

# A Participatory and Learning Based Approach to Raising Awareness on Water and Sanitation



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## Introduction

The eThekini Water and Sanitation Unit (EWS) has the responsibility of managing water and sanitation services within the eThekini Municipality. In 1996 the boundaries of the municipality were extended to create a Metro, and then again in 2001 to become a Unicity, which resulted in an increase in the number of households with no access to water or sanitation being incorporated into the EWS service mandate. In addition, there has been a substantial influx of poor people from rural areas. This large rural-urban migration is expected to continue for decades and places further strain on the municipality to expand their services to these communities.



Additionally, eThekini, Durban, is a city of contrast with both first world infrastructure which requires constant maintenance and upkeep to ensure that supply is sustained, as well as third world conditions in informal and rural settlements where no supply exists. Innovative technical methods of service delivery had to therefore be introduced for sustainability, environmental, financial and water scarcity reasons, requiring customer acceptance, education and training. The established and well behaved customer base also needed to be retained and reassured that costs and quality of delivery would not be compromised.

The EWS identified various levels of service that would allow provision of water and sanitation to all residents of the Unicity in the urban, peri-urban and rural areas. These included the installation of full pressure, semi pressure (roof tanks) and ground tanks for the provision of water, and the use of water borne sewerage systems, ventilated pit latrines, ablution blocks and urine diversion toilets for sanitation. It was important to ensure that the type of sanitation system used matched the type of water supply system. A free basic water supply of 9kl per month per household was also introduced.



Ground tanks



Roof tanks



Urine diversion toilets



Ablution Blocks

Challenges that EWS faced included blockages of pipes, misuse and wastage of water, vandalism, high levels of non-revenue water, difficulty in accessing remote areas and the presence of water borne diseases such as cholera. Many of these challenges were as a result of a lack of awareness and education, especially in those areas that had not previously had access to water or sanitation services, while others consumers had never had a voice with

regard to any services and a significant constituency and therefore considered non-payment, passive protest and vandalism of infrastructure to be legitimate action. As a result, the EWS embarked on an extensive awareness and education programme incorporating a participatory approach to ensure a two-way communication system. This programme was initiated in 1997 and works alongside the service provision programme to ensure continuous interaction with the target communities, awareness and education in the proper use and management of the services, and to monitor the acceptance, problems and successes of the services delivered.

## Priorities and Objectives

The priorities for the education and awareness programme were set based on the MDG to supply water and sanitation to all citizens, and on the need for all South Africans to conserve and protect the limited water resources. These priorities included improving the understanding and acceptance of the water and sanitation systems, educating to reduce the consumption and wastage of water, and the creation of forums for interacting with the local communities to determine the effectiveness of the programmes.

The target groups for the programme included poor( vulnerable) communities in both rural and peri-urban areas; women (as they typically manage the households on a day to day basis); children in peri-urban and rural schools and their educators; and vulnerable households in urban areas ( child headed, pensioners , indigent ).

The objectives for the education and awareness programme were set based on the target group and types of systems installed. These included:

- Increasing awareness on the proper use and management of water and sanitation systems in rural and urban (formal and informal) areas
- Reducing the misuse and wastage of water in urban areas (formal and informal)
- Reducing the levels of non-payment
- Promoting water conservation
- Improving community participation and interaction to ensure sustainability of systems
- Including water and sanitation aspects into school curricula

## Approach

A number of different approaches were used in the education and awareness programme in order to achieve these objectives. These included the use of posters and leaflets, house visits, the creation of forums, training, schools programmes, street theatre and media publications.

**Leaflets / posters:** Posters and leaflets have been created to address all aspects related to the water and sanitation services offered by the EWS. These are produced in English and other main languages, and are distributed to schools, clinics, communities etc. They are also used in conjunction with house visits and workshops to ensure that they are explained and understood correctly.



**House visits:** House visits are carried out by Customer Service Agents (CSA) to explain aspects related to water use, debt relief, use of sanitation systems etc. These CSA's are often employed from the local community.



**Street theatre:** Street theatre is used regularly to explain and demonstrate the correct use of water and sanitation systems, hygiene, and pollution. These street theatres have been carried out at taxi ranks, shopping centre, clinics, hospitals, councilor ward meetings and schools.

**Workshops and community groups:** Education and awareness programmes and workshops are carried out at clinics and within other community forums to create both an understanding of water and sanitation issues and to create a two way communication for feedback to EWS.



**Schools programme:** A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between EWS and the department of Education which includes the training of learners, principles, school management body and caretakers. Training in health and hygiene as well as maintenance and operation of water and sanitation systems is undertaken at all schools. A water audit and water detective programme has also been developed for the schools.



**Working models:** Working models have been developed that demonstrate the difference between storm water and sewerage systems.



**Professional development of educators:** A programme for the professional development of educators through the accredited Environment and Sustainability in Schools Course (in conjunction with Rhodes University) has also been developed.



**Community participation:** A participatory approach is followed by EWS to ensure the sustainability of their services and to empower the communities. Programmes carried out include the creation of focus groups to obtain feedback from the communities within different areas as to how service delivery can be improved, and the Raising the Citizens Voice programme which allows for the continuous strategic engagement between local government (EWS) and civil society with a particular focus on policy issues relating to water and sanitation. Training is provided on water and sanitation issues as well as rights and responsibilities.

## Results and Lesson Learnt

The success of the participatory approach to education and awareness has been a successful one demonstrated by some of the headline results:

- An increase in satisfaction levels with sanitation systems.
- No further cholera outbreaks recorded due to sub standard water and sanitation.
- A reduction in diarrhea incidents by 31% as compared to areas with no on-site sanitation and improved conditions for children.
- A reduction in non-revenue water (from 40% to 29%).
- A number of customers are now on debt relief and thus accounts now regularized.
- A reduction in consumption levels resulting in substantial cost savings.
- A reduction in illegal connections.
- Blockage rate reduced from 3800 per month to approximately 400 / month in one year resulting in substantial operational and maintenance savings.
- The use of a customer *report card* which makes use of market researchers to consistently track customer satisfaction and the creation of focus groups has allowed for EWS to identify problem areas and has highlighted focus areas for further awareness and training programmes.
- Evaluation and assessment of the education programme is undertaken to match understanding levels and provide feedback on the education content.
- Within one year more than 600 street theatre performances were held reaching approximately 38 000 adults and 45 000 school children.
- Over 230 educators completed professional development programme on water and sanitation.
- Citizen's Voice programme rolled to entire municipality.

The lessons learnt during this process include:

- Leaflets and resource materials are inadequate and of no educational value unless they are included as part of a structured approach. If materials are just dropped off at schools and adult community centres there is limited impact – educators and community leaders need to be trained themselves.
- There is a need for continuous follow up and education to ensure that all community members are informed of the initiatives and how to make use of the water and sanitation systems.
- There is also a need to establish a point of contact in the community and within the institution (EWS) to allow for rapid responses to queries and problems that may arise. For example, a call centre has been established to receive complaints and dispatch technical staff to attend to the problem. This is also used as a tool to measure customer satisfaction. A customer service charter and service level standards have also been developed to ensure that EWS provide a quality service.
- Project delivery is enhanced when local people from the community act as facilitators, care takers and trainers.
- It is important to use the correct language (English is often the second language) and to ensure that the level of understanding is met.
- In engaging communities in the Raising the Citizen's Voice programme the EWS has adapted and changed policies leading to empowerment of communities in the decision making process.

## Sustainability

It is important that the programme is sustainable and these aspects have been taken into account in the development and implementation of the education and awareness practices. Social, economic, environmental and cultural sustainability have been addressed. All communities have been targeted with the programmes with a focus on poor communities, women, children (schools) and educators. Continuous feedback is sought and programmes are re-evaluated on a regular basis. Investment in education material is recovered through the savings made in the reduction in water use, illegal connections and an increase in revenue from previously non paying consumers. Through increased awareness and improved practices, pollution of rivers and land has decreased. The traditional beliefs and indigenous knowledge was incorporated into all educational material developed to ensure acceptance by the targeted communities.



The EWS, together with funding from the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) has developed a Toolkit guide which contains all the education material that EWS has used in the role out of their water and sanitation services. This Toolkit can be used by other municipalities to initiate similar programmes within their areas.

There is also a continuous participation in national and international conferences, symposia and workshops by the EWS. There are frequent visits by delegations from other cities (national, Africa wide or from further afield). In cases where more formal city-to-city agreements are concluded, eThekini Water and Sanitation Division staff travel to partner cities to provide strategic planning support operational assistance and training. These exchanges take place over a multi-year time span. The experiences have been found to enrich the experience and knowledge of both parties. The EWS has also been recognized as a learning centre as part of the UNITAR / CIFAL programme.

Of equal importance to the sustainability of the project is the collaboration with research organizations such as the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the University of KwaZulu Natal. These organizations undertake regular surveys of the success of the various programmes to ensure that there is an independent and unbiased evaluation. The results of these surveys are made publically available and lessons learnt incorporated into EWS programmes.