

## The Alfred Nzo Municipality and CBO WSPs

### Water services and Community Based Organisations (CBOs)

The Alfred Nzo District Municipality is the Water Services Authority (WSA) responsible for ensuring access to water and sanitation services within its area of jurisdiction. Considering its peculiar demographic profile, the rural nature of human settlements and the topology of its geographic area, the Alfred Nzo District Municipality has opted for a process of developing community-based water services providers (CBO WSPs) supported by Support Services Agents (SSAs).

### The Alfred Nzo process

The Alfred Nzo District Municipality is located in the north east of the Eastern Cape Province, and includes the Umzimkulu enclave. In October 2000, the District Municipality approached The Mvula Trust to develop a proposal to provide operations and maintenance support services to 19 water schemes covering 33 villages. These schemes have been initiated and implemented by the Municipality. During the construction phase there was extensive participation by project steering committees (PSCs). However, little attention was given to institutional arrangements in related social development issues. In January 2001 the Municipality, in its capacity as Water Services Authority, appointed The Mvula Trust as an SSA with the following brief:

- To refurbish all schemes to their original designed status
- To develop and implement a process for selecting and empowering CBO WSPs
- To provide necessary institutional support to the WSA and the WSPs while ensuring that all schemes remain operational

Following an initial process of situational assessments of all the schemes (involving surveys of water use, use of the sanitation systems in place, willingness and ability to pay,

*“Congratulations to Mvula for taking up the challenge of the new South Africa, and especially with local government. It was not without design that Mvula was approached to be a partner in the development process in Alfred Nzo, as their skills and resources are valuable assets no sphere of government can be without. As one can see, the process is leading South Africa in the rural poor context.”*  
 – Ernest Zellhuber, Deputy Director: Water and Sanitation, Alfred Nzo District Municipality



**Community labourers install a Vergnet pump**

and willingness to become involved in scheme management), a village level action plan (VLAP) was adopted. The VLAP made provision for the development of CBOs that would be able to function as WSPs for their

communities. It was very important to make this a transparent process.

The communities were requested to form groups within themselves, if they were interested in becoming WSPs for their villages. These groups were then asked to submit an 'Expression of Interest' to the municipality. It was considered essential that all community members had an equal understanding of what is required of a WSP, and that all those interested were able to form groups and submit these "Expressions of Interest". Therefore, The Mvula Trust organised several meetings and workshops with the members of the communities to raise awareness and understanding of the criteria and requirements involved in becoming WSPs. It was considered essential to the process to actively engage tribal authorities in the villages as much as possible, and in a number of cases, the meetings were conducted at the house of the local "Induna".

Issues addressed during the meetings and workshops included:

- understanding of financial management
- understanding of issues around community relations, customer-provider relations, and conflict resolution
- consciousness of some of the developing needs in the community

After these workshops The Mvula Trust developed a framework for the Expressions of Interest. These expressions included a statement of willingness to become the WSP, a sense of the applicants' understanding of the issues and activities involved in being WSPs, and a motivation for why they felt they would be 'the right people for the job'.

On average three to four Expressions of Interest per scheme were received. The next step was to select the best candidates. An adjudication committee was established for each scheme, existing of the Ward Councillor (representing the political interests), a representative of the Municipality, two community members, and representatives of

The Mvula Trust as the SSA. This committee selected a prospective WSP per village, and nominated candidates to the Municipality for appointment as WSPs. It was the responsibility of the Alfred Nzo District Municipality as WSA to make the final appointments.

In its role as SSA The Mvula Trust was also responsible for drafting a water services agreement between the Municipality and the designated CBO WSPs. By April 2002 12 designated CBO WSPs had signed their contracts with the Municipality.

### **Activities of the CBO WSPs**

Once appointed by the Alfred Nzo District Municipality, the CBO WSPs are expected to appoint, pay, and manage their own personnel. Furthermore, they will be responsible for operation and maintenance of the water infrastructure. This includes carrying out minor repairs to the schemes, financial management, customer relations and conflict resolution.

Although the CBO WSPs will operate as the WSPs for their schemes, the SSA will maintain an active support role, so as to ensure mentorship of the WSP, and continued support where needed. An example will be that minor repairs will be carried out by staff of the WSP, while major repairs that cannot be taken care of by the operator will have to be taken care of by contracted external technical services. It will be a task of the SSA to ensure that contacts and agreements with these external contractors are established and working.

Furthermore, the WSPs will invoice the SSA for costs incurred on a monthly basis. The SSA will then check the invoices and, when approved, ensure that the money is paid from the Municipality into the community (WSP) bank accounts. This means that, in effect, the WSPs are fully responsible for the money in their bank accounts, and for paying staff members where appropriate.

## **Alfred Nzo, the CBOs and free basic water**

The Alfred Nzo District Municipality is breaking new ground in implementing a free basic water policy in its area of jurisdiction that will benefit all users served by a standpipe level of service. Considering its severe economic limitations the Municipality has demonstrated political will, and has taken the bold step of ensuring a basic level of water supply to its communities – with community responsibility for operating and maintaining their schemes. The Mvula Trust salutes the Alfred Nzo District Municipality on its innovative approach, and encourages other municipalities to explore the cost benefits of the community-based provider model.

The Mvula Trust Case Study Series includes case studies and stories of The Mvula Trust projects and experiences in the field of community-managed water supply and sanitation.



### **For more information on the project , contact:**

The Mvula Trust Kokstad office  
P.O.Box 1698  
Kokstad 4700  
Tel: 039 727 3349  
Fax: 039 727 3315  
Email:  
[Lebenya@mvulakks.co.za](mailto:Lebenya@mvulakks.co.za)