

The Nhlungwane Community Water Project

Introduction

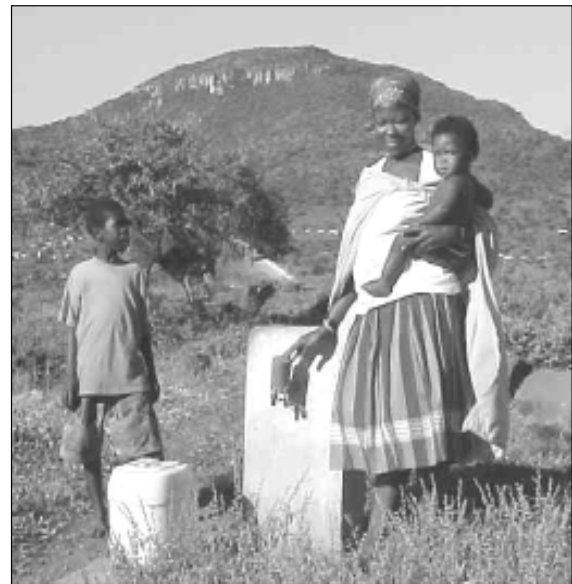
The Nhlungwane Water Project is situated in Msinga District in southern KwaZulu-Natal. The community consists of approximately 227 households with a population of 1100, and is divided into four main sections. The water project was established with the assistance of The Mvula Trust and was completed in 1997. It has been functioning without interruption since then. The water scheme consists of a diesel pump that supplies four reservoirs, which in turn supply by gravity 41 standpipes. The project has extraordinary high cost-recovery, it is one of two projects in the province known to have collected more income from O&M services fees than they have expenses; and an innovative localised system of operation and maintenance.

Operation, maintenance and management

Each household pays a monthly operation and maintenance fee of R7, and it is reported that in the region of 90% of households pay this on a regular basis. While record keeping in recent time has been less than consistently adequate, the records that do exist show that the inflow of funds has exceeded the costs and has allowed the surplus to be banked. Early 2002, their bank balance exceeded R11,000.

The community has also developed a very effective system of local management of standpipes. The standpipes have their own wardens, who are all women and often referred to as 'Nompompis'. These wardens offer their services voluntarily and the responsibility rotates through the households adjacent to the standpipe. Agreement has been made that each warden keep the keys for the standpipe. Every day at a specified time the wardens open the standpipes for the people to come and fetch water. Each household is allowed three 25-liter containers of water on weekdays and five containers during the weekend. Those who

The Mvula Trust community water project in the village of Nhlungwane, Southern KwaZulu Natal, in early 2002 was nominated for the Impumelelo Innovations Award, and won the 2002 WISA SWSS Excellence in Rural Water Supply Award.



Tapping water at one of the public standpipes in Hlungwane

wish to use more water have to pay 20cts additional container.

The wardens record monthly payments from the households around their standpipes. The money is however paid directly by the households to the Village Water Committee (VWC) on the 27th of each month.

Reasons for success

According to a recent study carried out in the community, success factors of the water project can be found in that the Nhlungwane water project is based in a relatively cohesive community, with good working relationships with traditional authority structures, some

dynamic individuals and an underpinning of women's organisation.

One of the factors for success was the energy and vision of a locally born man, who initiated a number of development initiatives in the community, and was instrumental in establishing the contact between the community and The Mvula Trust, and in setting up the VWC. Although he tragically passed away in 1995, the community and the committee took his momentum further, and continued the process of establishing the water project.

Interestingly, the majority of the committee members were and are women. Many of them, through their involvement with other local initiatives such as a local vegetable garden, organised production of local crafts, and a burial society, already had some organisational skills and experience that they could apply to the water project. They were keen to participate in any initiative that might help the community at large.

Another clear factor for success is the involvement of the traditional authorities. The community has a close working relationship with local traditional authority structures, which seek to play a facilitating rather than a determining or dominating role in relation to local developmental initiatives.

Committee and community members themselves ascribe their success to continued payment by the community, and opportunities to express concerns through regular community meetings. They state that trust played and

plays a vital part in the success of the water project. The factors noted above along with a strong commitment to consult and to keep people informed about issues and developments help to ensure that there is a high level of trust within the community. Individuals are confident that leadership structures will operate in the best interests of the wider community, and that individuals will shoulder responsibilities and perform their duties appropriately. This reservoir of trust nurtures the project and ensures that when difficulties do arise, they can be resolved without turning into major conflicts.

Lastly, the predominantly women-managed committee expressed a strong sense of ownership of, and responsibility for, the scheme. Key to their involvement has been participation in the planning and construction of the scheme, as well as in operating it. This is a key aspect of the community management approach, and confirms the work done and support given by The Mvula Trust and the other supporting agents in the



The Nhlungwane Water Committee with the WISA award

project.

Men and women in Nhlungwane

Nhlungwane village has some interesting gender dynamics. The fact that women have been able and willing to develop and unite themselves in their various development / community initiatives while the men are only marginally involved, seems to have deep-rooted, historical causes, mostly to do with the migration labour that the men of the village have been involved in for most of the last

century. However, rising unemployment and a declining rural land and cattle based economy has left many men at a loss as to what their role should now be. This, while for decades the women have been used to ensuring the community's survival, and have been united in their attempts to try to improve the life standard. For them, nothing has changed, really.

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 Durban office
P.O.Box 61301
Bishopgate
Durban 4008
Tel: 031 301 3205
Fax: 031 301 3255
Email:
lindy@mvuladbn.org.za