

Title

Community engagement and the provision of water services in Nyanga, Cape Town

Executive Summary

Access to water is premised in South Africa's Constitution as a basic human right, and was a key focus in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and now the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). Water provision is becoming increasingly more crucial for the Western Cape currently facing a drought with very low levels of rainfall predicted for the rest of 2017. Against this background, the study explored, using the Community Scorecard Methodology, how better community engagement could improve water provision by the City of Cape Town in Nyanga. Findings from the study show that the quality of water provision and water education remain key challenges for residents and the lack of rain has increased pressure in an already water strained province. The challenges are two fold where both residents as service recipients and the city as a service provider face substantial difficulties. The observed challenges not only relate to access to this service, but also weaknesses in public participation processes which affect access to information, and management around water provision. Although the study included various stakeholders and focused on water and electricity services, the focus of this policy brief is on water services. The Community Scorecard Process served as the key research tool to explore citizen engagement and service provision challenges and this was further supported by other research methodologies such as focus group discussions and surveys. Various interconnected and iterative workshops were conducted to create trust, knowledge and support change by creating an environment for fruitful exchanges of information. Based on these methods, the study proposes a set of recommendations for ensuring better water service delivery, as well as incorporating the community as agents of change as opposed to mere beneficiaries of services or passive customers.

Introduction and Background

Available information on the Western Cape shows that it has been the second most protest-prone province since 2012 around basic services provision issues such as electricity and access to water (Chigwata, O'Donovan and Powell, 2017; Municipal IQ, 16 May 2017). Nyanga is one of the oldest Black townships in Cape Town and remains one of the poorest¹ areas in the metropole. A media briefing by cluster commander Major-General Moses Memela in News24 (28 July 2017)² indicated that crime in the area is prevalent and Nyanga consistently scores as the region with the highest murder rates in South Africa. Nyanga is often considered a forgotten settlement rife with service delivery protests, which has frequently resulted in violence and insurgency. Stats SA (2011) census data indicated that just over half of homes in Nyanga have access to running water in their homes, which remains quite low as this is a growing settlement comprising of both formal and informal dwellings. It is against this background that the HSRC in partnership with the City of Cape Town and in close collaboration with an NGO Project 90, working in the area, embarked on an 18 month project focusing on electricity³ and water services in this community. The Community Scorecard Methodology, piloted now for the second time in collaboration with the City brought the community and city officials together to discuss challenges, and to devise strategies to improve the provision of basic services in the area.

While South Africa has seen improvements in water provision, the reality in Nyanga shows that major challenges remain. For this case study, water becomes an important focus as the Western Cape is experiencing one of its worst droughts in a century (Cape Argus, 29 August 2017) with water levels at approximately 30% as of September 2017, and with recently implemented level 5 water restrictions focusing on water issues are vital. Specifically two issues key were: access and quality of the service, and civic education around water provision which is closely related to public participation. The methodological approach used is closely aligned to the Back

¹ 48% of the labour force is unemployed and 78% of households have a monthly income of R3200 or less.

² See: <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/nyanga-murder-rate-still-on-the-up-20170728>

³ During this project significant gains have been made to address electricity challenges, while the state of water services remains worrisome.

to Basics Approach⁴ i.e. the Batho Pele Principles which emphasises the need to put citizens first and acknowledging the importance of citizen engagement in service delivery.

The structure of water provision and the reality for Nyanga

This project was undertaken during the City of Cape Town’s restructuring process, and the fieldwork period was from September 2016 to July 2017. The research found that water service provision involved a multiplicity of players who all served specific line functions. Although the Department of Water and Sanitation is instrumental in the provision, maintenance and infrastructure development of water services, there are various other stakeholders who assist in water provision. In addition, residents accessing information or making enquiries is perceived by residents as a tedious task. This is due to the various role-players and the differences in functions. There are differences in processes and points of call and private homes, council homes and informal dwellings get confused on who to engage when facing a specific problem or how to effectively utilise the Technical Operations Centre as not all residents have the needed resources (airtime, a cell phone or internet to log complaints or to follow up on their reference number). The Technical Operations Centre is the call centre where residents register their requests for municipal services or make complaints. The below diagram offers an overview of the different role-players in Nyanga, which excludes contractors, although they do play an important and complex role, for instance in installing water meters).



Figure 1: Structure of water provision in Nyanga
Source: HSRC 2017

The complexity of the water service provision structure serves as background for the findings of this study. Both the Department of Water and Sanitation and Sewer Services focus on infrastructure installation and maintenance in the public space up to the point where a water meter is installed for private properties (usually council property). Human Settlements refer installations and repairs for rental homes to their Housing Maintenance Unit. Sometimes when a matter is urgent, residents will be urged to source a local certified plumber and if the issue is a municipal/city fault, tenants will be reimbursed (which is not always the case, and tenants do not always have the resources to do this). This results in persisting water issues and sometimes water wastage. Furthermore, private owners are responsible for their own maintenance and need private plumbers that are costly for many in the area. Lastly, a unit from Water Demand Management installs and maintains water meters within properties. The Technical Operations Centre, which is a call centre, is responsible for handling maintenance requests from residents and usually provides them with a reference number after an issue is reported. However, this is a mere call centre and staff is not always sure where a complaint should go, which results in delayed remedies.

⁴ See COGTA (2014) for more details on the Back to Basic Approach.

Research Approach: Citizen Scorecard Methodology

The Community Scorecard Methodology is a form of Participatory Action Research. The main research sites were identified by the City of Cape Town (Nyanga Old Location, Mau Mau, and Zwelitsha)⁵. However, residents from various other areas in Nyanga participated in the study⁶. The fieldwork included various consultations with stakeholders in the form of meetings, workshops, a community scorecard day, focus groups and baseline and end-line surveys. Throughout these processes participants were asked about their access to water, the state of infrastructure, citizen engagement, the various challenges faced and tentative solutions as a way forward. Several stakeholders participated in the study including city officials from 13 departments including the ward councillor and members from his office; as well as community leaders and residents from Nyanga.

Key research findings and policy implications

The Western Cape is faced with extreme water scarcity which indicates that the former supply-side model of water provision is ineffective as the demand remains great. This is further strained due to communities such as Nyanga not having more constructive relationships with city officials in order to fully address the challenges around water issues. One such example is the importance of sparing water (which is often misused by entrepreneurs such as car washes and meat vendors) and working together to improve service provision and taking care of this scarce resource.

In sum, better water provision and local agency is affected by a variety of problems including access to information (from both the community and city), a lack of training and skills from Technical Centre Operations staff, poor coordination between departments, between residents and between the city and residents. A major problem seems to be the lack of knowledge as most residents do not fully understand service provision and maintenance processes such as the changing of water meters. Furthermore, access to maintenance sites are also affected by criminal activities such as vandalism and criminal activity also affects the safety and security of city officials as hijackings and damaging to property remain a concern. Residents complained about drinking water that came out mixed with sewerage water from household taps. Residents also argued that the pipe infrastructure in the area was too small and too old for the population. This resulted in frequent breakdowns that were also witnessed by researchers and city officials on the scorecard day (8 November 2016). Challenges are exacerbated by informal businesses such as car washers and meat vendors who do not preserve water, contaminate supplies and generally do not act responsibly.

Similarly, it was noted that there is poor communication between the city and residents thereby leading to misunderstandings and challenges with contractors including lack of monitoring and accountability. The various challenges were evident on the scorecard day (8 November 2016) which acted as a walkabout through the area. Through this observational exercise participants witnessed how infrastructure is vandalized as well how the community often engages in tampering with water meters, setting up illegal water connections which also acts as a health hazard as they sometimes connect illegally into drains. Overall, a major result is that Nyanga residents become mere beneficiary of services, as opposed to being able to own processes, and serve as custodians of services and infrastructure.

Recommendations

In order to enhance water service delivery and education, there is a need to emphasise the importance of the process of relationship-building between the municipality, city, communities and civil society. The research team over the last 18 months managed to build a good working relationship with the community leaders from these areas and the relevant officials. As a way forward we propose:

⁵ A full research report will be published which outlines the rationale for the 3 area's and will include an in-depth methodology section. However, the HSRC policy authors can be contacted in order to clarify the selection of the specific sites.

⁶ Overall, although an ebb and flow of participants it included participants from 14 different sites, but the focus was on the 3 identified sites.

1. **To improve communication.** The city has to keep improving and encouraging community engagement and involvement as a permanent feature in service delivery. Part of the challenge community faces is that when they are not getting services, they do not find any means of escalating queries or felt heard. By officials sharing their contact details (cell and office numbers) and sparing more time in dialogue spaces, communication channels are created. This allows the community to communicate their challenges and will help the city to save time and resources. This could potentially decrease protests in the area.
2. **Better water education.** Residents need to have readily available access to information around the water service delivery process and regulations, as well as knowledge of the fault reporting system and grievance process. This could mean joint information offering that includes the mandates of the different responsible entities and updates from the city. It should be accessible and simple in the form of a pamphlets and posters in community centres and offices, even using roadshows and utilising local community liaison officers. Whatsapp groups and certain social media channels should also be utilised, and community liaison officers can assist in circulating information to those who do not have access to this technology.
3. **Enhance capacity and training.** The city serves thousands of impoverished areas therefore lacking capacity to optimally provide services. Frontline staff in particular needs better training along with the Technical Operations Centre to save resources as well as ensure that residents receive correct and reliable information and assistance.
4. **Improve city's identification and presence.** Officials, workers and contractors should carry suitable identification at all times and be more present in communities, beyond problem-solving to share service provision knowledge. As distrust around letting strangers onto private premises is very high (given the context of crime) and will improve relations and safety of residents and officials/contractors.
5. **To support the role of the community water in processes.** Residents and City officials could work closer together to regulate harmful water consumption behaviours and activities (such as those of informal businesses) regulating these activities through community structures. This would require constant feedback from officials to area representatives about the issues they are facing and include the community as "watch dogs" and "protectors" of infrastructure and service related workers. In other words, finding new ways to recognise and support community agency.

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