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in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Question and Answer (Q&A) Document

Operation and Maintenance of WASH Infrastructure Webinar Series

Webinar #3

Question: Did you have a standard functionality checklist?

Answer: On a monthly basis, we monitored the following:

- Water quality (taste, colour, smell) through community-based operators.
- We took and tested bacteriological samples (e-coli)
- We monitored the number of functional 'tap-days' (ie. The sum of all taps working on any given day divided by the theoretical maximum over 1 month).
- The reliability of the source (available all day, available part of the day, not available). This was sensitive to the seasons.
- Inspections, servicing, repairs, and maintenance on all electro-mech equipment (eg. Pumps).

Question: Was the water quality issue in Alfred Nzo DM related to fecal pollution?

Answer: Yes, that is why we introduced chlorination. The sources were high in the mountains with no upstream human settlement, so it was most likely from wild animals.

Question: Which steps or process did you follow for Community Based Approach?

Answer: Each village had a minimum of a technical operator, and administrator, and three board members. These local 'staff' were trained and supported by our team within the Support Service Agent. We provided:

- Technical support to operators,
- Administrative support (especially on reporting) to administrators,
- Governance support to Board Members (water utilization, operator selection, performance, etc.).

Question: As a Support Service Agent, by whom were you contracted? What are the criteria for being awarded such a contract?

Answer: We were contracted by the Water Services Authority, which in both cases was the District Municipality. Calls for Proposals were issued stating the scope of work and the standards to be met. If there are any specific requests for detail, I can supply the ToR.

Question: In terms of the free water now provided by the government in South Africa, what is limit per person per day? And if exceeded, is there any extra charge?

Answer: The guideline is 6m³ per household per month. In most cases in rural areas, there is no mechanism to measure, bill and collect over consumption.

Question: Has there been any exploration of cross-subsidies (across productive/industrial water) as a way to subsidize rural water?

Answer: Where rural areas are close to industrial centers, but this is seldom possible given the history of settlement planning in South Africa. Rural villages are mostly far from significant commercial/industrial centers. Although there are some exceptions. In-fact the concept of free basic water originated in eThekweni (Durban) where they implemented such cross-subsidies first. Influenced by this experience and national policy was developed.

Question: Any thoughts on the use of performance-based payments as a form of subsidy?

Answer: The SSA contracts could indeed be performance based with incentives. This would however require careful design of such incentives.

Question: With transport costs being such a large proportion of rural water supply management, how do you see remote sensing of functionality parameters reducing costs to the provider?

Answer: We did have a form of remote sensing.

- In the early years (before cellphones), we had a system of receiving and sending handwritten messages to operators/administrators/board members on the local transport (taxis and busses). It was not in real time, but we were able to respond to requests within 24 – 48 hours. Our daily planning was setup in a way that the incoming messages were considered before field staff were deployed.
- In later years we utilised cellphones, this was almost in real time. Operators/administrators/board members had the cellphone numbers of their designated support people. If there was an issue, they gave a missed call and the support person phoned back. This communication was paid for as part of our contract with the Municipality.

These approaches did not require the use of any sophisticated equipment that would have been an additional maintenance task on us as the SSA.

These remote sensing/reporting systems were invaluable in ensuring that we could provide the level of service we did. Importantly we took an approach of networked rather than hierarchical communication. We did establish a 'call center' through a common number to call, but most calls went directly to assigned support staff.

For me, the bigger question is whether the transmission of information can result in action being taken to address issues that arise.

Question: What type of feedback loop or methods of communication existed to communicate the data (especially the WQ data) back to the communities? Were the maps the most effective tool?

Answer: Our Community support staff held meetings monthly with the community based 'staff'. At these meetings, they received reports and gave feedback on all the operational issues (WQ, fuel, spares, maintenance, repairs, staff, etc.).