Water Leaks Project: Harare, Khayelitsha, Phase One

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About the author: Linda Martindale is a freelance journalist focusing on human interest and social policy issues. She was commissioned by EMG to write up the first phase of the Water Leaks Project.

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Introduction

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Case study

Water Leaks Project, Khayelitsha

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Figure 1a: Cape Town services bill

METER DETAILS/PROPERTY VALUES WATER (Period 07/10/2003 to 30/10/2003 - 24 Days) (Actual Reading)
AT STREET KHAYELITSHA / ERF SEWERAGE (Period 07/10/2003 to 30/10/2003 - 24 Days) (Actual Reading)
AT STREET KHAYELITSHA / ERF REFUSE (Period 14/10/2003 to 10/11/2003)
AT STREET KHAYELTSHA / ERF Account Details as at 24/11/2003 Add interest on outstanding balance Add 14% VAT on Amounts marked with * above Disposal Charge (1 X 85LBIN/BAG X 1 Removals)
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Figure 1b: Cape Town services bill

severely limit her access to water. She has also had a visit from a municipal employee threatening to claim possessions such as her TV in compensation for her water arrears.

The South African Bill of Rights states that everyone has a right to have access to water to meet basic needs. South Africa is rife with unemployment and the often-linked socio-economic problems. Water management and issues around water delivery affect the nation's communities as well as its leadership. Communities need to be involved in decision making and problem solving, and education about responsible water usage and conservation is crucial for all

Education about responsible water usage and conservation is crucial for all South Africans, not just those living in rural or township areas.

South Africans, not just those living in rural or township areas.

The Water Leaks Project (WLP) has grown out of this need and seeks to address these issues. It is a combined initiative that brings civil society, the

private sector and government together in an unprecedented way. The project aims to train ten unemployed people as plumbers and business entrepreneurs to fix leaks and help address the social and environmental issues concerning water and water delivery in Khayelitsha.

This case study describes phase one of a three-phase strategy to get the WLP up and running, and replicated by communities in other areas.

The politics of water

"Requesting that water be a part of one's daily life, whether one has money or not, is not an unreasonable request. It's

> water, but the infrastructural, financial and environmental equality. Nobody would disagree that everybody needs our past that lives on today and threatens our quest for delivery and that in the poorer municipalities is a legacy of quently, and hygiene is of utmost importance to survival ance of six kiloliters (kl) per family per month is not adaddressing water issues in the community. The basic allownot a 'want' but a need. It's a basic human right," says Senza problems around water delivery in post-apartheid South HIV/Aids as bedding may need to be washed more frepeople. More water is used in homes that are affected by equate for the average family, which may host up to eight Kula, an environmental activist from Khayelitsha, the African present challenges of their own. The disparity between the more affluent suburbs' water Director of Ilitha Lomso and one of the key role players

Non-payment by those who can pay, disregard for those who cannot, infrastructural collapse, lack of funds, disparity based on apartheid delivery systems, lack of skills, and a shortage of human resources in municipalities, have all exacerbated the problem, leading to controversial cut-offs of water delivery in some areas. Much water is lost to leakages in the systems, especially in township areas, an unnecessary complication to an already strained situation.

The Water Leaks Project (WLP), an initiative of members of a community affected by water issues and various non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in partnership with government, is one of the ways effective management of our water resource can be tackled. It's an innovative plan that aims to effectively address water issues from all aspects

of development – empowerment, employment, entrepreneurship, education and the environment.

Characteristics of the project

There has been strong community involvement from the inception of this values-driven initiative. It is community-initiated, -managed and -driven, which is one of its greatest strengths. It is not just a technical fix to a very real problem, but touches the heart of issues of empowerment and environmental management, as well as unemployment and poverty. Educa-

This is not just a technical fix but touches the heart of issues of empowermentanderwironmental management.

tion and skills development form part of the foundation and make it sustainable. For example, in many cases a sealing ring fitted to a leaking toilet would solve the problem, but the *know-how* of this simple fact needs to be shared and motivated.

The WLP includes long-term creation of employment and encourages entrepreneurship, for example by training the ten water activists in the following:

- 1. basic plumbing how to identify leaks, change washers etc.;
- 2. basic business skills;
- 3. environmental aspects of water; and
- 4. water policy and management.

The trainees will set up small businesses, either individually or in groups, so jobs will be created while a real problem in the community is being solved.

One of the benefits of embarking on this project now is that the group can learn from the successes and failures of past projects that are similar. It is wise to involve the community from the start, include business skills for the plumb

ers, monitor and evaluate the project from the early stages of progress, adopt a more holistic approach including education and awareness-raising about water demand management, and to acknowledge and address political issues related to billing, non-payment and community solutions to high water consumption.

Another key to the uniqueness and success of this particular project is the working link between community-based organisations (CBOs), NGOs, government and the private sector. The energy and zeal of youth in the townships is channelled into issues like caring for the environment and solving unemployment issues, while NGOs are able to translate policy and facilitate information-sharing from other parts of the country. This mixing of knowledge, experience and commitment is greatly beneficial to all parties involved.

Key role players and partners

The key movers and shakers in this project are NGOs and CBOs who are members of the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF) Water Caucus, in particular the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG), Ilitha Lomso, a youth organisation dealing with environmental issues, human rights and unemployment, and the EJNF's Western Cape office. They each bring their organisation's unique characteristics and strengths to the table. EMG, as an NGO, is able to monitor and assess policy and provide links between local, national and international arenas. Ilitha Lomso is rooted in the community and has a history of activism and community concern. As a network, EJNF facilitates communication and joint action between organisations.

A multi-stakeholder steering committee has been established as an important vehicle to take the project forward. The committee comprises representatives from the EJNF Water Caucus, national departments (Water Affairs and Forestry, Agriculture, and Education), local government (Stocks and Stocks) and the private sector (Liebenberg and Stander).

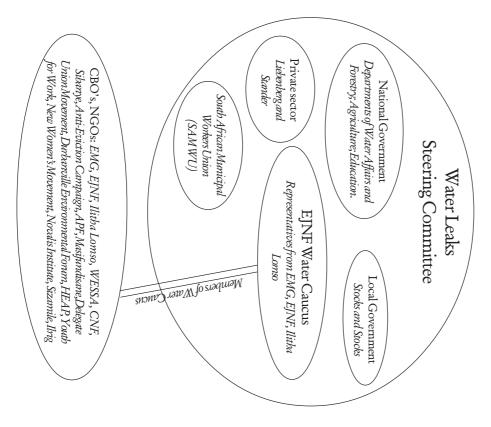


Figure 2: Composition of the WLP Sterring Committee

Pilot site: Harare, Section 34, Khayelitsha, Western Cape

The project is to be piloted in the township area of Harare, Khayelitsha in the Western Cape. After Soweto in Gauteng, Khayelitsha (Xhosa for 'our new home') is the second largest township in South African and became home to thousands of migrant labourers in the early 1980s before its rapid expanse in the last decade. It is home to approximately 330 000 people today and hosts approximately 43 000 fully serviced stands with a further estimated 27 000 unserviced stands with standpipes only. There is no water storage facility in the vicinity and the entire area is fed by two main entry sources. There are high estimates of internal plumbing leakage on the whole and many taps and toilets leak constantly, sometimes exacerbated by high water pressure.

Harare was chosen as an ideal area to pilot the project because of the history of the work and relationships already initiated by Ilitha Lomso and members of the EJNF Water Caucus. This site was agreed upon officially as the pilot site in March 2004 by all parties.

Motivation for the project

The WLP is motivated by a number of social and practical reasons. People's relationship with water has been altered in urban dwellers' lives and in the modern-day understanding of the water cycle. In many cases, getting water has been reduced to opening a tap. The natural cycles of water, rainfall and rivers are far from the average city dweller's mind. There has been a gradual alienation from water. Part

of the WLP's educational aim is to bring the connection in a fresh way to those living in the cities, getting back to the roots of our relationship with water.

There are other tangible needs for the project. An estimated 17% of water is unaccounted for in Cape Town,³ predominantly in the former Black Local Authority areas. Much of this water is lost due to a high prevalence of water leaks in the systems. The allocated 6 kl per family per month appears not be enough water as it is, and this problem is exacerbated by the leaks. Leaking pipes and inadequate infrastructure have not

Water is wasted on a massive scale around the world.

been taken into consideration with the allocated water limits. While there is a moratorium on water cut-offs in Cape Town, national policy allows for indi-

vidual municipalities to implement them after due process. Cutoffs or the threat of cut-offs is used to encourage households to pay outstanding debts and helps the municipalities because they each have to pay for the water they supply out of their own budget. Joint solutions are needed to address this.

Leaks are not a uniquely South African problem. Many governments under-invest in the infrastructure of disadvantaged communities, resulting in environmentally-unfriendly practice. Water is wasted on a massive scale around the world. The WLP is a small, yet powerful project that can be rolled out elsewhere, that will aid in the conservation of our planet's resources. Similar projects have had some success in the past, for example, Cape Town City Council and the South African Municipal Workers Union's (Samwu's) Ikapa Water Leaks project, which has saved the council millions of Rands in the long term.

Another very real motivation for the project is the army of unemployed youth who are already volunteering to educate communities on environmental issues surrounding water. Organisations like Ilitha Lomso have begun training environmental activists who are returning education, advocacy and practical skills to their communities. They have done this with little funding and financial resources. Skilled artisans are often lacking, partly the legacy of South Africa's history which excluded black people from training and recognition as artisans.

When asked why Ilitha Lomso is putting time and energy into the WLP, Senza says: "Most of our projects are reactive. We are an organisation that reacts to issues around social justice, human rights, and the environment. We want to be proactive when facing this issue of water leaks and conservation. To stop complaining and offer some solutions to the problems, to show government that civil society is aware of the problems, but also committed to finding practical and workable solutions."

Objectives of the WLP

The objectives of the project are many and varied. The first and most obvious is to fix the water leaks in Harare and to help residents there to save and manage water. Starting with a manageable section and documenting and evaluating the process will enable others to embark on similar projects in other areas. Ten water activists will be trained to fix the leaks as well as receiving training in business skills to develop and sell their service to the community and Council. These activists will educate the communities around water

issues and good management of the resource, as well as the 'bigger picture' of global resource management and conservation. "We want to teach the community that every drop counts," says Malusi Blou of Ilitha Lomso, Nyanga East.

The WLP also aims to build a partnership between civil society and the City of Cape Town, and aims to see it replicated elsewhere. It intends to raise awareness of some of the issues around water delivery in the lower socioeconomic areas where people cannot afford to pay high water bills, and to educate the local municipality on areas of

"Peopledo not even understand how to read the water bills, let alone have the resources to pay them."

deficiency in the administration of water delivery and billing. Isaac Mangwana of Masifundisane, states: "People in Harare do not even understand how to read the bills, let alone

have the resources to pay them. Many people look at the complicated bill and throw it straight into the bin." Isaac believes that some education around reading and understanding water bills would help the situation.

Progress of the WLP

The current project with its involved stakeholders began stirring in 1999 with a water seminar facilitated by EJNF Western Cape, at the Peninsula Technikon. Separately, Ilitha Lomso initiated a water project teaching families to fix leaks in their homes and raising awareness around water justice issues. The ideas and discussions of the various parties turned into action and the WLP was initiated. EJNF met with Council, along with a Samwu representative, and continued discussions around water delivery and the project

in particular. The combination of interested parties has evolved into an active working group since March 2003 when the project process was formalised in a meeting involving the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), EMG, EJNF, the City of Cape Town, and Liebenberg and Stander. Subsequent 'round table' discussions have led to the advancement of Phase One of the proposed project.

Phase one: Consultation, research and recruitment

Phase One covered the *consultation, research and recruitment* stages of the process. This first phase of the WLP lays the foundation and is crucial to the project's future. Months of planning, consultation and research have born fruit already, with buy-in from CBOs, NGOs, local and national government, as well as the private sector.

This phase included the initial meeting of the project's Steering Committee to agree on its terms and function, and the allocation of tasks and responsibilities among the EJNF Water Caucus members. Isaac Mangwana was appointed part-time, on a three-month contract, to begin work in Harare. He has been responsible for organising monthly WLP Working Group meetings, liasing with various key role players and advancing the awareness-raising component of the project.

In May, Isaac and others from Ilitha Lomso visited *local high schools*, specifically KwaMfundo High and Sangweni High School, to assess how water is used in the school and to interview parents who are involved in the school gardens

regarding their understanding of water issues. They also presented the project idea to the school's environmental working group. Council and DWAF have done some work to raise awareness in schools and it was decided to draw this into the project where possible.

Relationships with *community radio stations* that are supportive of the project have developed and been fostered by Isaac, Senza and others. Radio Zibonele has shown particular commitment to the project and its objectives. *Education through drama* was initiated as another component of awareness raising. A Water Leaks Drama Workshop was held with a community-based drama group. The group prepared an hour-long educational drama with feedback from Thabang Ngcozela of EJNF and members of Ilitha Lomso, but due to lack of finances have withdrawn from the awareness campaign until there is funding.

Community meetings have been held in Harare to explain the project as well as for project team members to listen to the community expressing their problems with water delivery and management. In March 2004 a day meeting was held by the Water Caucus to introduce activists in Khayelitsha to the project, gain their support and identify the pilot site. Participants were interested and committed to raise awareness and support the project in any way possible

The project proposal was also presented to Parliament in June 2004 where it received enthusiastic support. Outreach has been made to national departments including the Departments of Water Affairs and Forestry, Agriculture, Education, Social Development and Public Works. Local authorities and politicians have been approached in an effort to gain

endorsement and support, including the Mayor and the Harare Ward Councillor.

The development and identification of a training programme for the artisans is in the process of being negotiated. A proposed course outline was designed and discussed in April 2004. The task team have met with trainers from various training institutions to research possibilities for a course in basic plumbing and business skills. It is envisaged that training in environmental aspects of water and water policy will be done by members of the EJNF water caucus. Ten trainees are still to be selected in this phase of the project.

Isaac continues with the project on a voluntary basis after the three-month contract funding came to an end. The commitment that he and others from Ilitha Lomso and EJNF show to the project, regardless of remuneration, has been one of the keys to its success thus far.

Phase two: Training and implementation

During the second phase of the project activists will be trained and sent out to fix leaks and help households monitor and manage their water. Contracts will be drawn up with the chosen ten trainees regarding expectations, commitment to the programme, ownership of tools, and payment. Baseline data such as employment rates, extent of leaks, income etc. will be collected so that the success of the intervention can be measured at the end of the project. Leaks for fixing will be identified and prioritised by Council, Harare residents and the project team. Regular community meetings, Water Caucus meetings and Steering Committee meetings will be held.

Phase three: Evaluation and replication

The first step will be to collect the post-project data for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Analysis of this data and evaluation of the project will ensure that replication happens and any glitches are not repeated unnecessarily. Recommendations for doing a similar project in other parts of Khayelitsha or elsewhere will be discussed and analysed in the light of the successes of this pilot project. It will be crucial to complete accurate reports of the process from

Completing accurate reports of the process from beginning to end will be crucial.

beginning to end, and present the findings to the various partners and to the community involved. This will assist with fundraising for additional water leaks projects.

Funding

Funding to get this project off the ground is crucial. To date the project has been resourced by volunteerism, with some financial support from EMG's Reclaiming Sustainable Development project, which is funded by the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

The WLP team are convinced and committed to the idea that the primary funding for this project must come out of South African coffers. The City of Cape Town, in particular should support it financially, although thus far no commitment has been made. The DWAF has indicated that it will provide financial support for the awareness-raising component of the project through their Masibambane programme.

Possible funding for training from the Construction

SETA is currently under investigation. Funds have been made available to the National Skills Fund for 'capacity building of emerging contractors', under which category this project could fall. Funds for the business skills aspects of the training course are also being investigated through some of the organisations that provide training.

Benefits and indicators of success of WLP and future roll-outs

Environmental

Less water will be wasted. Fixed leaks and better management of water in homes means that the water supplied by Council will be used for drinking, washing, cleaning and cooking, rather than pour unused into the ground or wastewater system. The long-term benefits of heightened awareness of water issues are immeasurable. The transfer of knowledge will happen within communities and thus set a precedent for sharing beyond the project site. Ultimately the WLP will help re-build the relationship between people and water that has largely been lost through urbanisation and alienation from the natural world.

Social and community

This project will provide income for ten water activists who repair the leaks and start their own small plumbing businesses while educating the community. Open communication between residents and Council, facilitating problem solving around water delivery and usage, will result in

greater community ownership of water issues. This kind of transparency will decrease riots and unrest related to water delivery and foster partnership between the community and government. The reassurance of a trustworthy supply of one of the most basic of human rights as stated by the Constitution will restore hope for those who are disillusioned. Those who cannot afford to pay for water will at least get their full free 6 kl allocation. The implementation of food gardens is rising in the township areas, thus promising some levels of food stability. Water cut-offs, leakages

Water cut-offs, leakages and exorbit ant bills are not belping in the alleviation of poverty.

and exorbitant bills are not helping in the alleviation of poverty. People who are involved in processes such as this one foster an otherwise-lacking sense of control, responsibility and ownership. The

social benefits of fostering the fading sense of *ubuntu* is related to this. Senza explains: "When people who are struggling financially have to fight over water, it breaks down the sense of community to which we hold. *Ubuntu* used to be a part of our values, but now sharing a cup of water can cost and bring resentment. It goes against the fabric of community sharing and sacrifice."

Advocacy and partnership

The WLP will aid in the gathering of crucial information on residents and their water usage and understanding of water issues. Many decision makers, according to Ilitha Lomso, often do not understand the reality on the ground, and theoretical solutions may be ones that are not workable. The project aims to bring a practical solution that works in

partnership with those on the ground and those making the decisions. Education around water as a human right and its proper management will be far reaching, spelling out the reality of our need to conserve our water resource.

Financial

Water bills will be lower and more affordable for people in lower socio-economic communities, resulting in a possible decrease in arrears for Council. Cosatu claims that the water leaks project they initiated saved Council over R17 million. The long-term costs of building dams may be lessened, as the socially unfriendly and costly process of dam building will be diminished. The ten artisans who will be running their own business fixing leaks and educating people around water issues will be financially more stable and be able to provide an income for their families.

Sustainability

In the past, in projects such as the Ikapa water leaks project there has been an apparent rise in water consumption once the project is concluded. Sustainability is crucial. With the activists being trained in water advocacy as well as fixing leaks, the project should be sustainable and able to be duplicated all over the Western Cape and other parts of the country. "If it works, it will help motivate people in other places to try it too," says Isaac.

Conclusion

When asked why he was involved in the project, 20-year-old water activist Zama Timbela explained: "What got me involved in the Water Leaks Project was seeing the problems around water issues in my community and wanting to see some change. I saw the amount of leaks not being fixed and people paying for water they were not using, I saw people struggling to pay for water and water being cut off. Life without water is difficult and I watched people face

"If the leaks are fixed, water cut-offs witll be reduced and people will not be denied access to water, one of the most basic of human rights."

disease and misery. I realise that water is a key issue and want to be involved in policies and the politics around water, as well as the impact these issues have on our environment. I realised there was opportunity for the community and government to make some sort of difference and help solve some of these prob-

lems. If the leaks are fixed, water cut-offs will be reduced and people will not be denied access to water, one of the most basic of human rights."

This project, although in its infant stages, holds vast potential to provide some practical solutions to much-spoken-about problems. It's an opportunity for education around environmental issues, for job creation and income generation for unemployed township dwellers, and for the spirit of *ubuntu* and communication to develop between role players from all sides of the proverbial fence. It is sustainable and can be multiplied, impacting on communities beyond the Western Cape. "If we can, with our little re-

source, get something like this off the ground, then so can the bigger fish," smiles Malusi, Ilitha Lomso, Nyanga East. "Aluta continua – the struggle continues."

Notes

- Members of the EJNF Water Caucus are the Anti-Eviction Campaign, the Community Networking Forum, the Delegate Union Movement, the Durbanville Environmental Forum, the Environmental Monitoring Group (EMG), the HIV&AIDS Environmental Partnership, Ilitha Lomso, the International Labour Research and Information Group, the Masifundisane Environmental Group, the New Women's Movement, the Novalis Institute, the South African Municipal Workers Union (Samwu), the Sibanye Women's Organisation, the Sizamile Youth Organisation, the Wildlife and Environment Society of South African (WESSA), and Youth for Work.
- 2 These numbers were provided verbally by K. Parry of Stats SA and are derived from the 2001 Census.
- 3 Cape Times, 17% of city's water 'lost' in leaks, bursts each month, 30 September 2004.

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