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# BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE WATER SYSTEM

Retail Water Distribution Project in South Africa

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# BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE WATER SYSTEM

## Retail Water Distribution Project in South Africa

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## **SUMMARY OF RWDP ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **SERVICES ENHANCED**

- Water supply increased from 50 percent availability to about 85 percent in 22 pilot villages.
- Water access re-established in 2,500 households in Dwarsloop.
- Water access affecting 1,000 households and the public water supply system in Thulamahashe re-established.
- R9 million leveraged to refurbish infrastructure in all village water schemes.

### **MUNICIPAL SERVICES REVENUE COLLECTED**

- R700,000 in FY 2002/03
- R2 million in FY 2003/04
- R18 million in FY 2004/05 (through Dec. 04)

### **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES DEVELOPED**

- New water and sanitation by-laws
- Credit control and debt collection by-laws and policies
- Water services tariff policy
- Free basic water policy
- Water Services Provider (WSP) model
- Water service development plan
- New residential tariff structure
- Operating procedures for 157 village water systems
- Customer outreach, education, and communication strategies

### **INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING PROVIDED**

- Water services and commercial managers recruited.
- 350 operators trained in new operating procedures.
- 400 ward committee members trained in water management and conservation.
- 40 councillors and officials trained on legislative roles and responsibilities.
- Training provided on water and sanitation by-laws to 43 wards comprising 157 villages.
- Community members trained in the operation of valves at reservoirs.
- 25 revenue clerks trained in basic computer skills.

# BACKGROUND

South Africa's Bushbuckridge region, an area of formerly segregated settlements within Eastern Transvaal province, remains unevenly developed. Under apartheid, areas with high economic potential such as Hazyview, White River, and their surrounding areas were classified as for whites only. For traditional ethnic groups, increasing the potential of homeland areas such as Lebowa, Gazankula, and Kangwane has meant extracting the most out of limited resources.

After free elections in 1994, the status of the area changed. Previous administrative boundaries were redrawn — often with the intent of erasing reference to those imposed under apartheid. Local government became embodied in Transitional Local Councils and Transitional Rural Councils. Successive mergers and subdivisions led to three local councils that fell under the newly established Northern Province. These included Bushbuckridge North, Midlands, and South. While such changes greatly aided in reforming local government administration, it was understood that the local

and rural councils and the new demarcations would be temporary — until such time as a more thoughtful approach to the organization of local government could be undertaken.

In 1994, and also as part of the transition process, the national Department of Water Affairs and Forestry acquired temporary responsibility for the provision of water services in areas that had previously been designated as homelands. This responsibility was meant to devolve to local government to improve efficiency and accountability. It also meant that living on the left side of the street instead of the right side might have been the difference between having running water in your house or having to fetch it at the local pump.

For years, water services in Bushbuckridge were erratic at best, non-existent at worst. Residents in parts of the small town of Thulamahashe, for example, went two years without water. In Dwarsloop, only about half of 2,500 households were receiving water, and only on certain days and during specified hours.

In 1997, the government passed the Water Service Act, which gave all residents the right to have access to basic water supply and sanitation. The act transferred control of water services from the national government to local governments. But many of the local authorities inherited an infrastructure that did not work properly, and they lacked the expertise to recover costs and put in place financial systems that would ensure continuing service. In addition, more than 10 years after apartheid ended, many groups continue to suffer from the fallout of institutional discrimination. Selective resource allocation during apartheid and poor water management led to the spread of water-borne disease, which contributed to high

infant and child mortality rates and lower educational attainment.

Today, as a result of USAID's Retail Water Distribution Project (RWDP), water is flowing freely in Thulamahashe, Dwarssloop, and in other towns and villages in Bushbuckridge, an area with some 140 communities and about 800,000 people.

Bushbuckridge and the neighboring local municipality of Maruleng make up the Bohlabela district municipality, the target area of USAID's four-and-a-half year project that ended on March 31, 2005.

The \$2.954 million project helped former homelands assume responsibility for water services provision, a function previously handled at the national level.

**For years, water services in Bushbuckridge and Maruleng were erratic at best.**

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Operationally, this consisted of assisting in setting up the Water Services Authority (WSA), which now has legal responsibility for ensuring access to water services and overseeing local regulation. Establishing WSA meant devolving local authority from the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry to allow the Ministry to concentrate on regulation.

The RWDP was divided into six task areas all aimed at assisting local government efforts to act as the responsible Water Services Authority and supporting their initiatives to respond to the new law by creating linkages between

the WSPs and existing community-based organizations engaged in providing water services.

These six task areas are:

- Policy, planning, and the transfer process
- Management systems development
- Customer outreach and education
- Customer service, billing, and collection
- Operation and maintenance
- Institutional learning and staff development

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#### **RETAIL WATER DISTRIBUTION PROJECT GOVERNMENT AGENCY PARTNERS**

- National, regional, district, and local offices of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF)
- Limpopo Provincial Department of Local Government and Housing
- South African Local Government Association (SALGA)
- Bohlabela District Municipality Water Services Authority (WSA)
- Bushbuckridge Local Municipality
- Bushbuckridge Water Board
- Maruleng Local Municipality



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# POLICY, PLANNING, AND TRANSFER PROCESS

With the assistance of RWDP, a set of policies have for the first time given municipalities control and regulatory mechanisms to ensure sustainable water services provision. A system that was previously ad hoc and discriminatory now has codified regulations and procedures that will ensure water is available more than 90 percent of the time (in places where the system is fully functioning).

These policies include:

- Water and sanitation by-laws
- Free basic water and sanitation policy
- Water tariff policy
- Credit control and debt collection policy
- Credit control and debt collection by-laws

From the outset, technical assistance provided by RWDP staff was driven by the belief that collaboration and the transfer of skills were essential to building

the capacity of local counterparts to implement and maintain a viable cost recovery system in each municipality. In terms of policy work, RWDP set up task teams of counterpart staff from finance and technical departments of local and district municipalities. Each team formulated these policies under the guidance of the specialist from the project. They then reviewed the documents at drafting stages to ensure that the final product suited the local needs. Final drafts were then submitted to councils for adoption through the municipal manager.

This approach was also used when dealing with the transfer of assets and staff from DWAF. A task team that comprised all affected actors in the area was set up and was assisted by the project specialists. This team dealt with all technical matters on transfers and reported to a coordinating committee that comprised representatives of all municipalities,

DWAF, the Bushbuckridge Water Board, and councillors. The committee was responsible for providing policy direction to the task team. This approach was so successful that Mopani and Sekhukhune District Municipalities copied this model. Bohlabela is now the leading district in Limpopo Province in terms of devolving water management responsibility from DWAF.

Although the transfer of responsibility for water provision started in 2001, it was delayed by the lack of an approved National Transfer Policy combined with a lack of established human resource policies in the Bohlabela District. Personnel issues were identified as the critical items. The National Transfer Policy was approved in September 2003, while Bohlabela approved their human resource policies in August 2004. Consequently, the original target date for transfer of July 2004 was revised to July 2005. By March 31, 2005, Bohlabela had signed the transfer agreement and is waiting for DWAF to sign as well.

Despite this delay, one of the key successes of the transfer process in Bohlabela has been RWDP's ability to influence the newly approved National Transfer Policy. The lessons learned from the transfer delay later became policy statements through the submissions that the District made to SALGA and DWAF. Some of the key lessons learned

were that the infrastructure was in such a poor state that it could not be transferred in its current condition. The issues related to transferring personnel required delicate negotiation, a clear policy on staff transfer, and a recognition that after the transfer some municipalities would still require monetary assistance to ensure staff success in their new positions.

### **BASELINE ASSESSMENTS**

Once the legislation passed, it was important to determine the capability of the municipalities to implement the new laws. Municipal officials heading relevant departments completed questionnaires that were analyzed, and baseline assessments were compiled. Because this happened soon after many of the new municipalities were established, local officials advised the RWDP team to start from a base of zero.

### **WATER SERVICES PROVIDER MODELS**

Given the history of South Africa, the concept of local governance was not clearly understood by many people. As a result, it was critical for the newly developed institutions to quickly familiarize themselves with the concept of local governance and the running of municipalities. This was done through information workshops that were arranged based on the identified need of municipal officials. Through these workshops

that explained the new laws and the roles and responsibilities that emanate from them, municipal officials and councillors quickly grasped a deeper, more meaningful understanding that they are the service delivery arm of government. Now most of the trainees can clearly articulate water service issues, something many attribute to the information they learned at the workshop in July 2001.

Another type of workshop that was based on the participative approach was training in the various applicable WSP models. Local counterparts would identify a training need that served as the basis of a workshop designed by a team of RWDP experts and local counterparts. Independent of policies and regulations, these workshops focused on technical maintenance and other basic components of providing retail

water services. A measure of the workshops' success was the appreciation local DWAF officials expressed for being included in shaping the training process.

The workshops looked at the various applicable WSP models, given the municipalities' individual political circumstances and socio-economic realities. Through these workshops, both local municipalities and the WSA realized that they needed to work together if they were to succeed in providing water services, and RWDP facilitated partnership arrangements between local municipalities and the WSA, which was acting as the WSP in both Bushbuckridge and Maruleng municipalities. This collaborative approach has proven successful even in dealing with operational problems. The challenge to this approach has been to ensure that it is sustainable.

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## **STARTING FROM SCRATCH**

At his initial meeting with Bohlabela Executive Mayor Caswell Maluleke and other officials, Chief of Party Robert Mbwana presented a one-page agenda to guide the conversation. Maluleke took one look at it and told Mbwana to start the project on the basis that the councillors and officials did not understand their roles and responsibilities in terms of the legislation. Four years after starting from scratch, Maluleke and his colleagues are now considered leaders in water services provision by their counterparts across Limpopo Province.

Once this institutional and technical knowledge was transferred, RWDP assisted the WSA in drafting memoranda of understanding with local municipalities, the Bushbuckridge Water Board, and DWAF that assured that the local WSPs would be accountable to the WSA. By signing these agreements, the municipalities were pledging to ensure water supply, revenue collection, and infrastructure repair. As a result, water availability in the 43 or so villages in Bushbuckridge where RWDP was active, increased from three days a week to six. In Maruleng, approximately 20 of the municipality's 24 villages have experienced an improvement in their water supply.

### **ASSISTANCE IN DRAFTING WATER SERVICES DEVELOPMENT PLANS**

By utilizing the same model of setting up task teams, the project initiated a process to help Bohlabela draft its water services development plan. Adoption of such a plan was a prerequisite to receive national government funding, so RWDP leveraged the resources of the European Union's Masibambane project to provide as much technical assistance as possible to the district. A province-wide review of the plans indicated that Bohlabela's plan was among the most well-thought-out in terms of content and fulfilling the legal requirements and planning needs of the district.



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**RWDP technical assistance included helping to establish regional offices for bill-paying services.**

### **LIAISONS WITH GOVERNMENT ENTITIES AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS**

The structures that were set up through RWDP's efforts have ensured efficient interaction among key stakeholders. SALGA, DWAF, and most importantly local community establishments — particularly in communities where the project was carrying out specific activities have influenced policy formulation at higher levels and further assisted in focusing service delivery in communities where it is needed most.

When the by-laws were drafted, Bohlabela Executive Mayor Caswell Maluleke made it clear

that he did not want to sit back and wait for public comment. So with the assistance of the RWDP team, he and his staff held town meetings in all 43 of the district's wards, where he solicited input from the public in their own communities. Rather than rejecting the new by-laws, the communities generally embraced them. At one such meeting, the R2,500 fine that was being suggested for anyone illegally connecting to the municipal water system was rejected as too small. To really discourage illegal connections, Maluleke was told the fine should be increased to R10,000. These sentiments were particularly strong in the villages where illegal connections are rife.



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# MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT

Over the course of the project, efforts to implement a suitable management structure were hampered by the delay at the provincial level in determining whether the Water Services Authority would fall under district or local control. Because there were different organizations operating in a given area and personnel had not been transferred from DWAF to the municipal WSA, the development of management systems could not be undertaken as planned. In addition, service is still divided among separate administrative, operational, and procurement systems. A reorganization and integration of these systems is still pending. However, the project was able to assist DWAF and Bushbuckridge and Maruleng Local Municipalities in improving their own management systems.

Although institutional management of the WSA was problematic, on another level RWDP was

able to provide additional assistance. Through the European Union's Masibambane program, which provided institutional funding, the project team assisted the WSA in securing funding for a GIS-based information management system that would give local officials up-to-date information on the state of their infrastructure.

## **NSIKAZI BUSHBUCKRIDGE WATER FORUM**

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry initiated district planning forums throughout the year. Through Masibambane, RWDP assisted in making the Nsikazi Bushbuckridge forum more effective by helping the WSA avoid a lot of project duplication so that national grants were better utilized on capital projects. This forum was incorporated into a new District Area planning forum. This meant including all development needs, such as

water, health, and infrastructure, so that all the appropriate elements in the design of a health clinic, for example, would be addressed together at the earliest stages. In addition, follow-up with the WSA continued over the life of the project to ensure the sustainability of the skills that have been imparted to the WSA.

### **FINANCIAL STRATEGY FOR COST RECOVERY**

The financial strategy to establish the provision of water as a sustainable service started with the restructuring of water service tariffs. At the outset of the project, the Bushbuckridge municipality was only collecting R0.30 for every R2.50 they were

paying the Water Board for a kiloliter of water, a clearly unsustainable situation for the fledgling administrations. The project restructured this tariff to an average of R2.65 per kiloliter.

In collaboration with the Bushbuckridge local municipality, RWDP initiated the registration of all business and domestic consumers residing in formal towns to assist with the billing process. A year later, approximately 330 businesses, government institutions, hospitals, schools, clinics, and district departmental offices are on the same computerized municipal billing system. The project also advised the municipality to outsource the billing and collection function to a private institution.

**The registration of domestic consumers has cut down on illegal connections.**

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**Advice on tariff restructuring is now available in 11 regional offices in Bushbuckridge.**

The value of restructuring the tariff, billing, and collection systems was not limited to just water services. RWDP assisted in setting up systems and procedures for municipal billing and debt management across the board. The numbers in the chart below indicate the revenue gains produced by the restructured systems in Bushbuckridge.

### **HUMAN RESOURCES SYSTEMS**

As part of RWDP's efforts to establish new institutional struc-

tures, it was important to ensure that the accompanying transfer of staff from DWAF to the Bohlabela local municipality was compliant with labor laws. To do this, RWDP assisted in setting up a human resource subcommittee consisting of all the relevant bodies. The subcommittee assisted in fast-tracking the development of Bohlabela human resource policies, which were adopted in October 2004.

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### **MUNICIPAL SERVICES REVENUE COLLECTED IN BUSHBUCKRIDGE**

|                              |             |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| FY 2002/03                   | R700,000    |
| FY 2003/04                   | R2 million  |
| FY 2004/05 (through Dec. 04) | R18 million |



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# CUSTOMER OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

To reach consumers with RWDP's core messages about improving water supply and reducing demand, a communications strategy was developed to help introduce new policies, improve coordination among agencies, and promote water conservation. It started with a knowledge, attitudes, and practices (KAP) study conducted in 2003. The survey of 1,513 households established a baseline of indicators that were used to monitor the development of the new water services program. Some of these indicators included the following baseline information:

- Access to water — 2.9 percent of the households had piped water inside the main dwelling and 15 percent outside the dwelling, but on their property.
- Time households spend collecting water each day — 46 percent spent more than one hour.

- Connection to sewer system — more than 85 percent of the households reported that their property was not connected to a sewer system.
- Attitude towards current water services — 96 percent of the respondents felt their household water supply could be improved.
- Quality of water — 63 percent felt that the water they are using is not clean and safe.

The KAP study found that 79 percent of the households were willing to pay for water services if it were available, reliable and safe. This dispelled one of the long existing myths that people in the rural areas were not willing to pay for water service. The study's results guided RWDP pilot initiatives to formalize illegal connections and put billing systems in the villages of Calcutta and Cork.



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**Project research dispelled the myth that people in rural areas are not willing to pay for water services.**

In an effort to regulate illegal connections, RWDP tested an approach that permitted community members to choose the type of service they would like and have a meter installed. Households learned firsthand what type of service they could expect and how much it would cost. A social consultant then arranged community meetings and made house-to-house visits to educate the community on the importance of legalizing their connections and having meters installed. Although the traditional authority in the area tried to stall the effort, the registration process and accompanying education initiative led to 5,000 households registering to have their illegal connections formalized and meters installed. This model is being adopted in other areas to ensure that the approximately 40,000 illegal connections

are legalized and the consumers are brought into the billing system.

### **OTHER OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS**

Legalizing water connections was just one example of outreach activities that were undertaken to raise public awareness about the new decentralized water services. Another was a campaign that focused on the need to stop wasting water by those who already had regular access to it. This was driven by a nationwide drought. In Bohlabela, this resulted in rivers running low and levels of water in boreholes dropping to such depths that the yield from the boreholes was greatly reduced. In 2004, this meant little water available to community members. In April of that year, in collaboration with USAID, RWDP trained council-

lors in all 43 wards on water conservation. The campaign informed the ward councillors that fixing a leaky toilet could save some 200,000 liters of water a year and that turning off the tap while brushing their teeth could save 14,000 liters per year. These messages were delivered through ward councillors and influential groups who could reach policy makers and water customers.

Approximately 400 ward committee members were trained and the response was overwhelming. Many councillors requested that the training be repeated and offered to take the messages to their wards and

communities. This education program had such an impact that ward committee members requested it be provided in all schools in the district.

Once the message got out, meters were needed to assist implementation of these reforms. Although capital funding restraints limited RWDP's ability to fund the installation of meters, Bushbuckridge obtained funding from the European Union to install about 5,000 meters in Calcutta and Cork. Toward the end of the project, RWDP was also able to use some of its funds to purchase an additional 400 meters and tanks for Calcutta and Cork.



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**House-to-house visits educated the community on the importance of legalizing connections.**



# CUSTOMER SERVICE, BILLING, AND COLLECTION

Recognizing that water services would only be sustainable if customers paid for it, great strides were made to adopt standardized rates and convince consumers of the need to pay for their water. At the same time, however, the project realized that customers expected better service for their money. To accomplish this, resources were allocated to improve service, but the project did not fully succeed in changing the mindset of officials and employees who were now being asked to provide retail customer service.

## **COST BASIS FOR FEE STRUCTURE**

The new tariff structure was based on an estimate of the total cost of providing water services in the area. This took into account the cost of bulk water services as well as operation and maintenance. It was complicated by the fact that in Bushbuckridge, a lower-income municipality,

these costs were about twice what they are in a more affluent area such as Cape Town. The cost of water services in Bushbuckridge was estimated at about R4.80 per kiloliter. This would have been a dramatic leap from a starting point of R0.3 per kiloliter, so the tariff was implemented progressively. The initial tariff averaged R2.65 per kiloliter and will be expected to reach real cost levels in five years.

## **BILLING AND COLLECTIONS PROCESS**

Bushbuckridge opened 11 regional offices as service points for the municipality. This provided the necessary accessibility for customers to make payments, however, the lack of immediate response to address service problems and inquiries is jeopardizing consumer confidence in the new system. A 24-hour response center would go a long way toward fostering this confidence.

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# OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

In an environment where personal, political, and historical conflicts play such a central role in the public service sector, standardizing procedures is a big challenge. In Dwarsloop and Thulamahashe, RWDP's coordination of activities served to ensure that organizations and individuals could put conflicts aside and focus on the task at hand. This team approach succeeded at giving the municipalities, the Bushbuckridge Water Board, DWAF, and civic organizations a voice in the operation and maintenance of local water services. To promote sustainability, RWDP advised the Bohlabela District government to recruit as a water services manager someone who did not come from the area and who would not be saddled with local political or social tensions. Unfortunately, the inability of the municipality to attract such an applicant resulted in the appointment of a compromise candidate — an ex-DWAF employee who had worked in the area for a long time. While he has brought a lot of good knowl-

edge and experience to the position, old tensions are resurfacing thereby hampering progress on the implementation of a revised water system.

Labor issues also proved to be a challenge to making progress in service delivery. RWDP attempted to address these issues with both the municipalities and DWAF officials, but structural limitations still exist. Because maintenance teams are paid for a set eight-hour day without the possibility of working in shifts or being paid for overtime, service suffers. Valves are not operated early in the morning or late at night, and response to emergencies is limited. Until the municipalities and DWAF view the water business as a 24/7 service, these problems will continue to occur.

Despite these difficulties, there have been noteworthy successes in areas where standardized operating procedures were piloted.

- Improved water supply operations to Dwarsloop

**Approximately 350 operation and maintenance staff were taught new procedures based on a needs assessment.**

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and surrounding areas provided water to approximately 2,000 households that had been without regular water access for at least three years prior.

- Improved water supply systems in Thulamahashe benefited 1,500 households as well as the town's public water supply.

## **LINKAGES AND LEVERAGING**

In May 2004, Bohlabela's newly appointed water service manager and the customer service manager visited the Sedibeng Water and Maluti a Phufong water service

providers in Harrismith. The WSA in the Eastern Cape had set up a water services provider in Harrismith that was working well across similar rural, semi-rural, and urban conditions as Bohlabela. This exposure showed the visiting team that the problems facing Bushbuckridge were not unique. The managers from all three municipalities have since begun collaborating and exchanging ideas and solutions to common challenges.

## **TRAINING IN SELECTED SCHEMES**

Once the pilot initiatives were up and running, in October

2003 RWDP identified problems that were hindering equitable distribution of water in villages and suggested standard operating procedures to ensure equitable distribution. Because such procedures varied from village to village, results also varied. Between May and December 2004, approximately 350 opera-

tion and maintenance staff from DWAF and the local municipality were taught new operating procedures based on the needs assessment from the previous year. The requests by attendees for continued training at regular intervals were testimony to the value of what they learned.



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**Improved water services have benefited more than 3,500 households in Dwarsloop and Thulamahashe.**



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# INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

To build on its successes, the WSA's management team began collaborating with RWDP to provide on-the-job training and mentoring to the DWAF staff and local officials who would be working together. The RWDP specialist team members worked with the staff to develop business and operational plans and also to advise on best practices regarding operations and maintenance of water services infrastructure.

In addition, since 2001, RWDP assisted the WSA to leverage additional resources and funding for other activities related to the development of GIS systems, the training of ward councillors, and the refurbishment of water schemes. RWDP helped prepare business plans to access funding and occasionally negotiated the funding requirements for the WSA. Through this assistance, the WSA received additional financial assistance from USAID

(R2 million for ward committee training) and DWAF (R12 million for refurbishment and R3 million for Masibambane capacity building activities).

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

The support provided by USAID through the RWDP to Bohlabela was the first of its kind in the province.

Consequently, lessons that have been learned on this project are provided here to be shared with other funding agencies as well as local and international stakeholders.

## **SELECTION PROCESS**

The RWDP staff understood that the Bohlabela District was targeted precisely because it faced considerable challenges providing water services. With this in mind, the staff thought that local officials would welcome the project.

Because the structure of the project was unclear at the outset, it was difficult to get buy in up-front. For future projects it will be important for local counterparts who are direct beneficiaries to request the assistance and to be able to justify what it wanted to achieve out of this assistance. It will also be important to obtain formal commitment from the selected authorities to maximize the benefit they receive from the project. However, local officials were already overburdened by heavy workloads and enormous demands on their time. Therefore, it was difficult for them to assume the added responsibilities the project

entailed, which often included an inordinate number of meetings and workshops called on short notice.

In addition, to have focused this considerable effort on one Water Services Authority appears in retrospect to have been unfair to the many others around the country that faced similar challenges. Future projects should seek to include a greater number of WSAs at similar stages of development. This greater participation would enable the project to offer its technical assistance to a wider audience. It would also allow the project to re-direct resources from a WSA that was

**Customers willing to pay for water expect quality service.**

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not co-operating fully with the project to those who are making full use of the project's work.

### **LOCATION OF THE PROJECT OFFICE**

In hindsight, it was wrong for the project team to be located in offices separate from the WSA. Although attempts were made to obtain office space within the WSA, this was not possible due to the WSA's own space restrictions. In the early negotiations, however, the funding agency should make the availability of adequate in-house office accommodation one of its funding conditions. It is critical that the team be perceived as part of the authority and not as an outside agency assisting it.

### **CAPABILITY OF AFRICAN STAFF**

The project team in South Africa was staffed in its entirety with African professionals, which proves that the region has professionals with the range of skills and experience necessary to carry out such projects. Continued employment of African staff on future projects will build capacity and allow international aid to achieve more with the funds available.

### **PART-TIME SPECIALISTS**

Having a core team of top part-time specialists in a range of fields allowed the project to access a wide spectrum of high-

level skills and expertise that would not have been available in full-time employees. The main project team could then access these skills necessary for the project. For such specialists to be effective, however, they should commit to regular and ongoing involvement in the project and be seen as an integral part of the team. Visiting the project offices on an occasional basis does not create this involvement. This team model was so successful that SALGA adopted it in assisting other municipalities throughout the country.

### **OTHER LOCAL EXPERTISE**

Bringing in other fields of specialization to supplement the skills already available proved challenging. Possible solutions to this would be to expand the core team to cover all possible skills required even though some may be used infrequently or to have a much more realistic system of bringing in additional specialists at rates that were not subject to low ceilings imposed by the funding agency.

### **PROJECT TIMING**

Because certain officials at WSAs are political appointees, the start of projects should coincide with the terms of those officials. Projects that operate on the local level should correspond to the local election calendar, and not overlap it.

## **INCLUSION OF LOCAL AGENCIES**

Although it is understood that agreements for the provision of international aid have to take place at a national level, it is important that the actual implementing and recipient agencies at the district and local levels are fully involved in the process and have the opportunity to provide inputs into the structuring of such funding agreements. By doing this, concerns about the appropriateness of the project and the funding arrangements can be addressed by local implementers at the early stages.

## **PROJECT DESIGN**

RWDP focused on water services as a sector of local government service. Because municipalities are faced with a much wider range of service delivery challenges, such as infrastructure and health service needs, it became apparent over the course of the project that more fundamental governance issues needed to be addressed.

Additionally, it is critical that stakeholders are involved in the project design from the outset. It is also critical for bilateral partners to share a common

vision and expectations to ensure that the objectives of the project are achieved. The project spent a lot of time managing what seemed to be differing expectations between USAID and DWAF regional officials, who were bilateral partners.

## **CHOICE OF INDICATORS**

The main indicator for the project was the number of low-income communities implementing sustainable environmental management practices. This indicator had a lot of variables that made quantifying the results problematic. For example, the number of communities could be defined as villages or towns, irrespective of the size of the village. A village with 1,000 households had the same indicator value as a village with 10,000 households. The definition of low-income was also not clear as there was no threshold value attached to income. In water services terms, “sustainable” means that consumers are paying the cost of the service. For low-income communities in the area, this was not likely to be achieved. In retrospect, this indicator was not appropriate because it was difficult to measure.





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