

# The Water Dialogues – South Africa

## “Enhancing delivery through dialogue”

Worldwide more than one billion people lack a safe water supply, while two and a half billion have no access to sanitation. To remedy this situation some actors have promoted the involvement of the private sector in service delivery, while others have opposed this, maintaining that public delivery is preferable and no profit should be made from water services. The conflict is having a significant negative impact on progress in delivering services.

Municipalities in South Africa face many challenges in meeting the constitutional requirements to ensure effective, equitable and sustainable delivery of water supply and sanitation, provided affordably to all. This is taking into account the highly skewed distribution of wealth, service provision and water resources. In the efforts to address these challenges a number of different approaches to service delivery including commercial approaches and Private Sector Partnerships (PSP) have been used.

The Water Dialogues- South Africa provides the opportunity to create a constructive dialogue to identify, critically analyse and evaluate these approaches leading to greater understanding of service delivery models. It is envisaged that this understanding will lead to more effective service delivery models to contribute to universal supply of safe water and sanitation.

The Water Dialogues - South Africa (WD-SA) is national multi-stakeholder dialogue process and research project analysing the role of the public and private sector in the delivery of universal water and sanitation in the country.

### ***Context***

The Water Dialogues is an international initiative to bring the range of views and constituencies round the table to constructively discuss, review and analyse whether and how the private sector has a role in water supply and sanitation.

During the 2001 International Conference on Freshwater in Bonn, a multi-stakeholder working group was established to oversee an international scoping process on water and the private sector. In 2004, a strong majority of the participants at the International Stakeholder Workshop in Berlin agreed that a multi-stakeholder review of water supply and sanitation was needed, stating:

*The overarching goal of a multi-stakeholder review is to contribute to making progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for water supply and sanitation, prioritising the need to achieve for the poor the human right of affordable and sustainable access to water and sanitation, and to attain the long-term goals of universal access and poverty eradication.*

It was also agreed that the review would take place via national processes feeding into an international process.

South Africa is one of five participating countries, including Uganda, Brazil, Indonesia and the Philippines, that have initiated a review process guided by a multi-stakeholder group. The South African Working Group has agreed to focus its review on both public and private sector delivery, with emphasis on how to improve public sector delivery, particularly in less well resourced municipalities.

***The Backbone - Codes for participation***

Recognising the potential for conflict amongst stakeholders, all members of the WD-SA Working Group agreed to abide by a Code of Conduct with the following principles:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-stakeholder process</li> <li>• Openness and transparency</li> <li>• Mutual respect</li> <li>• Confidentiality</li> <li>• Accountability</li> <li>• Innovative approach</li> <li>• Collective interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ownership of the results</li> <li>• Respect for minority views</li> <li>• Open minds, co-operation, and a spirit of serious inquiry</li> <li>• Sensitive to the distinction between facts and perceptions, and to complexity</li> <li>• Dynamic and forward-looking</li> <li>• Commitment to the process</li> </ul>
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***Objectives of WD-SA***

The overall goal of the WD-SA is to contribute to more effective service delivery models for the universal supply of safe water and sanitation by creating a constructive dialogue that identifies, critically analyses and evaluates different approaches to service delivery. Its specific objectives are to:

1. Set-up and manage *The Water Dialogues–South Africa* project so that it is fair, transparent, participatory and accountable.
2. Strengthen multi-stakeholder dialogue on water supply and sanitation in South Africa by establishing a forum in which parties are able to participate equally and effectively.
3. Identify case studies in South Africa that can be used to identify, critically analyse and evaluate the different approaches to service delivery, including commercial approaches and private sector participation.
4. Plan and conduct research in alignment with the international process so that findings can be shared and lessons drawn from all the national processes.
5. Document lessons on process and content.
6. Disseminate results and lessons from *The Water Dialogues-South Africa* and liaison with The Water Dialogues international umbrella process.
7. Strengthen the participation of civil society organisations in sector processes and strengthen linkages between South African and International processes, enhancing the status of South Africa in the Region.

## ***The Water Dialogues research***

The Water Dialogues is essentially an experiential, experimental, applied and innovative research mechanism aimed at facilitating a deeper understanding of the provision of water services. From the problem statement, the following research question was formulated:

*Given the varying capacities of Water Service Authorities, how do different institutional approaches affect outcomes?*

Research is structured around institutional approaches, reflected in the section 78 selection of a WSP and the form of the contract between the WSA and WSP (left columns below). However the capacity of the WSA is also likely to influence the effectiveness of water and sanitation delivery. (Since there is no single measure of capacity, we used “operating income” as a proxy for capacity.)

Institutional Approach	Section 78 Mechanism and WSA-WSP Contract Type	Water Services Authority Capacity		
		High	Medium	Low
Public Private Partnerships	Private sector with concession	*	*	*
	Private sector with lease	*	*	*
Community Based & Small Scale Provision	Community Based Organisation with service contract	*	*	*
Public – Public	Public – Public – Private	*	*	*
	National entity (water board) with management contract	*	*	*
	Multi-jurisdictional with lease	*	*	*
	Another municipality (nature of contract unclear)	*	*	*
Public Internal	Internal	*	*	*

Where possible, two cases per cell will allow for comparisons between results from two areas with similar capacities and institutional arrangements, allowing for the emergence of other factors to explain differences in delivery.

## ***Process***

This project is participatory in its conception and implementation. Because many of the key players nationally in water and sanitation are active participants in the national Working Group, results from the project will be taken up as they arise--not only at the end of the research. Ongoing discussion will ensure that results do not just sit in unread reports but are actively engaged with. Documentation through reports, papers and a website will ensure that results can be shared more broadly, including with other countries and international decision makers.

The process of stakeholder dialogue is as important to the WD-SA as the expected research product. Currently "dialogue" is used to refer to a range of processes. The WD-SA distinguishes itself from these processes because it does not reflect or promote any one agenda or position. Its intention is not to force consensus, but to engender what has been referred to as "Confrontative Dialogue", which aims for better understanding between

stakeholders with unequal relationships, significant conceptual gaps, and a high degree of mistrust. It aims to "make diverging values and interests visible and understandable and to illuminate political alternatives" (Abrahamsson, 2004).

## ***Governance***

The WD-SA is led by a Working Group (WG), comprised of members from organisations representative of sectors including national and local government, the private sector, civil society, trade unions, water boards, and academic/ research organisations.

### **Members of the Working Group**

- Department of Water Affairs and Forestry
- Environmental Monitoring Group
- eThekweni Municipality
- Johannesburg Water Management
- Mohale City Municipality
- South African Local Government Association
- South African Municipal Workers Union
- South African Water Caucus
- The Mvula Trust
- Water Information Network- SA
- Water Research Commission
- Water and Sanitation Services South Africa

The Working Group meets every two to three months to provide strategic guidance to the research and other activities implemented by a paid, full time Coordinator with support from a Project Officer. Administrative issues are delegated to a Management Committee comprised of five of its members.

The WD-SA is funded by Irish Aid, and funds are administered by the Environmental Monitoring Group (an NGO based in Cape Town). Members of the Working Group contribute their time as well as costs related to their participation. Seed funding from Heinrich Boll Foundation helped the WD-SA get started.

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