

Municipal-Community Partnerships for Sustainable Water Supply Experiences of The Mvula Trust

Introduction

Nationally and internationally, it is recognised that Municipal-Community Partnerships in the operations and maintenance (O&M) and management of *rural* water supply systems is one of the most cost-effective and efficient ways to ensure sustainable water supply.

Remote rural areas are characterised by distances from urban service and support centres, where it is expensive to travel long distances to communities. Schemes are often out of commission for long periods, waiting for support in fixing broken schemes or receiving fuel for pumps to ensure ongoing O&M of their schemes.

The Mvula Trust has worked with municipalities and communities to develop service delivery models and relationships that can deliver affordable and reliable services. In the last 11 years Mvula has implemented over 250 water supply systems which have been managed by capacitated community-based structures. Through capacitating these structures to engage in O&M, communities can provide sustainable services, often with very little outside support.

Mvula is well placed to assist municipalities to set up water supply provision arrangements that build on existing capacities and strengths in remote areas, with mechanisms and structures to ensure a role for local people.

The legal and policy framework

The Water Services Act (1997) details the water services provider function as the actual delivery of water services to consumers. The function includes activities such as O&M, revenue collection and customer relations. The Act states that a range of entities may perform the provision function, including community-based organisations (CBOs).

The Strategic Framework for Water Services (2003) promotes the use of CBOs in smaller, localised schemes. It states that “DWA will engage with other national government departments to secure the right of water services authorities to use community-based water services providers (as defined in this Strategic Framework) without undertaking competitive tendering.”

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the Department of Provincial and Local Government (dplg) also support this position. In effect municipalities are being encouraged to recognise and support a role for CBOs in water services delivery. This role can be within an internal or an external delivery mechanism – as defined in section 78 of the Municipal Structures Act (2000).

This document highlights the advantages of contracting CBOs in water supply provision, giving municipalities a vision for the benefits.

The argument for Municipal-Community Partnerships in water supply

Municipalities sometimes feel that communities lack the necessary experience and expertise to carry out provider functions. Municipalities are worried about the ability of communities to handle finances. Mvula has always supported the enabling of communities to manage their own finances relating to water and sanitation schemes. For the period 1993 – 2002 Mvula statistics show that of the communities who managed over R200m, only 0.3% was lost in mismanagement of money.

There are, in fact, many *de facto* community-based water services providers in South Africa. Although they may not have legal status with the water services authority, they are carrying out O&M of schemes, customer relations and cost recovery – particularly in cases where free basic water policies are still being put in place. Further, these water committees have existing skills and capacity that could be harnessed to strengthen municipal service provision.

Mvula advocates arrangements where communities are given certain responsibilities in water services provision. This model recognises the legal role and functions of local government, as well as the efficacy of community-based structures in running water services.

Examples of Municipal-Community partnerships

The Alfred Nzo District Municipality (Eastern Cape) – supporting O&M activities

In 2001 the Alfred Nzo District Municipality took the decision to appoint community-based structures to perform selected water services provider functions. At the same time it was recognised that communities cannot be left on their own. Therefore, three water services agents were appointed by the Municipality – one of which was The Mvula Trust – to train and capacitate these structures, as well as to provide back-up support. Under Mvula's control were 36 schemes serving over 90 000 people and 101 villages in the Umzimvubu South area (Mount Ayliff and Mount Frere).

The main benefit for the communities is the quality of the service provided to consumers. During the two years the Programme ran there were only 11 major breakdowns of service in nine of the 36 schemes. Further, 105 community-based water provider board members and 62 operators were appointed and trained.

From a municipal point of view, this mode of operation is highly cost-effective. The O&M costs (which include the water services agent costs) are, on average, less than R2.50 / person / month. The reasons for these economical costs are the low maintenance technologies and village-based O&M arrangements.

The Ngcobo Local Municipality (Eastern Cape) – refurbishment and O&M

In the Ngcobo Local Municipality area (Chris Hani District Municipality), Mvula has embarked on the first stage of a Refurbishment and O&M Programme. Villages are clustered in groups of three to six. In each village local operators are coordinated by a Community Services Provider (CSP), consisting of three people. They are remunerated monthly for their work.

The role of Mvula is the development of an O&M Plan, and training and capacitating the CSPs and local operators. This model recognises and enhances the efficacy of local structures in running water services by giving them certain responsibilities while, at the same time, providing them with training, support and supervision capacity.

Exploring contractual arrangements between CBOs and water services providers

Funded by the Mott Foundation, Mvula is piloting the provision of support to municipalities to put in place contractual arrangements between capacitated community-based structures and municipal-appointed water services providers. For example, Mvula is facilitating a dialogue between the Tshiungani Water Committee and the Mutale Local Municipality (the proposed interim water services provider) in Vhembe District Municipality (Limpopo), and between the Nhlungwane Water Committee and the uMzinyathi District Municipality (KwaZulu-Natal). Dialogues should lead to a clear division of roles and responsibilities between the water committees, the appointed water services providers, and the water services authorities through a formal arrangement or Memorandum of Understanding.

Mr Masokhona (Water Services Manager of the Vhembe District Municipality) says “This should lead to better cooperation between community-based structures and local municipalities, and strengthen the skills and capacities of both”.

Lessons learnt

- Community management is not an end in itself, but one means to an end. It ensures a more sustainable service in remote rural areas (particularly as it is cost effective, and O&M is immediate and ongoing).
- Community structures need to be capacitated to take up the different water services provisions tasks.
- Community structures cannot be left on their own; they may need continuous training, back-up support and external control mechanisms. These roles can be played by water services provider or a water services agent.
- Municipal-Community Partnerships need formal contractual arrangements, outlining each parties’ roles and responsibilities.

What Mvula can offer

Through working with municipalities and communities Mvula can offer the following expertise in ensuring sustainable water supply in rural and peri-urban areas:

- Engaging with the selection of water services providers (Municipal Systems Act section 78 process).
- Acting as a water services agent.
- Supporting community-based structures to perform certain (or all) of the water services provider functions through capacity building and training.
- Facilitating dialogues and drafting up contracts between water services authorities, water services providers and CBOs – with clear divisions of roles and responsibilities.
- Developing O&M plans and capacities which involve community participation.

For more information

- The water services agent programme in The Alfred Nzo District Municipality – John Sarng, Programme Manager, Mvula Kokstad Office (phone 039 – 727 3349 / e-mail john@mvulakks.co.za)
- The Refurbishment and O&M Programme in Engcobo Local Municipality – Mongezi Dambuza, Programme Manager, Mvula East London Office (phone 043 – 726 2256 / e-mail mongezi@el-mvula.co.za)
- For information on alternative contractual arrangements for community-based water services functions – Philip Davids, Institutional and Social Development Specialist, Mvula Policy Unit (phone 011 403 3425 / e-mail philip@mvula.co.za)
- The Mvula Trust and its approach: Jabu Masondo, Communication and Advocacy Officer, Mvula Head Office (phone 011 – 4033425 / e-mail jabu@mvula.co.za)

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