

Water and Sanitation The Mvula Trust Policies & Sector Challenges

A Selection of stories from the

IRC Lessons Learnt Project

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**The Mvula Trust
The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry
IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre**

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HIV/Aids epidemic threatens sustainability of our projects

The South African HIV/Aids epidemic is threatening The Mvula Trust's mission to improve the health and welfare of poor and disadvantaged South Africans in rural and peri-urban communities. Mvula does this by increasing their access to safe and sustainable water and sanitation services. Mvula's Project Development Facilitator Nomonde Mnkwa reflects on what can be done.

The Mvula Trust is a Non-Governmental Organisation involved in implementation of water and sanitation projects in seven of South Africa's nine provinces. But with the HIV/Aids epidemic, will The Mvula Trust be able to realise its aims?

Impact of HIV/Aids in projects sustainability

When planning for implementation of our projects we allow for a population growth of 2.5% per annum. According to the Department of Health 2000 National HIV and syphilis sero-prevalence survey of women attending public antenatal clinics in South Africa, 4.7 million of South Africans are infected with HIV, most of them being at the prime of their age. This means the population growth might not be as initially expected.

A lesson from a water project

For our water projects to be sustainable, there is a need for each and every householder to pay a monthly tariff. This monthly payment is for ongoing operation and maintenance, which ensures project's sustainability.

Nhlungwane water project lies in the jurisdiction of Umzinyathi Regional Council in KwaZulu-Natal and was implemented by The Mvula Trust. In a research conducted in 2000 on community-based operation and maintenance strategies, the participants revealed that there were more deaths amongst people of young and middle adulthood. These people happened to be breadwinners in their families. This does not threaten only the sustainability of The Mvula Trust implemented projects, but the South African economy as well. There are large sums of money that are being ploughed to community development. The question is what can be done to make sure that the HIV/Aids epidemic is controlled so that efforts of developing South African rural and peri-urban communities are meeting their planned objectives.

A lesson from a sanitation project

Siyazama sanitation project lies in the jurisdiction of Indlovu Regional Council in KwaZulu-Natal. It is being implemented by The Mvula Trust who trained the project's community health workers, to further on the community's health and hygiene awareness through household's visits. These community health workers now take care of HIV/Aids patients in the community. The Department of Health provides support in terms of information and compensation to these community health workers.

Mvula's proactive role

Poor sanitation raises particular risks for people with Aids as their weakened immune systems are less resistant to bacteria, infections and disease. This makes poor hygiene and sanitation one of the leading causes of the progression of asymptomatic HIV to Aids. The HIV/Aids epidemic is increasing the need to provide sanitation and improve hygiene practices. There is a risk for HIV positive mothers to breastfeed. This risk increases the use of formula feed which increases the impact of poor sanitation and hygiene. Safe disposal of medical waste is imperative to prevent further exposure to the virus.

The HIV/Aids epidemic is making the need to provide sanitation, improve hygiene practices and the need for sound sanitation for HIV/Aids management more urgent.

The Mvula Trust has somehow started to incorporate HIV/Aids awareness to its work. However, this is still not enough, and everyone needs to make sure that the gospel goes on. Bolu Onabolu, The Mvula

Trust's Health Manager in East London regional office, says that in some of the surveys they have conducted they have established that people are not very aware of the transmission routes of HIV. This alone means there is a great challenge, especially for field workers to put more emphasis on HIV/Aids awareness. The Mvula Trust is a leading organisation in using participatory methodologies such as the 'Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation' (PHAST). In creating awareness about HIV/Aids, readily available resources such as the PHAST tools have to be utilised. Talking to Shadrack Dau, the Assistant PHAST Manager at The Mvula Trust, he shared information on a workshop held by The Mvula Trust and the Health Systems Trust, to create awareness on HIV/Aids. A PHAST tool called family dynamics (silhouettes) has been used during these workshops. The report of this workshop can be obtained from Shadrack Dau at Mvula Trust Head Office in Braamfontein.

Integrated approach

In trying to address HIV/Aids we might not realise how deeply people are being affected emotionally and economically. There are people infected by the virus and people affected because their families/friends are infected. If we integrate our work with that of the Department of Welfare and the Department of Health, we will make a great impact. This will mean that there will be counseling available to all community members that are affected, and community members that are infected. The Department of Welfare can provide social workers whilst the Department of Health can provide HIV/Aids counselors.

In order to provide sustainable development we have to incorporate HIV/Aids work, and integrate efforts with government departments and non-governmental organisations. Hopefully we can therefor be proud of our involvement in bringing health and welfare improvement in lives of poor and disadvantaged rural and peri-urban communities of South Africa. Mvula Trust cannot afford to ignore this opportunity to be part of the team that has brought about change in this country.

Nomonde Mnukwa, 2001

Will “free water” really flow freely?

The free water policy presents many challenges to the sector. Bethuel Netshiswinzhe highlights some of the harsh realities and questions facing implementation at local level.

Poor cost recovery remains a threat to the sustainability of many South African rural water schemes. Nevertheless, the government moved ahead in November 2000 to introduce a free basic water policy of 6 kiloliter for a household each month. Over the past three years we have witnessed a number of projects which collapsed because people didn't pay for the service. Many of those that continued to function only did so because the government subsidised their operation and maintenance. The irony of the situation is that there are cases where cost recovery collapsed because local councillors interfered politically by promising people that the government would provide free water. At the time this was against the government's position of cost recovery for services. It appears that those local politicians knew what was coming. Now that the ball is in their court, are municipalities ready to implement free water? Can the councillors deliver on their promises?

The kick-off date for implementation of free water is July 2001. But many of the municipalities, especially those in rural areas, will not be ready. The situation is further complicated because there isn't a clear implementation strategy. The national Department of Water Affairs is still busy working out the details of the strategy, and they will soon be on a road show to workshop municipalities on the strategy, and to obtain additional input from various role-players.

How will free water be managed at a local level?

In rural areas most water schemes are communal standpipes, with no metres for measuring water use. To implement the free water policy of 6kl a household each month, consumption will have to be monitored so that those who consume more, and are able to pay, can do so. It will not help much to install metres in these communal taps and will take between two to three years implement. So how do we monitor consumption per household where four or six households collect water from one tap? Should we replace communal taps with yard connections? If yard connections are put in place, the very same poor people who aren't paying for their water now will consume more water.

Consumption levels in communal taps is generally bellow 25 litres per capita. This is largely because people still have to walk to collect water. This will not be the case when they have water they can draw in the yard. Who will pay for that extra water consumption of water?

The pre-paid cards have also been suggested as an option to address this problem. However, the pre-paid system comes with its own problems. It is very expensive. And when people get frustrated with the system, vandalism is the order of the day

Who pays for the “free water”?

Free water will not come free of charge. Possible funding sources have been mentioned. These include the equitable share and cross subsidies. There are problems with these sources. Equitable share is meant to provide for a range of basic services - water is just one of them. At the moment local governments can decide for themselves about how they use their equitable share. And with cross subsidies it will very difficult, if not impossible, to implement free water in poor small rural municipalities with no economic activities. How will the policy be sustained on a short to long term basis? Who will pay for operation and maintenance (O&M) in schemes where people stopped paying when the free water policy announcement was made? Are there any short term measures in place to manage the government policy transition phase, from emphasis on cost recovery to free water?

How will we encourage community ownership?

The legislative framework requires local governments to function in a developmental way. This means they have to implement development programmes in a way that allows local people, and all other

relevant stakeholders, to actively participate in identifying their problems, planning and implementation of appropriate action. The precedent set here by national government is a top down approach. How can we now expect local governments to implement free water in a developmental way? How do we ensure that users take responsibility of their water systems, to guard against water wastage and vandalism? How do we implement the policy in a way that will not compromise key development principles?

Experience all over world has taught us that development cannot be handed out. It is an internal process of change where people take responsibility for improving their living conditions. The government and other external agencies can only play a facilitative role.

What about the backlog?

The challenges of making free water a reality are going to preoccupy the sector for some time to come. Are we not turning our back on over eight million rural poor people who are still without any access to clean water? To them the promise of free water does not mean anything at all. They still walk long distances to collect unsafe water.

What short term measures are being entertained by national government and municipalities to meet the needs of these people? To these people, the free water will only benefit big city dwellers, where cross subsidisation is simple to implement.

Since the government's free water policy announcement, things will never be the same in the water and sanitation sector in South Africa. If we fail to implement the free water policy, it will be very difficult to reverse the situation, and the government would have committed a development suicide. How will we manage to ensure that there is community ownership and responsibility within the context of giving handouts?

Bethuel Netshiswinzhe, 2000

At least many got a drop

If the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (Dwaf) were a person, I'd pat her on the back. I have walked a few miles in Dwaf's moccasins since South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, and believe me I have good reasons to applaud them.

Dwaf's main function is to ensure that the objectives of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) are met. To ensure that this does happen, the directorate of community water supply and sanitation was established in 1994 to promote water supply and sanitation provision. By 1994 the White Paper on Water Supply and Sanitation estimated that about 12 million people did not have access to adequate supply of portable water, and nearly 21 million lacked basic sanitation.

Today the picture is different. As Bethuel Netshiswinzhe, the policy director of The Mvula Trust, puts it, *"about six million rural people have been provided with clean water and improved sanitation in the last six years"*. Further reflecting on Dwaf's policy, Bethuel believes that this has been the most challenging task, and it did not go without problems. He argues that many of these problems were largely because of poor application of the policies by officials.

The department's community water supply and sanitation directorate established the community development section, in which I was involved as a community development officer. Our main function was to ensure community participation in development. At this time, this approach was unusual.

The White Paper on Water Supply and Sanitation of 1994 was the first in a number of policies the department produced in subsequent months. These policies created more challenges for us. The noticeable challenge in this regard was policy on basic service provision that defines the basic water supply as 25 liters per person per day, and a maximum walking distance of 200 meters. This level of service was not appropriate to ensure effective cost recovery. As Bethuel argues, *"to date we can say the sector has failed to explore ways and means of providing a mixed level of service for some people who can afford it."* He believes that the sector has still to find ways to narrow the gaps that exist between policy and practice.

The department works in partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGO) like The Mvula Trust, which is a national organisation. It is known as the largest implementing agent in rural water and sanitation services. The Mvula Trust has made considerable strides in ensuring that Dwaf's mission is realised.

Recently, Dwaf introduced the free basic water policy. Many people within and outside the sector felt that this was crazy and undoable. However Martin Rall of Mvula Trust believes that South Africa is rich enough to implement this. He said that other medium income countries like South Africa have been able to do it. Whilst admitting that this is a complex issue, he argues that it can be implemented sooner in cities than in rural areas.

According to The Mvula Trust, the challenge now is to develop new strategies and support mechanisms to enable local government to implement this policy. Mvula Trust has already engaged local municipalities to answer questions ranging from financing the free basic water, development of institutional arrangements, to the choice of technical and service level options.

By and large, policy review processes are taking place in the department and in The Mvula Trust. It is a matter of time before local authorities will be in a position to take over the management of water service

provision, and the department may concentrate on a more regulatory process. It is the aim and a legal requirement to ensure that local municipalities take charge of service provision.

Moses Makhweyane, June 2001

Bonus incentive: is the policy working?

The Mvula Trust is one of South Africa's largest non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in water supply and sanitation. From time to time The Mvula Trust awards bonus incentives to deserving communities after their project has been implemented. The Trust's Northern Province project manager Moses Makhweyane takes a look at how the bonus incentive policy works, and whether it makes a difference.

The Mvula Trust awards an incentive to a community after conducting a vigorous evaluation on the scheme, and when the results are in line with the Trust's criteria. Top on the criteria list is that the community should have been able to operate and maintain the scheme for more than six months without external support. The scheme must be in a good and sustainable condition.

Not all The Mvula Trust water projects qualify for the incentive. But a selected few stand a chance to receive the award. The bonus incentive equals 5% of the total capital budget for that specific water project, which could be between R5 000 and R 50 000. The purpose of the incentive is to encourage communities to strengthen their locally based operation and maintenance management to achieve sustainability of the project.

Mohlabaneng, a village in the Northern Province, is one of the water projects The Mvula Trust funded and implemented. In February 2001, The Trust awarded the project a bonus incentive of R30 000. Mr. Brown Monaiwa, chairperson of the Mohlabaneng Village Water Committee, supports the bonus incentive policy. Of it he said, "The Mvula Trust must keep this policy since it encourages communities to take care of their schemes, including those that did not benefit from The Mvula Trust. "When asked about the possibility of the committee neglecting the scheme after receiving the award, he said there was no chance of that. "The community has developed and adopted the habit of looking well after their scheme. I do not see an event where they'll reverse the situation."

Monaiwa said that his village will benefit a lot from this award. "As first priority," he said, "we would like to install gate valves that were previously not installed as part of the project. We shall then move on to install a few stand pipes. The balance shall be kept in the bank for future operation and maintenance emergencies."

Kurante, Sebela, Tisane, Magukubu, Mankotsana, Ga-phago and Mohlajeng are amongst the Northern Province water projects that were previously awarded the bonus incentive. On average up to three or so villages per year are awarded the bonus incentive. Experience reveals that communities who are aware that they may receive an incentive tend to work harder to improve their operation and maintenance management.

The result is a handful of sustainable community managed projects. The Mvula Trust has always advocated for community management under the backdrop that previously there were few or no municipalities at all in most rural communities to manage water schemes. Even under the current municipalities, operation and maintenance of schemes remains a complex issue that will take some years for them to begin to manage efficiently and effectively.

Valentine Nkoana, a programme manager in Mvula Trust's Northern Province office, agrees that bonus incentives have worked well in encouraging community-based management. She added that: "The Mvula Trust must always try to make an in depth investigation of the communities to be awarded so that gaps are identified and responded to properly."

Nkoana says the community based management concept should be seen as a resource, because it makes use of local resources, like labour, knowledge and expertise. This, she says, makes the project cost efficient. She says that some people within the sector do not believe in community-based management - they continue to see this an arrangement meant for the rural poor. But she argues that The Mvula Trust must engage all in the country to make them realize how community management can benefit the country as a whole. Decentralised management of schemes has proved to be effective and efficient, both here in South Africa and internationally.

Moses Makhweyane, May 2001