



Development facilitation for potable water

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The provision of water to the majority of South Africa has always been at the discretion of the government without any say whatsoever by the beneficiary communities. This anomaly has led many communities to be without access to this essential commodity. The reasons were more political than socio-economical. The present democratically elected government has gone a long way to reverse this deprivation of potable water to the majority of the people of this country. This has been done through the introduction of progressive policies, legislation and procedures. This paper is intended to discuss practical strategies of maximizing the benefits of such policies to the beneficiary communities through development facilitation. The Eastern Cape water programme by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) in partnership with the Independent Development Trust (IDT) will be used as a reference.

Basic needs approach to water provision

The basic needs approach requires an intervention by the state in the creation of access to essential services. These services include potable water, employment, sanitation, health, education, security, food and others. The provision of these services by the state on the other hand, depends on the resources of the country and the economic policies that are followed by the government. A country whose policies are not geared towards sustainable growth and development often fails to afford these services. By the same token, a country that has poor social welfare programmes (even if it has high levels of growth) is found to lack in the provision of basic needs.

The economic policies of South Africa are characterised by growth and social welfare. These are pronounced in the Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) and Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) documents. These policies are, however, only enabling mechanisms but cannot deliver and create capacity at the community level. It is therefore essential to have a community facilitation mechanism that will ensure the creation of absorption capacity in the communities.

Facilitation of institutional capacity for water provision and management

Although water is a basic need, it is regrettably a scarce resource in most areas of South Africa. This reality requires that the provision and the management of water at community level be handled in a manner that will ensure

commitment to its economic utilization as well as meeting the cost thereof. This process requires serious debates and agreements with all the sections of the communities. These consultations should result in micro policies and procedures being formulated in order to ensure effective provision and management of water. The latter process is usually time consuming and conflicting with traditional bureaucratic procedures of the government. During the process, the communities are also agitated and expectations turned into confrontation.

The water programme of DWAF and the IDT in the Eastern Cape is targeting about 85 000 people who have got no access to potable water. These two institutions are each intending to ensure that the access is created within the broader context of the RDP. This process requires intensive community involvement and control and this can only occur through institutional capacity building and empowerment. This role has been given to the IDT whilst DWAF is expected to provide policy guidelines and resources. The role of facilitation has been to ensure that the community needs and DWAF's policies and resource allocation are merged in an equitable manner. This has not been an easy process because each party tended to want to dominate the other resulting in tensions and a threat to the programme.

The problems experienced were characterised by:

- unhealthy power balances within communities resulting in difficulties in establishing representative structures;
- bureaucratic inflexibilities and lack of understanding of the current progressive approaches to development;
- poor and sometimes non-existent local government structures;
- lack of integrated approach to development within most communities; and
- lack of financial institutions within reach of the targeted communities thereby making the control of financial resources an impossible task.

Conclusions and policy proposals

The provision of potable water to communities is a broad process that requires the co-ordination of needs, resources and institutional framework. This co-ordination needs to be underpinned by effective facilitation. The process is often time consuming and depends on the level of development of the communities and their institutions. Its success should be judged according to how equitable the power

balances turn out to be as well as the socio-economic, political and environmental sustainability.

It is worth noting that community driven development is a new experience in South Africa and its success will be determined by how the relationships within resource institutions and communities are managed. In the case of the Eastern Cape DWAF and IDT joint programme, the signs are that there could be positive outcomes.

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