

Partnerships: Community management and local government

Julia Cain and Phillip Ravenscroft, South Africa

Management arrangements for rural water supply in South Africa are rapidly evolving. Recent legislation and emerging government policies are providing an innovative framework in which institutional arrangements for water services can be developed. In the context of rural areas in the former Transkei bantustan, new working relationships are being developed between evolving structures of local government and community-based organisations.

This paper focuses on developments in the Eastern Cape Province in an area where the institutional framework has been interpreted with an emphasis on community management. The roles of the various stakeholders are discussed, and the successes and challenges to these arrangements are also reviewed.

This paper is based on a research project, "Case Study of Management System for Rural Water Supply: Matatiele District" funded by the Water Research Commission (South Africa) in 1998.

Context of providing water services

Water Services Act

At the end of 1997, the government of South Africa passed an important piece of legislation for community water supply. The Water Services Act (Act No. 108, 1997) deals with the way water services are to be provided. Most notably it provides for the following:

- The identification of a Water Services Authority which has the statutory responsibility to ensure that water services are provided. Typically this would be the local government in an area.
- The identification of a Water Services Provider which is the body actually responsible for providing the service. It is particularly notable that the Act provides for the option where a water committee can be a water services provider.
- The requirement of a Water Services Development Plan to be prepared by the water services authority, which describes the arrangements for water service provision both present and future.

Local government

In the context of the rural areas of South Africa, the executive level of local government consists of District Councils. The membership of District Councils is made up of representatives from each of the various Transitional Representative Councils (TRCs) that fall within their juris-

dition. TRCs are a non-executive level of local government elected directly by their constituents. This research project was based in the magisterial district of Matatiele, which has its own TRC. In turn, this TRC is one of the 9 TRCs that constitute the Wild Coast District Council, which covers a large section of the Province of the Eastern Cape and has over 2 million people. The Wild Coast District Council is entirely located within the area of the former Transkei.

The financial burden of providing water services

The national Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) currently provides an annual subsidy of approximately R500 million (\$US 83.3 million) to approximately 600 water schemes primarily in the former homeland areas. Cost recovery on these schemes is less than 1% (Muller and Palmer, 1999). The DWAF is in effect acting as the water services provider on these schemes to customers who largely do not pay for services.

These water supply schemes must soon be transferred to local government in accordance with its designated constitutional responsibility for services. In the Eastern Cape, a province that is largely constituted of the 2 former bantustans of Transkei and Ciskei, there is an historic lack of management capacity. In order for local government in these areas to meet its obligations for ensuring water services to its constituents, and to improve upon the current financial burden of providing these services, decentralised management arrangements are being explored. One of these options includes the support and development of community-based organisations such as water committees to take on the day-to-day responsibilities and local control of providing water services.

The process

In order to develop appropriate management arrangements that would be supported by both local role-players and project beneficiaries ('customers') while meeting the requirements of the Water Services Act, various forms of consultation were undertaken in the case study area. These activities included the following:

- a series of workshops bringing all stakeholders together to discuss management arrangements;
- participatory workshops with village water committees;
- interviews with relevant governmental and non-governmental structures and organisations;

- a comprehensive programme of community household surveys.

Critical to the process of developing ‘buy-in’ by both local government and community-based stakeholders was managing the tensions and different interests of various groups. Local government in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape is generally lacking in experience and capacity yet is determined to exert its constitutional rights and powers. It is also quite justifiably concerned with generating income for itself. At the same time, many of the water committees in the case study area have been operating and maintaining their community water supply projects on an ad hoc basis themselves for several years and are fiercely independent in nature. Furthermore, members of water committees are often suspicious of local government and its ability to deliver services, and are frequently more aligned with tribal authorities. Added to this, community members do not support any payments they make for water services leaving their communities i.e. going to local government. In response to this situation, the Water Services Act provides a framework that is both flexible and quite innovative and which allowed management arrangements for the rural water projects in the case study area to be negotiated to the general satisfaction of all stakeholders.

The basic institutional model

As part of the case study, 3 different institutional models were developed to suit the different types of rural schemes in the area. These types included small stand-alone schemes; group schemes with pre-paid reticulation systems; and group schemes without the pre-paid system. It should be noted that none of the group schemes considered were large complex regional schemes, but rather schemes serving up to 20,000 people from gravity-fed weirs.

The following model illustrates the basic institutional model that was developed.

The roles and responsibilities of these structures are summarised below.

Executive Level of Local Government (Water Services Authority):

- To choose and appoint the water services providers for each water supply scheme
- To set up the contractual agreements between itself and its appointed water services providers (with assistance by the support organisation(s))
- To ensure that all appointed water services providers continue to provide sustainable water services
- To coordinate and plan all future water services development in its district
- To develop an information database related to water services and supply which could be accessed by water services providers
- To disseminate information about local government and its services
- To provide technical and management support or, to ensure support is provided by designated support organisations, to community-based water services providers
- To provide finance (through central government transfer payments) for support services to community-based water services providers.
- To financially assist water services providers and communities in the case of high cost repairs, emergencies or replacement situations as required.

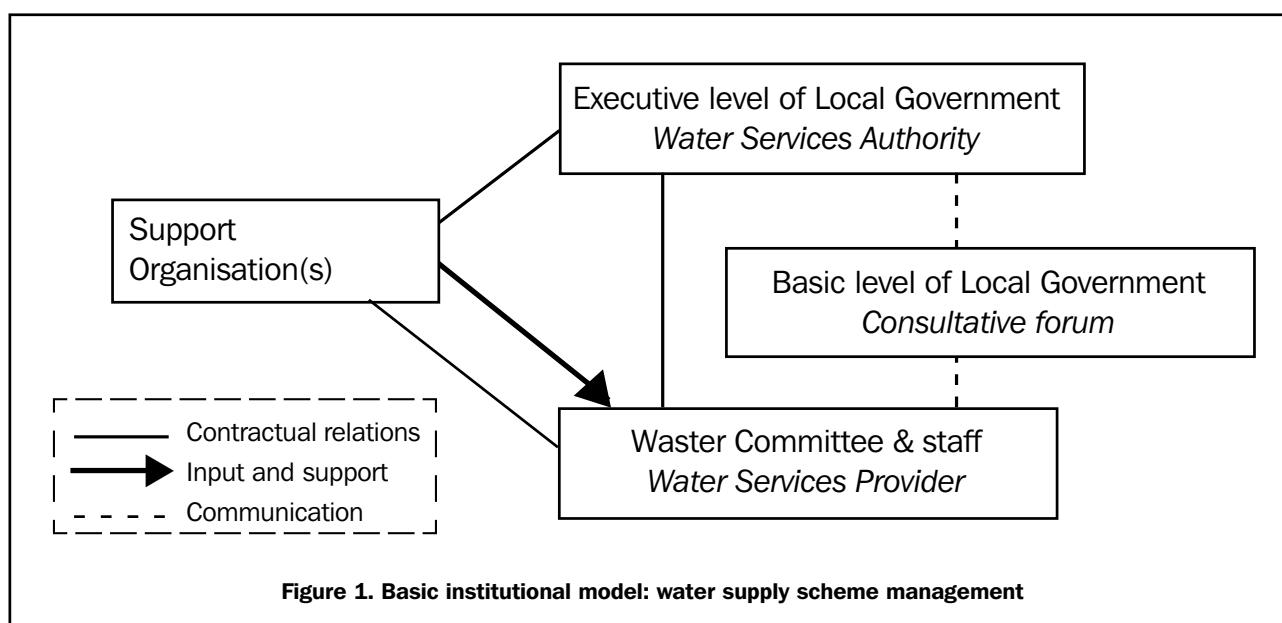


Figure 1. Basic institutional model: water supply scheme management

Basic Level of Local Government (consultative forum):

- To act as a link between the water services authority and the water services provider
- To monitor water services providers and to monitor customer satisfaction with the water services providers
- To provide a ‘voice of authority’ from government within communities, particularly on issues of payment for services to water services providers
- To facilitate a forum that meets regularly for all involved in water services

Water Committees (Water Services Providers):

- To employ and pay staff to do the daily work of the project
- To ensure that the daily, weekly and monthly operation and maintenance activities required on projects are carried out
- To ensure that repairs are carried out as necessary
- To ensure that effective collection systems are in place
- To enforce policies on non-payment
- To ensure that accountable books, records and receipts are kept
- To have the books audited by an external structure
- To report as required by the water services provider agreement
- To be accountable to the water services authority.
- To contract out to external contractors for specialised repairs as required
- To contract support organisations
- To attend and participate in the district water services forum

Support organisations

The research consistently identified the need for external mentorship and support to community-based water services providers. Support organisations are therefore defined as those organisations that would provide technical, management, financial, and administrative assistance to water projects in the operations and maintenance phase on behalf of the water service authority. Support organisations would normally be NGOs or private companies with the relevant capacity i.e. technical and/or management support capacity. It should be noted that support to community-based water services providers is a responsibility of local government, but in the case of district councils lacking capacity, it is a function most suitably contracted out as a public – private partnership.

Bulk services providers

An additional structure in the case of group schemes would be bulk services providers. In terms of the types of rural water supply projects considered, bulk services providers would be organisations that would be responsible for a physical scheme from source to storage. Bulk services providers would thus sell bulk water to village-based water services providers.

Water services forum

The Water Services Forum would serve as a vehicle for bringing together local stakeholders involved in rural water supply. Participation in the forum would include those organisations in the district involved as water services providers, bulk services providers and support organisations. Local government at the basic level would facilitate the forum. This forum would enable this level of local government to play an active and informed role in water services provision and thus develop an important communication and monitoring link between rural water projects and the water services authority. The forum would also enable horizontal networking between different community-based water services providers and would promote communication around water services provision in the rural areas of the district.

Challenges and successes

The Wild Coast District Council is currently busy developing its water services development plan and has thus not yet started implementing new management arrangements for water services. It is significant, however, that the Council is incorporating the model of community-based water services providers into its plan based largely on the findings of this research.

The challenges to implementing this institutional framework relate primarily to the ability of local government structures such as the Wild Coast District Council to take up their responsibilities as a water services authority. The management and development of contracts with community-based water services providers poses a challenging task. There is always the fear that even with a good framework nothing will be done and the current ad hoc situation will continue indefinitely. Adequate provision of resources and support to local government will be critical to the long-term success of water services under this model. This in turn relies heavily on transfer payments and grant funding from the national fiscus to local government, which is itself currently under development.

On the side of potential success, the model offers a cost effective and appropriate framework for managing water services in rural areas. It formalises the important role that community management has played, and continues to play, in local development. In turn, the roles and functions of community-based organisations are recognised and institutionalised in relation to local government, which must remain, ultimately, responsible.

CAIN, J., RAVENSCROFT, P., PALMER, I., *Case Study Of Management System For Rural Water Supply: Matatiele District*, Water Research Commission (South Africa), 1999.

MULLER, H., PALMER, I., *The Operating and Maintenance Subsidy Burden*, Appropriate Practice Conference, South Africa, 1999.

JULIA CAIN, Director, Mattcomm Training & Communication Services, PO Box 1701, Matatiele, South Africa 4730

PHILLIP RAVENSCROFT, Director, Maluti Water & Community Engineering Services, PO Box 1469, Matatiele, South Africa 4730
