

HSRC RESEARCH OUTPUTS

3393

**ETHEKWINI
WATER CUSTOMER
SERVICE PROJECT
REPORT**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

The EWS Customer Services project is an attempt to assist the poorest households by maintaining minimum standards of delivery and avoiding the prospect of municipal officials having to cut off the needy from essential services. Trained facilitators have visited households with large water debts in the 20 priority areas for debt reduction. They supplied the householders with education materials regarding conservation of water and the action that should be taken to contain or reduce the debt, they inspected the property for leaks and other evidence of undue water consumption and they advised the householder on the courses of action open to them.

The overall objectives/outcomes of the EWS initiative (involving Khanyisa Projects Consultants employed to run the Project) are:

- To undertake quality water service education (cost effectively)
- Improve customer satisfaction with service provision
- Achieve improved payment levels or a reduction in debt levels
- Achieve a reduction in water loss and the consequent costs

The Human Sciences Research Council has been contract by EWS to evaluate the Project process in the light of these objectives.

THE METHODS

The extent to which the above objectives has been examined quantitatively through a survey of 515 randomly chosen households and other facilities from a list of 7,000 names and addresses of places visited by facilitators. Qualitative information on key issues has been obtained from key informant interviews, attendance at ratepayer meetings, and observations at the sites visited during the survey.

THE RESULTS

Objective 1: Quality water service education

- Facilitators gave advice based on a thorough inspection of the potential causes of water loss on the property. The majority of survey respondents found the facilitator helpful, although a few cases were found where the facilitator had not spoken to the householder.
- Most survey respondents were able to mention one or more ways in which households can conserve water: The most frequently cited conservation strategies were to wash things in a basin rather than under running water, to only wash clothes once or twice a week, not to flush toilets too often, and that leaks should be repaired.
- Respondents knew what action had to be taken to contain or reduce the debt and what the consequences might be.
- There are many complaints of inaccurate meter reading, of customers not getting 200 litres a day, and of bills running out of control. There was a need for more information on the operation of the basic free water system, on reading a meter and on repairing leaks.

Objective 2: Customer satisfaction with the service

- The general level of satisfaction was high: approximately 60% were satisfied with the management of water services, 76% found the facilitator helpful, 87% of the people who visited EWS offices as a result of the visit found the staff polite and helpful, and 46% of the total sample said they felt better after the EWS intervention.
- There were some specific causes of dissatisfaction: a high level of service interruption, the clause in the acknowledgement of debt agreement which states that EWS is entitled to foreclose on the property if the debt is not paid, water charges were thought to be unfair with a request from some respondents for a flat rate, and the consolidated billing which did not allow householders to prioritise water payments when money was scarce.
- Satisfaction was stronger in smaller and less poor households, and in some areas (Newlands East and Ntuzuma). The three areas with the lowest satisfaction ratings were Mpumalanga, Wiggins, and Lamontville.

Objective 3: Improved payment levels or a reduction in debt levels.

- A conservative estimate of 53% of the sample had taken some action following the facilitator visit. The true figure is probably higher because in some instances the HSRC team was unable to interview the householders on the list because they were away, or for other reasons. 70% of people actually interviewed said they had taken some action (visited or telephoned an EWS office to discuss the containment or resolution of the debt.

- A conservative estimate of 23% had paid something towards the debt.
- According to the consultants' Khanyisa figures an average of R114-36 was recovered per facilitator visit and this ranged from R17-42 in Mpumalanga to R377-59 in Newlands East.
- In cases where there was confusion over who should be paying the account, about half had succeeded in rectifying the matter at the time of the HSRC visit.

Objective 4: Reduction in Water Loss

- It was not possible to include this question *in the survey* as too few respondents read the meter on a regular basis.
- Statistics have, however, been compiled from the data assembled by EWS and analysed by the consultants. This indicates that there has been a *general decline* in the daily individual household consumption in the 20 wards during the term of the Project. In addition there has been a total reduction in the daily consumption in these wards of 3062kl.
- For those wards for which figures are available there has also been a daily reduction of 550 litres daily through forced leaks.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Broadly speaking, the Customer Services initiative has achieved its objectives and should be continued. There was evidence that the householders visited understood how to conserve water, that they knew what course of action to take and were aware of the probable outcome. A substantial number of householders had paid something towards settling their debt and/or having a water restrictor installed.

The attitude of the vulnerable families experiencing difficulties in meeting their bills is one of broad endorsement of a strategy to improve water services, despite sharp irritation expressed by some in the comments recorded by fieldworkers.

It is proposed that the administration of poor black communities should be raised to a new level. It is strongly recommended that the administration of the townships should be raised to the level of other communities such as suburbs i.e. the reference to houses by numbers and stands should be abandoned — streets should be named and street numbers assigned to houses. This would be important in confirming a new culture of respect for the residents quite, their postal and other communications, etc, apart from improved administration it would make possible. Such change would significantly improve the capacity of the Metro to respond to household and community issues.

It is recommended that there should be more extensive consultation with civic organisations on the basis which was initiated with the eThekweni Water Forum under the previous Minister of DWAF.

There are certain cases and places where the process followed by Customer Services is unlikely to yield results and other procedures should be followed:

- Highly vulnerable households should be dealt with on merit (eg child-headed households)
- An Indigency Policy should be set in place and publicized.
- The Council should discuss with civic organizations whether a flat rate payment is advisable.
- The expanded Public Works Programme should be extended to problematic areas.
- The public education campaign should continue but should include instruction on how to read meters and how to mend leaks.
- It is proposed that in the case of vulnerable households insurance against leaks is provided to stop the process of poor families falling into debt by events beyond their capacity to control.
- Finally it is proposed that consideration should be given to raising the level of free basic water provided by the Metro for larger households.

INTRODUCTION

The question of payment for water services by poor households is a key social policy issue in South Africa as municipalities are working towards providing a high level of service while poorer households are either experiencing stagnant or declining income. eThekweni Water Services has been noted for its innovatory approach to providing appropriate services to the poorest in the community but there are continuing challenges posed by rising expectations and a cost structure of better services.

The eThekweni Water Services have stated the following objectives and outcomes:

- Undertake quality water service education (cost effectively)
- Improve customer satisfaction with service provision
- Achieve improved payment levels or a reduction in debt levels
- Achieve a reduction in water loss and the consequent costs

The Customer Services project, which includes a number of these objectives as its brief, was established as an attempt to assist the poorest households by maintaining the minimum standards of delivery and avoiding the prospect of municipal officials having to cut off the needy from essential services.

The issues which are raised in the report straddle a number of departmental and professional fields; for instance, good management of water services has to be associated with housing policy, improved levels of administration of poor black formal areas (as is shown in the number of difficulties in following addresses), and most significantly welfare policy. The latter aspect goes further than the research objective and raises the question of close cooperation between the Department of Social Development and the Metro (as well as other departments) in setting out a clear welfare or specifically an indigency policy in relation to water services. This will be returned to in the conclusions.

Aim:

To evaluate the intervention by the consultants, Khanyisa Projects, in assisting those not paying their water bills every month to regularise their water use and payments.

Specific Objectives:

1. To investigate the effectiveness of the identification of the consumer problems.
2. To ascertain whether appropriate advice was offered to the consumer.
3. To ascertain whether appropriate action has resulted, firstly, by the consumer and secondly, by EWS.
4. To describe the changes attributable to the intervention, and the extent to which the intervention has been successful.
5. To look at outstanding problems and make recommendations for their resolution.

Methods:

After an initial meeting with Khanyisa consultants where they explained their experience with the project, they supplied the HSRC researchers with essential database files giving addresses of householders visited and reports on the problems encountered and the costs recovered.

Dr Hemson attended a number of public meetings with SANCO and other civic organisations where their perspective on payment issues was presented. He subsequently interviewed a number of councillors.

The following were also assessed:

- The social and political environment as it affects the success of the programmes, taking into account significant differences between areas, and of different types: better-off and poorer households, larger and smaller.
- The role of the Councillors as setting the policy environment for EWS' programme.

A survey of the affected consumers was conducted to quantify the success of problem identification, the measures proposed to solve the problems, and their resolution. A sample of 515 households was constructed from the approximately 7,000 interventions by area and by the nature of the problem. Extensive notes were taken of comments made by the respondents during the survey, resulting in both qualitative and quantitative data sets.

THE SURVEY

Of all recent surveys which the authors have undertaken, this survey has been particularly demanding of the fieldworkers because of the many difficulties in locating houses through the addresses provided (which were often stand or plot numbers). In addition there was further a high level of respondents who were not available. It appears that a significant number of families have two households; one in the urban and another in the rural area; a fact which is unremarkable except that both have to be maintained at the same time and could explain that the urban household cannot have the full attention of the head of the household.

In a number of cases, as is developed below, there is not a clear head of the household as both parents have died and siblings are undecided about who should take on the financial and administrative responsibilities.

In many communities, as will be reported below, there is scepticism or outright hostility to "the Metro" which was, at times, directed to the fieldworkers and made the successful completion of questionnaires more demanding.

Despite many of these difficulties a good proportion of the sample was covered and the results can be regarded as reflecting the conditions and responses of the 7000 affected households.

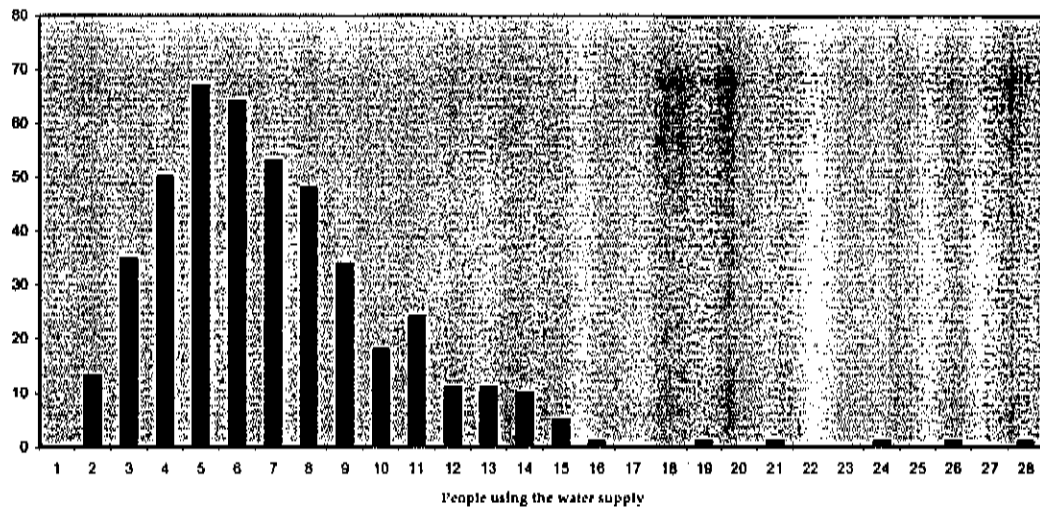
Table 1 Q1 Have you or someone in the household been approached by a facilitator from Khanyisa about your water bill?

	Q1
Visited by Khanyisa	444
Not visited by Khanyisa	60
No contact made by fieldworkers	11
Total	515

Two of the facilities surveyed were not households, but primary schools, with 561 and 1020 pupils and staff respectively, and the remainder had an average of 6.1 people using the water supply. 13.8% of the properties were receiving rent from tenants.

The size of the household has particular significance in this study. Nationally the 2001 Census reported an average family size of 3.9 individuals per household; the average here of the households experiencing difficulties in meeting their payments is of 6.1. The relationship between family size and socio-economic status will be extensively explored in the survey and related to specific conclusions and recommendations.

Figure 1
No. of people per household making use of the water supply



SAVING WATER

One of the main objectives in working to develop better consumer relations is to improve the quality of customer satisfaction to achieve a reduction both in debt levels and water loss. These components are closely related to water service education; a household which is keenly aware of domestic water loss will be more likely to have lower debt levels and to save the Metro services from wastage. The Metro has undertaken educational initiatives in pamphlets and on radio programs to achieve these objectives.

One of the pamphlets circulated to black working class communities provides a broad explanation of the metering system, gives the free number (080 1313013) and information about the amount of water consumed in particular activities such as flushing a toilet or having a bath. The pamphlet, as other communications from EWS, is intended to lead to better and more conservative water use. The strongest point made in terms of saving water relates to watching out for leaks and getting them repaired. The illustrations specifically point to three activities which should be avoided: letting a tap run while hanging up the washing, leaving a tap to run while drawing water, and using a hosepipe rather than a bucket in washing a taxi (see Appendix 1; the pamphlet: Ngisizeni bo!).

The questionnaire probed the awareness of conservation of water in a number of open-ended questions which allowed spontaneous mention of the issues by respondents and

provide their own interpretation of what they were committed to undertake. Most (88.1%) of respondents (n=444) claimed to be trying to save water, and almost all of these (97.7%) said that all members of the household co-operated. In Table 2 these points are reflected as follows:

The general message which is conveyed by the pamphlet; that washing things under running water should be avoided, had the highest spontaneous mention (35.3%). Specifically respondents mentioned that water should be poured into containers, that basins should be used or sinks with a plug, and that a basin should be used for bathing.

The second rank of messages is given to the practice that clothes should be washed only once or twice a week. Washing, and in particular rinsing clothes, is a major consumer of water and the response shows an awareness of quantity used.

The third rank is given to saving water in the use of the toilet by using dirty water to flush, not flushing too often, turning off water when the toilet is not in use, and putting a brick in the toilet.

The fourth rank is given to leaks: to repairing facilities, reporting problems, and using a container to catch leaking water.

The other points spontaneously mentioned by respondents refer to generally restricting the amount of water used, not leaving taps running, re-using water, using other water sources apart from the tap, and controlling children who may play with water.

Taken as a whole the points spontaneously mentioned show the following:

- An awareness of a number of ways of conserving water which are not mentioned in pamphlets or other messages;
- A comparatively low level of awareness of the need to repair leaks; and
- A number of ideas for saving water which restrict the use of water for general hygienic purposes.

In the pamphlet an illustration is made of the fact that a bath takes on average 120 litres; the largest single water use identified. If the minimum consumption of water is used, a single bath constitutes 60% of the 200 litres per household per day. The households who have problems in meeting their payments mention that a basin should be used for bathing (5.4%); reflecting a commitment to using a flannel and handwashing rather than bathing to save water.

Although this is not reflected in the pamphlet, washing clothes probably consumes more than a bath and respondents show a commitment to washing clothes less often (23.2%).

In general the message relating to not letting a tap run continuously is widely acknowledged (35.3%), while the priority message of repairing leaks as soon as possible is less widely understood and acknowledged (10.5%). Unfortunately there appears to be some misunderstanding of the capability of each household to undertake repairs, a point which will be returned to below.

Table 2 Save water n=371

Category	Detail		Total
Don't wash things under running water	Pour water into containers	16.7	35.3%
	Use basins or a sink with a plug	13.2%	
	Use a basin for bathing	5.4%	
Wash clothes only once or twice a week			23.2%
Save water in the toilet	Use dirty water to flush	5.7%	11.4
	Don't flush too often	3.5%	
	Turn off water when toilet not in use	1.9%	
	Put a brick in the toilet	0.3%	
Leaks	Repair leaks	8.9%	10.5%
	Report problems immediately	1.1%	
	Put container under leaking taps	0.5%	
Restrict the amount of water being used			9.7%
Don't leave taps running			4.6
Re-use water			3.5
Use other water			1.4
Don't let children play with water			0.5%

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The direct question about attitudes towards the management of water services finds that 58.1% rate EWS 'OK', 'Good', or 'Very good' and the remaining 41.9% rate services 'Poor' or 'Very poor'. This general assessment by a group of households who have had serious difficulties in their service appears quite high. Although few rate their service 'Very good', generally there is an endorsement of the view that EWS is making an effort to provide an improved service.

There are, however, substantial minorities with the opposite view. Although respondents report general satisfaction with EWS, importantly there are a number of sources of dissatisfaction. In particular, there is a substantial majority (73.4%) which feels that the water charges are not fair. The point will be returned to in the conclusion. There are other questions which relate to points of dissatisfaction.

Interruptions in the service.

A high level of interruptions were reported by the respondents (80.2%) who generally seem to experience a poor level of service in their area. The reasons relate mostly to burst pipes and repairs (60.2%) while a large proportion state they don't know why there has been an interruption (30.5%). The uncertainty seems quite understandable as the operations of the municipality may not be known.

Need for more information

Specifically there is confusion in relation to the operation of the free basic water strategy; although 38.8% report they are receiving the 200 litres free per day, the remaining 61.2% either report they do not or they don't know.

Most importantly in relation to understanding how the water service operates and managing water supply only 23.0% report that they know how to read a meter. This is a very significant point and, in discussion with civic organisations, is reported as a major point of dissatisfaction as a number of communities report they don't feel they don't understand and can't control their use of water as they don't have sufficient information.

A very high level of respondents (86.0%) report they can repair leaks in the house. This appears contradictory as the identified reasons for the problem and the qualitative responses often mention that there are leaks which are beyond the control of the household.

Confusion over who should be paying the account

Some accounts were not paid because the person receiving it did not think it was his or her responsibility, or felt unable to take on the responsibility. It is impossible to establish the rights and wrongs through a survey of this nature but it is clear that in many cases the non-payment is likely to continue unless some agreement is reached. The following are some examples from the interviewers notes:

1. The house was being used as an old age home. They were receiving free food from the Welfare Department.
2. The respondent complained that they were being charged for two households, their own and the next door house. The problem had been reported and was investigated and the neighbour told to pay. When she went to the Metro Office she was told she was not on the computer and that they could not register her.
3. Metro took a meter from a household of children where the parents had died. The children get water from the neighbour.
4. In Mpumalanga there are clusters of meters and people have difficulty in working out which one belongs to their household.

Table 3 Opinions and knowledge

	Comments	%
What do you feel about EWS management of water services? N=446	Very good	1.8
	Good	31.4
	OK	24.9
	Poor	29.1
	Very poor	12.8
Have you experienced an interruption in the past year? N=434	Yes	80.2
	No	19.8
What was the reason? N=341	Non-payment	9.1
	Burst pipe	45.2
	Repairs	15.0
	Don't know	30.5
Do you feel the charges for water are fair? N=434	Yes	27.6
Do you have free basic water of 200 lts a day? N=446	Yes	38.8
	No	28.3
	Don't know	33.0
If you have a restrictor are you getting 200 lts a day? N=239	Yes	46.0
	No	33.9
	Don't know	20.1
Do you know where the meter is? N=429	Yes	97.2
Do you know how to read a meter? N=426	Yes	23.0
Are you able to repair leaks in the toilet, kitchen and bathroom? N=442	Yes	86.0

INTERVIEW WITH FACILITATOR

The HSRC evaluation team first confirmed that the facilitator had in fact visited the household. According to the interviewer notes, where the householder confirmed the visit, the facilitators had conducted a thorough investigation of the property, examining the meter and looking for possible leaks inside and outside of the dwelling. As noted above (Table 1) in approximately 10% of cases interviewed by the HSRC, the householder claimed that the facilitator had not visited the household. On investigation it appeared that this non-contact was limited to one person.

In 56.3% of cases the facilitator's search had revealed an obvious problem. The two most frequently observed problems were leaks in the meter itself and leaks in the taps or toilets on the premises.

Table 4: Problem identification

Problem	No. of cases*
Meter leaking	74
Leaks in taps or toilets on the premises	63
Meter broken	19
Forced leaks	14
Customer owns property but has not changed account name	9
Leaks on road and on verge	9
Cross meter problem	8
Flow limiter not allowing a water supply	7
Meter hidden	5
Family is wasting water	4
Flow limiter, but normal water supply	4
Meter is not turning	4
Meters with wrong number	3
Wrong names/ surnames	3
Pipe burst underground	3
Account holder on bill not known	2
Broken valves	1
Meter incorrectly installed	1
Meter faulty	1
Flow limiter applied for but not installed	1

INFORMATION RECEIVED

More than half of the respondents had heard of Metro Water's toll free number (63%) or had seen the pamphlets (62%), and 49% had heard information about eThekweni water accounts on the radio.

The majority of respondents (75.5%) found the facilitator helpful. In an open-ended question about the information supplied by the facilitator (Table 5) most respondents gave *spontaneous* answers which indicated that they knew what action had to be taken and what the consequences might be. The most frequent answers given were that the debt would be frozen if they signed an acknowledgement, and that there would be no full pressure until the debt was paid. In a second set of questions (Tables 6a and 6b) householders who did not recall what they had been told by the facilitator were asked about each aspect of the action, and in most respects they understood the information.

Table 5: What information did you get from the facilitator about your debt on the water bill? N=439

Information received	Percent of cases*
Debt will be frozen if an acknowledgement of debt is signed	73.3
There will be no full pressure supply until the debt is paid	58.1
I must go to the office and pay the debt	31.4
Only told to go to the office	24.8
Just apply for a restrictor and you do not have to pay	23.2
None of the above	14.4
Go to the metro and ask them to reduce the debt	.5
Explain to the metro that the debt can't be paid	.2

*The respondent could give more than one answer

Table 6a: What information did you get about what happens when people fix the restrictor so they get full pressure? N=420

Information received	Percent of cases
Don't know	56.4
The entire connection is taken out	41.2
The person will be arrested	2.4

Table 6b: Information about the debt: Percentage agreement that the householder had been told.

Information received	Percent agreement
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You must go to the office to pay your bill n=203	78.8
Water will not be stopped for those who do not pay n=225	68.9
Just apply for the water limit n=190	57.9
Water and pipes will be taken away if you tamper with the regulator n=231	49.4
When you have signed the acknowledgement of debt interest will be stopped n=215	46.0

THE FACILITATOR'S ADVICE

Most people (89.9%, n=415) thought the advice given by the facilitator was correct. Only 9.2% thought it was wrong and 1.0% did not know. In an open-ended question about what the facilitator had suggested most people knew that they had to go to the Metro office and discuss the matter, either to make arrangements for payment or to have a restrictor installed (See Table 7). Nearly 70% of respondents said they had done this (Table 8), and almost all handed in the yellow paper to indicate that they had been seen by a facilitator. The most frequent excuse for not going was that the person had not had time (Table 9).

Once they got to the office 70.4% of the 267 respondents said they got good advice, finding the people at the desk polite and helpful (Table 10).

Although the survey respondents gave a positive response to the process for resolving the debt introduced by the facilitator, civic groups reported in interviews that once an acknowledgement of debt is signed there is a clause stating that the ownership of the house could be foreclosed if payment is not made. They maintained that this specific point had caused resistance to the Customer Service process.

Only a very small percentage (2.6%) of respondents who went to EWS office claimed to have paid the entire debt, but a larger proportion (63.2%) had paid something towards it and agreed to terms (Table 11). This process has been summarized on page 23 and the responses given during the survey were credible in the light of the figures on debt recovery reported to us by Khanyisa (see page 24).

Of the 39 people who tried to change the name of the account holder 22 (56.4%) succeeded, 13 (33.3%) were still pending at the time of interview, and 4 (10.3%) had given up.

Overall, of the respondents who had taken action, 59.9% said that EWS had helped to sort out the problem, and 66.5% thought that EWS was making an effort to do so.

In terms of water conservation, 10% of the respondents who had taken action (n=290) said the meter was showing less water was being used, 8.6% said that it was not, and 81.4% didn't know. This indicated that checking the meter had not been established as a way to control household water consumption.

Although a majority of respondents felt that the experience of an intervention was helpful, individual respondents complained that some of the people in the front line office "were very rude" and they were "unfairly handled". One respondent stated that the office had

refused to accept the amount he felt he could pay. Some were stated to be avoided for their rudeness. "These people ill-treat us as they tell us we have no clue about what is going on when we report".

Such remarks are, however, not made by the majority, but clearly the interface between residents and officials is a highly sensitive zone and impinges on the sense of dignity of local citizens.

Table 7 What did the facilitator suggest? N=396

Facilitator suggestion	Percent of cases
Go to Metro and make arrangement for payment	43.9
Go to Metro and request the 200lts of free water	20.5
Go to Metro and ask for the debt to be reduced	13.1
Go to office and report the problem	13.1
Go to Martin West and ask them to install a restrictor	3.8
Go to Metro and explain why the debt cannot be paid	2.0
Ask Metro to cancel the debt	1.5
Go to the office and change the name of the account holder	0.8
Call the toll free number if the pipes break	0.5
Go to court and have a member of the household appointed as head	0.3
Use cans to water the garden	0.3
Contact the water office	0.3

Table 8: The action taken. N=436

Action taken	Percent of cases
Went to the central office	59.6
Went to the local office	8.5
Phoned the EWS number	0.5
Other	0.7
No action	30.7

Table 9 Reasons given for not taking action. N=123

Reason	Percent of cases
No time to go	50.4
The owner of the house is not available	12.2
No money	12.2
No transport	8.9
Family difficulties	7.3
No one available to go	2.4
Did not think it was necessary	1.6
Lost the yellow paper	.8
Metro will not help	.8
Someone came and reduced the water flow	.8
Waiting for someone to come and fix the problem	.8
The person who was supposed to go passed away	.8
The responsible person must go to the office	.8

Table 10: Were the people at the desk polite and helpful n=282

Facilitator suggestion	Percent of cases
Very good	16.7
Good	56.0
OK	14.5
Poor	6.4
Very poor	6.4

Table 11: What did you do? N=234

What was done	Percent of cases
Paid entire debt	2.6
Made some payment and agreed to some terms	63.2
Agreed to a water restrictor	27.8
Had the account frozen	2.1
The debt was cancelled	0.9
None of the above	3.4

Table 12: If the respondent thought that EWS is not making an effort, what did they recommend should be done. N=49

Recommendations	Percent of cases
Cancel the debt	24.5
Reduce the debt	16.3
EWS should charge a flat rate	12.2
Make special provision for pensioners	8.2
Allow for payment on terms	6.1
Connect the water supply	6.1
Should have installed a water restrictor	4.1
EWS should have workshops to educate people	4.1
Should explain why bills are so high	4.1
Should check out the problems	4.1
Should give more free water	4.1
Other: should give free water, should not be turned away by guards	4.1

THE HOUSEHOLDER RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

A substantial proportion of the households experiencing difficulties (45.7%) felt 'Much better' or 'Better' after all the experiences starting with the intervention by the field team. This left the remaining 54.3% mostly feeling 'Just the same' (39.7%), 'Worse' (12.0%) or 'Much worse' (3.1%).

Table 13: Feelings after the experience. N=290

Feelings about the experience	Percent of cases
Much better	8.9
Better	36.8
Just the same	39.2
Worse	12.0
Much worse	3.1

As reported previously the majority of respondents reported satisfaction with EWS; but the analysis was intended as a problem solving exercise and explored those household types and areas where there are either higher or lower levels of dissatisfaction.

Breakdown by SES

We examined the possibility that the intervention was more successful with householders who were more affluent, by asking the interviewer to rate the appearance of the house as better than average, average or worse than average as a proxy for income or socio-economic status (SES).

House rating

Better off than neighbours: 27.7

Same as neighbours: 44.3

Worse off than neighbours: 28.0

On the whole the higher SES households were more receptive to the Customer Service intervention and they were more likely to think that EWS management is good, that people on the desk in the EWS offices were polite and helpful, and that the experience had left them with a positive feeling (See table 14). These households were more likely to have succeeded in getting some resolution to the problem they faced. Conversely the lower SES households reflect a series of attitudes which show that provided a negative or unimproved attitude at the end of the process with 39.3% instead of 61.7% reporting a positive feeling.

Table 14: Opinions about the process from different Socio-economic strata

	Higher SES	Rest	Significance at the 5%level
Thought that EWS management is good .	43.0%	28.8%	n=417, $\chi^2 = 7.675$, p=.006
Thought that the facilitator diagnosed the problem correctly	49.5%	59.9%	Ns*
Was the facilitator helpful	72.1%	77.2%	Ns
Took action after the Khanyisa interview	72.6%	70.5%	Ns
Found people polite and helpful at the Metro desk	77.3%	70.1%	n=273, $\chi^2 = 5.543$, p=.019
Did they give good advice	62.7%	73.8%	Ns
Did Metro help you sort out the problem [of the address]	67.5%	56.5%	Ns
Is Metro helping you to sort out the [general] problem?	69.7%	65.1%	Ns
Meter showing less water is being used	10.4%	9.1%	Ns
Had positive feelings about the experience	61.7%	39.3%	n=287, $\chi^2 = 11.766$, p=.001

*Non significant

One of the most important considerations in relation to water consumption is that of family size: the norm for domestic consumption established in policy of 200 litres to be provided per household per day within 200m of the house. The amount is based on the consumption of 50 litres per person in a family of four. Most importantly this is the amount set in free basic water; for the poorest of families unable to pay for water this would be the maximum consumption. If this amount is actually provided per household (and considerably less is consumed in most rural households) a household of two is, for instance, much better placed than a family of seven. In the former consumption is at the level of 100 litres per capita and in the latter at 28.6 litres per capita. Larger families are generally associated with lower levels of income and are also likely to find it more difficult to meet water bills.

In Table 15 many of the issues found significant among poorer families (in Table 14) are replicated with the larger families (with 7 or more member). The analysis which follows focuses on the larger families. The larger households largely did not think that EWS management good, were less likely to consider Metro helping to sort problems of correcting an address or their problem generally, and were considerably less likely to have positive feelings about their experience.

It appears that the poorer households felt a negative feeling after the whole experience; one which also includes the view that EWS is not providing good water management.

Despite their feelings, the overwhelming majority (72.2%) had embarked on action after having had the interview.

Table 15: Opinions about the process from different sized households

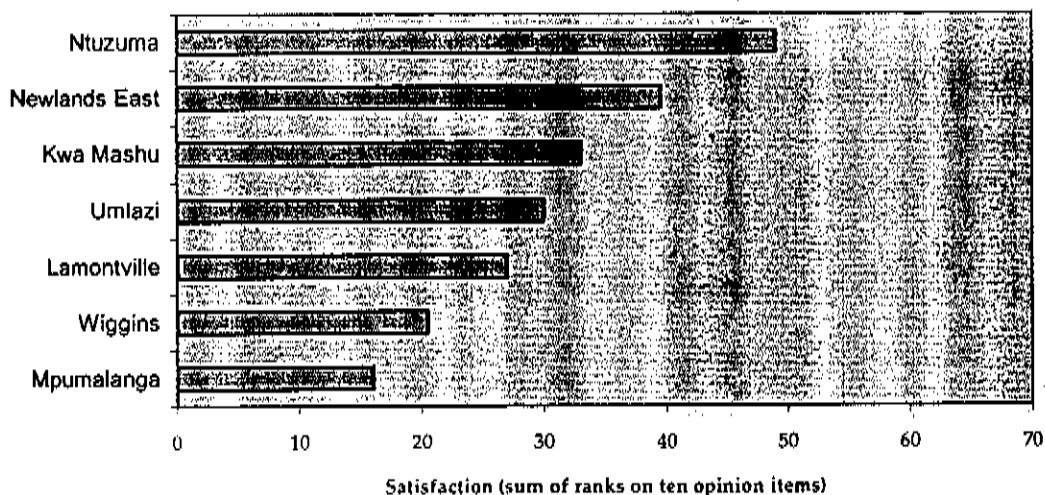
	Number of people using the water			Significant differences between groups (p<.05)
	<4 n=96 %	4-6.9 n=183 %	>7 n=165 %	
Thought that EWS management is good .	37.5	38.3	24.8	N=444, Kendall's tau=2.558, p=.011
Thought that the facilitator diagnosed the problem correctly	51.1	57.6	57.1	Ns*
Was the facilitator helpful	78.7	75.3	73.6	Ns
Took action after the Khanyisa interview	55.4	75.3	72.2	N=432, Kendall's tau=-2.106, p=.035
Found people polite and helpful at the Metro desk	79.6	73.0	69.1	Ns
Did they give good advice	77.1	67.8	69.9	Ns
Did Metro help you sort out the problem [of the address]	75.0	58.5	53.4	N=273, Kendall's tau=2.425, p=.015
Is Metro helping you to sort out the [general] problem?	82.0.	63.8	61.8	N=268, Kendall's tau=2.196, p=.028
Meter showing less water is being used	12.5	11.5	6.4	Ns
Had positive feelings about the experience	57.9	46.8	37.7	N=289, Kendall's tau=2.496, p=.013

*Non significant

Breakdown by area of residence

When the sample was divided into seven areas (or townships) it did not contain sufficient cases in some areas to make meaningful statistical comparisons based on percentages. It was possible, however, to indicate a rank order based on the agreement with the positive statements in Tables 14 and 15 through the creation of a ranking scale for each statement where 7 represented the most positive opinion and 1 the least. By summing the rankings on the 10 statements, areas could be ranked in terms of positive support for ETW and the Customer Service initiative. Figure 2 demonstrates that Ntuzuma and Newlands East were at the top of the ranking and Lamontville, Wiggins and Mpumlanga the least. The two biggest areas in our sample, KwaMashu and Umlazi, held middle ranks, probably because they have a range of different conditions within the townships so the overall rankings tended towards the mean.

Figure 2
Rank order scale of satisfaction with the process



The interviewers notes from the three least satisfied areas gave some suggestions as to why there should be a particular difficulty in those areas, but it was not possible to establish whether complaints were justified.

- The notes from Mpumalanga gave an account of many derelict houses, the legacy of the violence in the area, and a high unemployment rate. Some of the survey respondents were now using a nearby stream for washing clothes and one was considering moving to a rural area because she could not afford to live there.
- The notes from Wiggins indicated a high level of dissatisfaction with the service. Respondents said the charges were too high, and that they continued to receive accounts after the restrictor had been installed.

- In Lamontville the interviewer was told of corruption in the local office from a number of sources. A respondent said that although R100 had been paid, there was no receipt and it did not appear on the next statement. In the context of the survey it was not possible to establish whether this was a rumour, or whether it had a basis in fact. There appeared to be widespread disregard for the meters in this particular area. There were many which were broken and the caps were missing.

This study has shown that there are significant differences between areas. This is reflected in a number of ways:

- The administration of areas and the naming of roads and zones;
- Receptivity of communities to the messages on water accounts; and
- Levels of community organisation.

The research immediately reflected a key problem in urban administration; that it is often quite difficult to locate households by address. In the apartheid era little attention was paid to the naming of streets and the numbering of houses by streets; many were simply known by their stand numbers. This problem is still with us and is resented by communities who feel that the townships are still dealt with somewhat differently from suburbs even in the newer townships such as Wiggins. The difficulty in locating houses was a major factor in slowing the completion of the survey.

In many communities there is scepticism about the intentions of EWS and in some parts of these communities open hostility to fieldworkers who were seen as representing the Metro. In Umlazi Sections B, C, and W some households were reported to be 'very furious' and uncooperative. The latter felt that the Metro is 'bothering us' by 'asking the same questions'.

At times the fieldworkers were warned about a combination of crime and hostility and they moved in pairs in Umlazi and KwaMashu. The they reported in some areas:

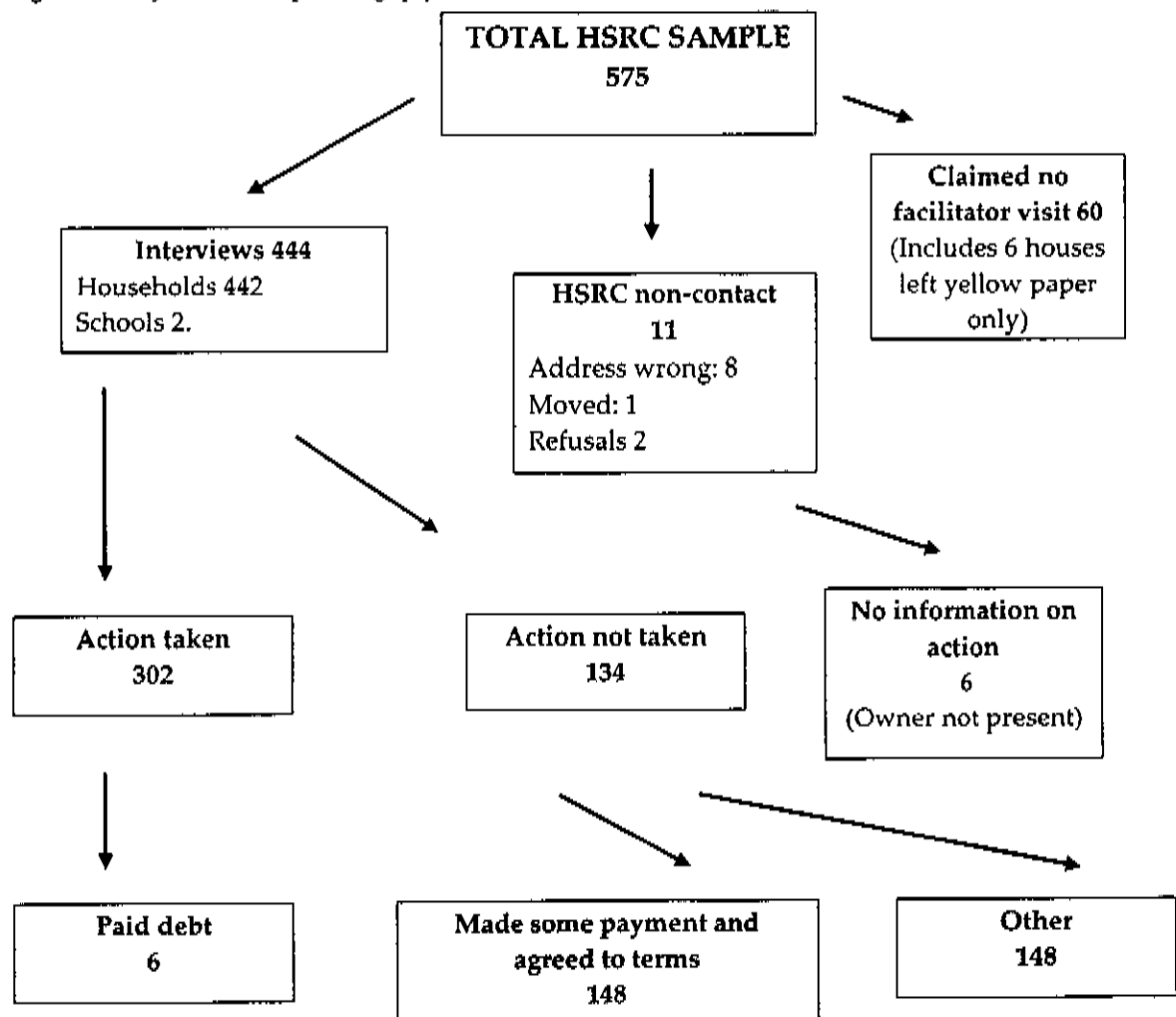
The people are very suspicious and want to chase away fieldworkers who they think are Metro employees. They do not want the Metro to be told of what they are saying.

In general, as the survey statistics show, people accept many aspects of water service administration but also mention they are paying too high bills or not getting 200 litres of free water a day. In Mpumalanga there has been a significant change from the past and residents received the fieldworker warmly and expressed concern about issues such as the effectiveness of the free basic water policy rather than open hostility to EWS.

PAYMENT OF DEBT

The original sample of 575 householders approached by the HSRC in November 2004 resulted in 444 interviews of householders who had discussed the question of non-payment of the account with the facilitators. According to the information given by the householders, 302 people had contacted Metro following this, 6 of these had paid the debt in full and a further 148 had made some payment and agreed to terms. A conservative estimate based on the original 575 names shows that at least 52.5% of people approached had taken the step of contacting EWS, and at least 23.3% of them had paid something towards the debt.

Figure 3 Survey estimates of percentage payment of debt



DEBT RECOVERY

From the figures supplied to the HSRC a total of R2 335 500 has been received in payment as a result of both the 11 793 household visits and of attendance at EWS offices. It is calculated that the payment received on average is R198 and the range extends from R82 per visit in Ward 6, Mpumalanga, to R413 in Ward 11, Newlands East, which was also the Ward which made the highest level of payment.

Table 15: Payment received

Ward	Ward Description	Total Cash Received	Total CSA Visits	Average Payment received per visit
6	Woodyglen (Mpumalanga)	R 29,760.32	365	R 82
11	Newlands East	R 268,749.17	651	R 413
29	Bonella, Cato Crest, Wiggins	R 85,097.79	536	R 159
40	KwaMashu B, D, E	R 106,224.74	727	R 146
41	KwaMashu C, K, Ntuzuma B	R 36,533.92	296	R 123
42	KwaMashu J, Ntuzuma F, H	R 109,526.24	654	R 167
45	KwaMashu M, N, L, Ntuzuma H	R 125,288.78	615	R 204
46	KwaMashu B, E, F, G	R 80,194.46	543	R 148
47	Besters, KwaMashu I, n, h	R 61,508.10	658	R 93
74	Lamontville	R 114,564.16	513	R 223
78	Umlazi J, K, L	R 159,555.94	687	R 232
79	Umlazi E	R 154,632.55	592	R 261
80	Umlazi A, B, E	R 134,547.23	697	R 193
81	Umlazi C	R 74,336.11	681	R 109
82	Umlazi R, N, W	R 158,028.20	458	R 345
83	Umlazi M	R 142,704.32	822	R 174
85	Umlazi P	R 119,809.68	678	R 177
86	Umlazi Y, Z	R 126,680.95	769	R 165
87	Umlazi Q, D	R 194,850.29	642	R 304
88	Umlazi A, T, S	R 52,906.68	209	R 253
	Grand Total	R 2,335,499.63	11,793	R 198

WATER SAVINGS

The following table gives an indication of the extent to which the Customer Service intervention has been able to reduce the consumption in the 20 areas. In the table below average consumption figures are calculated over a six month period in which the project has been active. The data are then sorted according to wards and it is clear that there has been a general downward trend in individual household consumption between July 2004 and January 2005 with the exception of Ward 6 and 11. In Ward 11 consumption *increased* by 50 litres per consumer (or household) per day while in Ward 47 consumption *declined* by 1,800 litres per consumer (or household) per day.

Table 16: Changes in average daily consumption, July 2004-January 2005

Ward	No. Consumers households	Jul 04 Average daily consumption	Jan 05 Average daily consumption	Consumption daily diff.
6	423	0.68	0.72	0.04
11	722	0.89	0.94	0.05
29	650	0.88	0.81	-0.08
40	754	1.01	0.80	-0.22
41	315	0.92	0.77	-0.15
42	692	0.91	0.74	-0.17
45	631	1.04	0.82	-0.21
46	576	1.10	0.93	-0.17
47	640	2.77	0.98	-1.79
74	565	1.14	1.03	-0.11
78	700	0.84	0.81	-0.04
79	689	1.07	0.74	-0.33
80	676	0.99	0.77	-0.22
81	687	1.02	0.71	-0.32
82	494	0.86	0.61	-0.24
83	823	0.88	0.69	-0.18
85	586	0.81	0.58	-0.22
86	787	0.86	0.69	-0.17
87	655	1.17	1.03	-0.13
88	225	1.00	0.72	-0.28
TOTAL	12,290			

To what extent has this decline in individual consumption led to a decline in the unaccounted for water *by ward*? In the table below there are considerable savings in Ward 47 and lesser savings in water loss elsewhere. These savings are often due to changes among even a small number of consumers getting runaway leakages under control.

Table 17: Changes in area average daily consumption

	No. Consumers households	Jul 04 daily area consumption, kl	Jan 05 daily consumption	Daily area diff, kl
6	423	286.07	304.70	18.63
11	722	640.19	678.62	38.43
29	650	574.96	525.66	-49.29
40	754	762.86	599.85	-163.01
41	315	288.30	241.82	-46.47
42	692	626.91	509.99	-116.92
45	631	654.12	519.94	-134.17
46	576	634.04	533.38	-100.66
47	640	1772.63	628.59	-1144.04
74	565	644.12	580.18	-63.94
78	700	588.80	564.28	-24.52
79	689	740.20	511.94	-228.26
80	676	666.66	518.75	-147.91
81	687	702.95	486.39	-216.56
82	494	423.67	302.87	-120.80
83	823	722.60	570.44	-152.15
85	586	472.08	342.33	-129.74
86	787	675.85	545.79	-130.06
87	655	763.68	675.85	-87.83
88	225	225.17	162.80	-62.38
TOTAL	12,290	12,865.82	9,804.18	-3,061.65
DAILY AVERAGE	12,290	1.05	0.80	-0.25
MONTHLY AVG	12,290	31.41	23.93	-7.47

In the table above there has been a total saving of 3,062kl as a whole over the period and a monthly average decline in water consumed of 7.5kl. The greatest change has been in Ward 47 with a decline of 1,144kl daily while in Ward 11 there has been an increase of 38kl daily. The extreme figures in Ward 47 need further investigation.

Altogether there has been a reduction in water consumption for the 12 290 customers of 91 806 kl per month. This translates in a cost saving (at R5.42 per kl) of just under R500 000 per month.

To what extent has there been a decline in the volume of water 'consumed' as forced leaks? Forced leaks are those leaks which are so large that they are identified by EWS as requiring

immediate intervention; the 'force' applies to the municipal intervention to stop a leak which is increasing bills to a level at which they are impossible to pay. Leaks of this type are either reported to EWS by the people, by technicians, or by the Customer Service facilitators visiting households. The question is whether the intervention is succeeding in reducing the wastage.

The table below gives an indication of the number of forced leaks and the monthly 'consumption' or waste. This figure is divided by the number of leaks recorded in July 2004. The figure of the difference between July 2004 and January 2005 indicates that among the Wards for which figures are available there has been a daily reduction of 550 litres. The greatest savings were made in Ward 42 where daily consumption through forced leaks declined by 2,25kl per day while losses increased in Ward 83 by 5.13kl per day.

The high monthly consumption in January 2005 indicates that some of the leaks have been attended to but many still remain.

Table 18: Changes in daily consumption through forced leaks by ward, July 2004-January 2005

Ward	No. Forced Leaks	Monthly Consumption Jul 04	Monthly Consumption Jan 05	Difference
11	1	1.27	0.19	-1.08
29	8	27.12	25.68	-1.44
40	2	5.26	1.44	-3.82
41	3	5.28	2.55	-2.73
42	15	13.65	9.9	-3.75
45	1	3.07	0.82	-2.25
46	5	28.9	42.65	13.75
47	12	51.84	41.28	-10.56
78	15	43.05	27	-16.05
79	15	50.7	37.8	-12.9
80	15	30.75	21.45	-9.3
81	7	15.33	8.19	-7.14
82	1	2.48	0.48	-2
83	3	14.22	29.61	15.39
86	5	21.85	22	0.15
87	29	64.38	32.48	-31.9
TOTAL	137	379.15	303.52	-75.63
DAILY AVERAGE		2.77	2.22	-0.55
MONTHLY AVERAGE		83.03	66.46	-16.56

COUNCILLOR RESPONSES TO CUSTOMER SERVICE PROJECT.

Interviews were conducted with six councillors who were visited at their offices in Lamontville and Umlazi and, in addition, Nigel Gumede, Chair of Ethekewini Water Committee was interviewed at his office. At their offices were numbers of residents awaiting assistance, ranging from 3 to 21, and a number of these had queries related to water services. These interviews helped provide the perspective of councillors on a wide range of issues associated with the project. The councillors see the water as a crucial political question and important to their re-election: "Water has been the issue every time around elections".

All the councillors were happy about the Customer Service initiative and saw themselves as initiating it and being part of it.

- We as councillors took the resolution to initiate the door-to-door campaign to educate people on reading the water bills and proper water use.

They see it as a success and note particularly that there had been a decline in people coming to their offices on billing issues, a development which was welcomed.

- I used to have 20 people coming to see me a week about water problems, now there are only one or two a week.
- The people are happy with the water service and this has been indicated by a decline in the number of people coming to the office on the issue.
- Payment level has increased, people have learned a lot about saving water.

The councillors felt the project had helped bridge the state of fear people felt when they saw bills so high (figures mentioned range from R9 000 to R150 000) that were impossible to meet.

- They feel they cannot go to the office or attend meetings when they are called because they think councillors will convince them to pay.
- Most of the people not paying are unemployed, the debt accumulates up to R9000 and the person is afraid even to go the relevant offices for fear of being arrested.

The Customer Service project had helped overcome some of these fears and to offer those who felt in danger with an alternative. The EWS officials were seen as 'very cold people who don't speak Zulu' but now Batho Pele principles were being applied. There were fewer people attending the councillors' offices as more are now going directly to EWS Customer Service.

Despite these marks of success there is some unhappiness about EWS is not as 'people friendly' as other departments, and that, in particular, the councillors' feedback was not always appreciated.

- Service is zero compared to Roads which is so friendly, you ask them and they come; EWS is run more like an empire.

- I struggle to get assistance as a councilor and you find that it is even worse for an ordinary person. A person was sent with a letter from me and she alleges that the attitude that she got from there from a senior person was so bad. I have few other cases of attitude problems with metro water staff. I'm not very impressed. There are individual exceptions but right from the bottom to the top to the bottom I personally have a problem with EWS. As an organization there is a problem.
- They take out meters after three notices but should consult the councilor so he can intervene. The councillors command a high level of respect in communities and cannot be sidelined. They are disconnecting without the councilor being aware; we could go door to door to solve the problem. There have been problems in disconnecting people without reason.
- There is a perfect service, we know where to get the people we need.

Some also felt more consideration should be given to those who had been disconnected:

- When people have been disconnected a reconnection fee is required and most people cannot afford to pay it upfront.

Despite this the councilors felt that their opinion was not ignored particularly on the issue of recommend rebates on accumulated billing debts. The Data Collection Form was also being used by councilors to initiate the process for a household being registered as indigent. Despite this many councilors felt in a dilemma as the municipal indigency policy was not clear either to themselves nor to their ward members:

- The indigency policy issue is a difficult one.
- The indigency policy is complex and should be broken down to address different specific issues.

All councilors felt that the problem of unpaid bills was related to unemployment within the household. Large families were particularly affected. One councilor said both that there was a 'culture of non-payment' but also that the people not able to pay bills were unemployed.

A number of councilors mentioned that they were aware of the problem of bills being addressed to the wrong person. This problem was caused by a mistake or by people not being able to afford the cost of transferring title deeds but the councilors were assisting with advice and support to get a letter of appointment to an individual within the household which enabled the Metro to make arrangements over billing. A number of councilors mentioned they had assisted in achieving the letter of appointment to a responsible individual within the household, but felt that the problems relating to transferring deeds was beyond them. There were considerable problems particularly when a head of household dies and people then struggled to regularise municipal services.

Generally councilors felt that the free basic water policy was operating satisfactorily but some felt that the basic level of free basic water should be reviewed upwards.

The councilors in Umlazi reported there had been efforts from within the community to organise around demands for a flat rate. This group had attracted residents but had been

disbanded as they had charged people to join and had not paid the municipal bills of members as promised.

- There was a concerned group around water issues, which charged people R10 to join. This group did deliver on their promise of a flat rate and it is no longer there, the leader of the group became a PR councilor and is now silent on these issues.
- There was the R20 Rate Payers Association to get their water and unemployment concerns addressed. This group was disbanded by the people and some of its members are now in the council and they are not saying anything about the issues they were fighting about.

The councilors felt they adequately represented the people and that there was no need for civics within the Alliance.

- As an Alliance partner there is no need for SANCO now that the ANC is in power, as it was there particularly against the apartheid regime and councilors who were appointed and not elected by the people.

Despite this point there was some lack of clarity about the formation of ward committees in municipal structures.

Councilor Nigel Gumede put forward the view that this would soon be rectified:

- Ward committees will be running parallel with the municipal structures and in their portfolios there will be a person that will be dealing with water issues and services delivery in each ward. The ward committees are right structures to be implemented help take part of the workload off the councilor.

The latter point reflects thinking among some councilors that the ward committees provide the opportunity of having substantial discussion with residents; some councilors were, however, ambiguous about the need for ward committees. They tended to highlight the role of councillors themselves in mediating between Ethekewini Water Services and customers.

CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSES CUSTOMER SERVICE PROJECT.

Interviews conducted with SANCO on 3 November 2004, on two subsequent occasions, and civic meetings were attended. It appears from these discussions that the leaders of civic organisations felt the role of councillors (although varying from one area to another) was not interventionist. Councilors relied rather on the established policy of the department and some amelioration of the effect of water restriction on particular families.

Civic organisations declare that the issue of payment for water services could not be separated from that of housing rates and electricity; the link had been firmly established through consolidated billing. In this respect water payment issues were not clearly distinguished from other payments and a general policy was needed to the issue of council payments.

Their approach is that of the community and citizen rather than that of the individual household and customer relationships; that the overwhelming majority of their membership

in the black townships are poor and are struggling to survive. From this perspective, there is strong objection to consolidated billing which, they felt, cuts across the classical survival strategy of the poor of paying one bill at a time and prioritising different necessities at different times.

They felt that there were aspects of unfairness in policy. Civic groups contrast the pressure on households in formal areas to pay their bills in comparison to informal settlements where water is available without cost from communal taps.

In an interview with SANCO officials it was felt that councillors were not representing their constituents particularly on the question of rates, but also on consolidated billing. Despite the merging of different issues, the water question is, however, regarded as the most important of all services and the solution is seen in consultation with civic groups.

- We can't live without water and the Metro must sit down with the community, but they don't listen to us. That is why we make illegal connections. As SANCO, how can we control that, because people have to live?

Civic organisations and professionals in the field were interviewed in relation to the role of councillors. It appears there is some conflict in the roles of civic groups and councillors and mutual suspicion. SANCO argues that councillors should consult them specifically in relation to key community issues such as consolidated billing and water service policy.

They complain that there has been some implementation of an indigency policy but that it is arbitrary and at the councillor's discretion.

Professionals in the field argue that councillors do not see issues from the same perspective as officials; and that the administration of water services in the councillor's view is a political problem i.e. they feel it should not work to their disadvantage. They felt that councillors were not generally directly involved in the Customer Service initiative. Councillors do, however, get lists of people who are listed as big debtors and may interact with these families; and make direct interventions. This does, however, raise a question of confidentiality, but does show proactive intervention in a few cases.

Some respondents and civic organisations complain that letters from councillors are not treated with respect by municipal officials.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the survey the researchers have reviewed data provided by the Khanyisa consultants. According to the Customer Service records out of a total of 12 290 households visited, 4 825 (or 41%) are confirmed as having come to EWS offices. According to the records following agreements reached, 9 816 had an increase in their debt levels (R14,1 million), 3 927 had what is termed a 'decrease in debt' mainly due to the 'freezing' of debt on the signing of an Acknowledgement of Debt (AOD) and application for flow limiters. The records showed that 2 216 customer had no debt. A number of customers (1 403) have applied for flow limiters, which amounts to 29% of those visited who came to EWS offices. The total cash received following 11 793 visits has been R2 335 500 and the total saving calculated in terms of reduction of water loss is R500 000 per month.

On the whole the Customer Services process is having an impact in securing the objectives of EWS but is working unevenly. There appear to be 3 different dynamics at work: firstly, the size of the household determines how difficult it is to manage the water usage; secondly the socio-economic status determines the ability to pay towards the debt, and thirdly the area of residence seems to be associated with an attitude towards civic responsibility.

A substantial portion of the sample consists of very poor and very large households, and these were less satisfied with the process and found it more difficult to take action.

Although it was a subsidiary aspect of the survey, there were a number of questions relating to the households' attitude to saving water. As has been argued this is an important component of household awareness of problems in domestic management and in understanding why water bills could be very high. The households show a responsible attitude to water conservation with indications that washing of clothes is limited, that members of the household use basins rather than baths to wash themselves, that the 'pour-flush' method is used, and that generally there is an attempt to restrict the amount of water being used by, for instance, not leaving taps running.

The civic groups complained loudly that they were not consulted either about the EWS Customer Service project, which they stated they knew nothing about, and about the research itself. SANCO, for instance, felt that research should be conducted with their cooperation to help identify the key problems in each community and to help to resolve these. Community groups insisted that they were not opposed to paying for water but that there should be a clear basis for the free basic water (i.e. many households were claimed not to be receiving the 200 litres per day) and a flat rate for those consuming more than the basic level.

There was a need for action in certain circumstances outside of the approach:

- There were a number of complaints about the meters malfunctioning in one way or another, and a number of indications that the meters had been damaged. Whatever the cause, this constituted a substantial part of the problem, and needs carefully considered action.
- There are households where it is difficult to establish who should or could pay the account, eg charities, child-headed households, households where the head of the household has recently died.
- Crime is a factor in some areas in establishing the service (because it puts officials in danger when they try to work in the area) and there was a suggestion of graft in Lamontville offices which respondents want investigated.
- These are generally poor communities, and once the debt gets past a certain level it seems impossible to pay it and people give up and become uncooperative. Under these circumstances in the interests of conserving water other solutions should be considered. The survey area breakdown (Figure 2) and the payment estimate by area (Table 15) demonstrate the most problematic areas in this respect. Very large households and very poor households are particularly at risk.
- We have discussed elsewhere the difficulty for the householder in detecting and mending leaks, and this applies to schools as well. EWS already has mechanisms in place which could be adapted to fit the circumstances in poor areas: insurance against undetected leaks, an early warning system when water consumption increases dramatically, and approved plumbing contractors. We speculate that if insurance to cover the cost of mending domestic were mandatory, and plumbing teams acted promptly on early warnings of increased consumption, it might serve the dual purpose of reducing water wastage and consumer debt.
- In the case of schools, it is ethically unacceptable, and probably violates children's Constitutional rights, for children to be legally obliged to attend institutions where their health is endangered by a lack of clean water because the water supply has been cut off. EWS should continue to supply schools with water, but recover the costs from the customer in terms of their contract with the customer. This is a legal issue between government departments and consequently should not form part of the initiative. It is, however, a serious matter. We have noted in other research, that in many schools no official is accountable for hygiene and sanitation in the school and this is an issue which should be discussed between departments.

One absence in the study, which was not taken up in the survey but which featured in the discussions with civic organisations, is that of social welfare. In the municipal framework this is featured in terms of indigency policy, an aspect of policy which is generally understood to be underdeveloped nationally.

Comparable research conducted in Westcliff, Chatsworth, gives evidence that water crises are generally associated or precipitated by a number of family issues, such as a death in the family in the case of large families, and in particular the death of a breadwinner. There is evidence¹ that householders often fail to pay their accounts when a crisis strikes (for example, loss of employment, death in the family, serious illness) or where there is a change in the household, such as when an employed daughter gets married. In poor households the debt quickly mounts beyond an affordable amount during such times.

In the reports from fieldworkers it is mentioned that child-headed families are particularly vulnerable. In the trauma and impoverishment associated with the death of a breadwinner it seems that households slip into debt problems which become impossible to meet from household resources. There are reports that social grants are, at times, difficult to access and take considerable time to obtain.

In these circumstances there is clearly a need for intervention by the Department of Social Development; the families are vulnerable and need assistance not only to be able to access sufficient water to maintain health but also to pursue education and other activities leading the household out of poverty.

¹ Reena Parikh. 2004. Assessment of the Service Delivery of Water in eThekweni: a case study of Westcliff. School for International Training, p33.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The first recommendation is that the administration of the townships should be raised to the level of other communities such as suburbs i.e. the reference to houses by numbers and stands should be abandoned – zones should be named as in the case of suburbs, streets should be named and street numbers assigned to houses. Umlazi is reported to be a 'nightmare' and very badly numbered. This would be important in confirming a new culture of respect for the residents, and improving their postal and other communications, etc, apart from improved administration it would make possible. Such change would significantly improve the capacity of the Metro to respond to household and community issues.

The Customer Services approach has been valuable in encouraging people to make arrangements about their water debt. It has also shown up cases where the addresses to which the accounts are being sent are incorrect, the meters malfunction or are incorrectly positioned and other such problems which can be rectified by EWS. It appears to be a useful way to address the sometimes chaotic situation with respect to water payments. It needs to continue, but the procedures in relation to vulnerable households should be modified.

It is recommended that there should be more extensive consultation with civic organisations on the basis which was initiated with the eThekweni Water Forum under the previous Minister of DWAF.

It should be recognized that there are certain cases and places where the process followed by Customer Services is unlikely to yield results and other procedures should be followed:

There are households and establishments that have a large debt, and are unable to pay for water at present and for the foreseeable future.

Guidelines should be set for excluding these households from the normal billing process, and making other arrangements for them. For instance, there should be co-operation with the Department of Social Welfare in identifying child-headed households and making suitable arrangements with immediate effect.

The implementation of an Indigency Policy would also serve to regularize the accounting procedure if proper controls were in place. Councils feel it is starting to work but there are problems relating to the many aspects of its operation. Civic organisations complain that the Indigency Policy document is not available to communities.

Many householders would favour a flat rate instead of a variable water bill, as it would be easier to plan and maintain. Contemporary billing is,

however, being conducted on the basis of meters and the quantity of water consumed. It is proposed that there should be a dialogue with civil society and with local councillors in vulnerable communities to discuss this proposal which is being put forward by vulnerable households as well as by civic organisations.

Three of the areas in this survey have shown a high level of dissatisfaction with the system. An initiative is needed to pursue development initiatives which to create local employment, reduce crime, and improve all services than to concentrate on debt recovery.

The public education campaign should continue but should include instruction on how to read meters and how to mend leaks. The question of repairing leaks was given relatively low priority in the responses to the question on saving water (Table 2), but was a major problem causing water wastage. Clearly it is not a simple matter for householders in poor areas to repair leaks without proper tools or the means to purchase them, or to purchase the services of a plumber.

The Metro does provide for insurance against massive leakages which are the responsibility of households; it is proposed that in the case of vulnerable households this insurance is provided to stop the process of poor families falling into debt by events beyond their capacity to control.

Council should consider as a matter of urgency what measures can be put in place to assist in the regularisation of ownership of houses, the transfer of title deeds, and providing letters of appointment to responsible household members. With the increasing number of children having to take over responsibility for the household after the death of their parents, there should be a proactive policy to assist in the formalities of ownership and billing questions.

Finally it is proposed that consideration should be given to raising the level of free basic water provided by the Metro. The initiative by eThekweni Municipality to provide free basic water at 6kl per household predates its adoption in national policy. The evidence from the survey is that 200 litres per household daily is just not enough, particularly for larger families. Yet larger families are those which are generally the poorest and least able to meet their bills. It is proposed that the Metro consider a policy of providing 400 litres per household daily free. This would provide 67 litres per individual daily for a family of 6, less than the amount for a bath, but would help alleviate the desperate conditions for many vulnerable households.