

*Saving water, serving people:
research into community and
management of water
services*

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Problem statements and method

- Statement A: Joburg Water's assessment and views
- Statement B: Community activists assessment and views
- Method: relation of research to problem statements, research issues and research strategy

Problem statement JW1

- “Operation Gcin’amanzi” address the severe water supply problems experienced in the area, completed June 2007
- Reduce the level of unaccounted for water and to improve service delivery.
- Actual consumption is in average between 6 and 15 kℓ/month; deemed consumption, per property (20 kℓ/month), actual amount is in fact far in excess of this amount.
- ‘Water demand’ per individual Soweto household is 61 kℓ/month.

Information JW1

- Prepayment meters to be installed on each formal individual property in the area (free?).
- District water pressure measurement valves and the refurbishment of faulty reservoir outlet meters
- JW expects to save significant amounts of water just by improving the system.
- Creation of an environment conducive for payment of water and sanitation services.

Information JW2

- Feasibility and environment-assessment studies have been completed; first phase in Phiri, 2200 stands, valued at about R19 million
- Comprehensive institutional and social development programme (what details?)
- 25% of work will be undertaken by small, medium and micro enterprises from Soweto plus local labour

Problem statement JW2

- More affordable services of water and sanitation, lower tariffs, reduction of future arrears, free private plumbing upgrade, better delivery will result, *but*
- A level of resistance has been encountered
- Adversarial lobby groups
- Incidents of intimidation, violence and malicious damage to property.

Problem statements from community and activists

- Changes in norms; existing conditions
- Information, understanding, knowledge
- ‘Changes are against the interests of the poor’
- Privatisation
- Constitutional rights and governance
- Technical issues
- Strategic issues

Problem statement CA1: Changes in norms and language?

- Are people paying for the first time?
- Is it the first time that people have paid according to consumption?
- “We don’t understand the language, why are we now customers, what is a free metered water?”
- Have people previously been disconnected for non-payment?
- In what way has the service improved or will it improve?

Problem statements CA2: Information, understanding, knowledge

- Joburg Water is not meeting with community activists and therefore we are opposing what they are doing.
- “We will be opposed until there is a clear explanation of what they are doing.”
- Who is Joburg Water? Is this owned by Suez?
- What is the general understanding of the people in relation to water services?
- We want to know the disadvantages and the advantages of pre-paid meters.
- In what way do various groups within the community relate to the initiatives?

Problem statements CA2: Information, understanding, knowledge

- Is the system of pre-payment clear to every person using it?
- What do people pay for the meter to be installed?
- Are there hidden costs to pre-paid meters?
- Who repairs the faulty meters?
- How is water managed, what is unaccounted for water?
- We don't have swimming pools, geysers and are not wasting water; we are not on big plots or even washing our cars.

Problem statement CA3: Changes are against the interests of the poor

- Interventions will worsen conditions for the people
- Will pre-payment mean a decline in actual consumption of households?
- “We are poor and cannot pay.”
- Installation will mean the end of Ubuntu whereby African people share amongst themselves, people will lock their taps and not help each other
- People will fight amongst each other and will steal water from their neighbours.

Problem statement CA3: Changes are against the interests of the poor

- Previously people stole clothes off the washing line, now they are stealing water.
- Pensioners will provide for those disconnected and will themselves be disconnected.
- Who pays for water used to douse a fire?
- Water management means poor service
- Some people are locking their taps.
- People are being threatened: if you don't accept pre-paid meters you won't get your pension. They are using the police and trespassing on people's property.

Problem statement CA4: This is privatisation

- This is an example of privatization; profit before people
- Why did the Metro introduce Suez, who owns Joburg Water?
- Water has become under the control of business and government must reconsider what has happened.
- You cannot privatize essential services; you cannot make money out of it.

Problem statement CA4: This is privatisation

- This company profits from the poor
- Community wanted municipality to take responsibility and not Joburg Water and this is privatization; people were getting water from communal taps.
- Water is a right which has been handed over to a private company, Suez; this is privatization

*Problem statement CW5:
Constitutional rights and government*

- Denying constitutional rights to free water.
- These problems are a legacy of apartheid and government must sort them out
- Is there a way in which constitutional rights of access are secured and guaranteed with pre-paid meters
- We have the slogan “smash the meters” because the people don’t have alternatives and have to have other means of having their say.

Problem statement CW5: Constitutional rights and government

- Joburg Water must come to the masses and explain themselves. 6kl is not enough and should have at least 20kl and would cover needs 'water is life'
- "We thought they were just fixing the pipes and now we see it is privatization, we hate that as we were not consulted. There were just top down decisions.
- We are only told of everything when the decisions has already been made and they have started to dig the trenches; the community was never consulted.
- We are totally against pre-paid meters.

Technical issues

- A meter is an instrument, a tool, you cannot talk to it
- “You cannot talk to a meter and it cuts you off without consulting you.”
- Pre-paid meters are even worse than flow enablers/restrictors
- If we are disconnected, how do we get water flowing again?
- What technical reports are there of pre-paid meters in other countries?

Strategic issues

- Are there alternative ways of managing total water supplies and losses?
- Is the tool problematic?
- To what extent can demand management answer some of the points raised by the communities?
- What problem are we addressing in using pre-paid meters?
- Are other means available?
- What has been the experience of other countries with pre-paid meters?

Method

- Issues involve real interests of people and of company: water losses, costs, poverty, uncertainty
- Research into information/knowledge areas needed
- Household surveys of income, consumption, attitude to new service
- Participatory research: involvement of community research groups