. They would rather wait for the demarcation process to take place to see how they would be structured.
- Timing of the project was not good because councillors were busy preparing for Local Elections. At the time they were called Transitional Local Councils (TLCs)



which made it very difficult for them to enter into an agreement with any service provider, as the District Council was then acting as the administrator of the TLC.

Lessons learnt

- Project took a long time to complete due to unavailability of councillors.
- Council resolution and commitment is crucial before any project can begin.
- Community Based Organizations need to be fully recognized by all other social structures in the community.
- The legal status of Community Based Organizations needs to be addressed and understood by all parties.
- Community Based Organization became aware of the legislative and policy frameworks.
- Municipality became aware of how Mvula Trust operates and how they can make use of the Trust as a support agent.
- Poor infrastructure - the infrastructure audit results show that some of the projects are not up to RDP standard and thus it will be difficult for the WSP to supply water to every consumer. This project did not include refurbishment of infrastructure.
- Capacity of both the WSA and WSP is not adequate to carry out the necessary obligations.
- Insufficient funds to address the needs of both infrastructure and capacity building.

Plan of Action

We have forwarded our final report to EU/NGO for further funding, to address the gaps on capacity for both WSA & WSP and infrastructure.

Conclusion

South Africa has been a democracy for the past six years. Municipalities are still new to take on and adopt the responsibilities delegated to them. They don't have the capacity to handle all this at one time. There is still a lot to be done in capacitating them, because they seem to fear the unknown and are reluctant to take full responsibility as Water Service Authority.

Related literature

Water Supply & Wastewater Management Handbook
1994

DUDU MNISI, Project Development Facilitator, MVULA
trust
