

WATER

PROVISION IN NYANGA: THE COMMUNITY NEEDS TO BE ON BOARD

Access to safe water is a basic human right, but not a given in many of South Africa's informal settlements. The drought in Cape Town and a fast-growing population put further pressure on the city to provide water in places like Nyanga where the community often takes to the streets to protest about poor service delivery. Bringing city officials and community members together, the HSRC and a local NGO explored how better community engagement could improve water provision.

The extreme drought in Cape Town almost caused it to be the first city to run out of water, a potentially dire scenario for informal settlements such as Nyanga. While wealthy Capetonians could budget for a plan B to avoid health consequences and a negative impact on their wellbeing, in Nyanga, where just more than half of homes have access to running water, a day zero could have had serious implications as service delivery protests already occur sporadically and previously, have turned violent.

Partnering

The HSRC partnered with the City of Cape Town and Project 90 by 2030 on an 18-month project focusing on water and electricity services in Nyanga. Using a Community Scorecard method, they brought

stakeholders together to discuss challenges and to devise strategies to improve service provision. From September 2016 to July 2017, they conducted fieldwork to look at water provision.

Players in water provision

The research found that providing water services involves multiple players. National government is represented by the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) that is instrumental in the provision, maintenance and infrastructure development of water services. Water Boards operate some wastewater treatment plants and are responsible for bulk water and some retail services. Municipalities provide most retail services and also own some of the bulk supply infrastructure. A range of

The HSRC joined forces with community members and city officials to look at water provision in Nyanga, Cape Town.

other service providers operate at municipal level. This complex governance system makes accessing information tedious for residents. People in private homes, council homes and informal dwellings are unsure whom to engage when they face problems. Many residents do not have the resources (airtime, a cell phone or the internet) to log complaints or to follow up on the reference numbers they get from the Technical Operations Centre (TOC), a call centre where residents complain or register their requests for municipal services.

The below diagram shows the structure of water provision in Nyanga, excluding contractors.

Figure 1: Structure of water provision in Nyanga



Complex structure

Although it is difficult to portray a complete scenario from this study, an interesting overview emerged from the participating residents.

The DWS 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). The Department of Human Settlements refers installations and repairs for rental homes to its housing maintenance unit. Sometimes, when a matter is urgent, residents will be urged to source a local certified plumber. If the issue is a municipal or city fault, tenants will be reimbursed, but tenants do not always have the resources to initiate claims. This results in persisting water issues and water wastage. Furthermore, private owners are responsible for their own maintenance relying on costly private plumbers. Lastly, the Water Demand Management unit installs and maintains water meters within properties. The TOC handles maintenance requests from residents and usually provides them with a reference number. When call centre staff are unsure where to log a complaint, solutions are delayed.

Talking about water

During fieldwork, the researchers consulted with various stakeholders. Among the participants were officials from 13 city departments as well as community leaders and residents from Nyanga. They found that ineffective communication between city officials and the community further strained the challenges caused by water scarcity, high water demand and ineffective models of water provision.

Problems included limited access to information, a lack of training and skills from TOC staff, poor coordination between departments, between residents and between the city and residents. Most residents do not fully understand service provision and maintenance processes, such as the changing of water meters. Furthermore, access to maintenance sites is also affected by criminal activities including vandalism and threats to the safety and security of city officials. Residents complained that drinking water from household taps came out mixed with sewerage water. They argued that the pipe infrastructure in the area was too small and too old for the growing population. This resulted in frequent breakdowns witnessed on the scorecard day when community members and officials walked the sites together. Challenges are exacerbated by informal businesses such as car washers and meat vendors who are accused of not conserving water and contaminating supplies.

Poor communication between the city and residents led to misunderstandings and challenges with contractors, including a lack of monitoring and accountability. During the scorecard day walkabout, participants witnessed how infrastructure was vandalised. Tampering with water meters and the setting up of illegal water connections become a health hazard when they connect into drains.

Researchers comparing notes with community members and city officials during fieldwork to look at water provision in Nyanga, Cape Town

Moving forward

To enhance water service delivery and education in Nyanga, relationships between the municipality, city, communities and civil society need to improve. Table 1 summarises the recommendations of the research team, who managed to build a good working relationship with the community leaders from these areas and the relevant officials.

Table 1: Recommendations on moving forward

1. Improve communication.
2. Implement better water education and awareness.
3. Enhance capacity and training in the city.
4. Have officials and contractors wear proper identification to access communities.
5. The city needs to get the community on board who can act as a network to disseminate information, as well as to be owners of processes and infrastructure.

The study showed that water provision is a complex, pressing and a multi-dimensional problem. Furthermore, water flows across different places, administrative areas, and geographic locations. The management of water involves multiple stakeholders, which imposes major coordination challenges for government. We welcome the fact that the 2018 State of the Nation Address emphasised the importance of water security and the allocation of additional funds to the water crisis in the 2018 National Budget.

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Scenes encountered during fieldwork to look at water provision in Nyanga, Cape Town