



KHANYISA PROJECTS CASE STUDY

**CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENTS FOR
REDUCTION OF NON-REVENUE WATER**

AT A GLANCE

FUNDERS

eThekwini water and sanitation.

TIMELINE

2014 to 2018

AREAS

All areas of the eThekwini
Municipality (Durban)

ACHIEVEMENTS

As at Dec 2014:

- Payments made: R19 961 240
- Reduction of bad debt: R12 101 860
- Household visits: 56 000

OBJECTIVES

- Increase Revenue
- Reduction of unaccounted for water
- Reduction of bad debt
- Educate customers with regard to sustainable use of water services

What: This programme involves the utilisation of a highly skilled technical team who analyse the customer database and GIS data in order to plan and prioritise community interventions.

How: Analysis involves

- Identification of water consumption hot spots
- Payment patterns
- Debtors status.

The programme also has highly trained field workers (customer service agents) who interact with residents or customers to address identified problems.

"We confirm that the scope of work was carried out in the most professional and efficient way and key performance indicators were successfully achieved"

BERNARD GABELA

Manager: Auxiliary Services
Education Department
EThekwini Water and Sanitation

CONCLUSION

The innovative customer engagement model in the form of household level customer service have yielded extremely positive results in addressing overall EWS objectives, especially those related to increase in revenue, debt level decrease, reduction of unaccounted for water and customer education on sustainable use of water services.



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BACKGROUND

The eThekweni water and sanitation unit (EWS) is responsible for the provision of water and sanitation services to more than 3.3 million people within the eThekweni municipal boundaries. This includes both urban and rural areas which have resulted in a number of challenges that needed to be overcome such as a lack of awareness on how to use water and sanitation services correctly, illegal connections, blockages and vandalism. Education and awareness programmes, as well as interaction with the community are an essential part of overcoming these challenges and improving the quality of life for all population groups.

These challenges can be summed up as an inability to adequately manage water services at household level.

Specific household challenges would include:

- An inability to manage water consumption resulting in unnecessary high bills
- Faults (leaks) left unresolved
- Lack of awareness of the need for water saving

EWS is committed to assisting its citizens or customers resolve their individual water service challenges. Assistance is available at walk in centres situated in the various regions of the municipality. The flagship customer service centres are called sizakala centres, where all help desks for municipal services (including water and sanitation) are found under one roof. The one downside of the walk-in centres is that it is incumbent upon the customers to visit these facilities to seek assistance. The reality is that many customers who really need this service do not access it. They choose not to do anything about the water service challenges they face (which invariably include payment issues). In an ideal world this would be an anomaly, however, the reality is that the challenges faced by poorer households are not conducive to heightened levels of understanding of the implications of not attending to water service problems.

The unsustainability of high household water consumption due to a lack of conservation and leaking pipes resulting in unaffordable and unpaid bills, informed an EWS decision to look at an alternative customer interface approach. The approach would not be reliant on pro-activeness of customers but would see customer services being extended to customers at a household level and at community level in general. Thus two key approach strategies were initiated, the customer service agent (CSA) and the raising citizens voice (RCV) programmes.

The CSA and the RCV programmes were designed to enhance existing EWS office based customer service offerings. Each programme was two pronged in that it desired to help customers at a household/community level whilst also addressing municipal objectives of revenue generation, reducing debt levels and enhancing the sustainable use of water services.



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CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENT PROGRAMME

OBJECTIVES & ACTIVITIES

This programme involves the utilisation of a highly skilled technical team who analyse the customer database and GIS data in order to plan and prioritise community interventions. Analysis involves the identification of water consumption hot spots, payment patterns and debtors status. The programme also has highly trained field workers (customer service agents) who interact with residents or customers to address identified problems.

There are a number of objectives that the CSA programme has set out to achieve. Listed below are these objectives with associated activities.

Increase revenue

- Visit and inform customers of various programmes and initiatives to help with arrear accounts including debt relief, flow limiters and amnesty
- Identify and increase revenue from customers with arrear accounts
- Determining location of un-metered connections (urban, rural, new developments, etc)
- Assisting customers in completing new application forms
- Form links and relationships with other units (non-revenue water, GIS unit, housing, etc.)
- Development of additional training and communication materials
- Support for community outreach programmes

Reduction of unaccounted for water

- Investigation of eThekweni billing system and GIS system in order to identify target areas and develop weekly work packages for customer visits
- Conduct customer field investigations
- Verification of customer details
- Identification and reporting of community water leaks
- Reporting / monitoring of faults
- Investigate reports of suspected illegal connections
- Determining location of un-metered connections (urban, rural, new developments, etc.)
- Assisting customers in completing new application forms

Reduction of bad debt

- Regularization of indigent customers
- Verification of customer details
- Identify and reduce high water consumption customers



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Educate customers with regard to sustainable use of water services

- Visit customers and educate on water related services utilising tools such as:
- Educational brochures
- Street theatre
- Posters
- Identification of household leaks as part of the "forced leak repair" programme
- Reporting and monitoring of faults
- Liaison with councillors and other municipal departments when required
- Support of community outreach programmes

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

The key performance indicators (KPIs) listed below illustrate the successes achieved to date.

• Increase revenue

KPI description	TOTAL
Arrears of all customers visited	R 239 209 956
Visited customers made a payment	5 310
Payments made	R 19 961 240

The total arrear amount owed by customers visited during period 2012 – 2014 was r239 209 956 and 5 310 of these customers made payment totalling r19 961 240 (average r3 759 per customer).

• Reduction of bad debt

KPI description	TOTAL
Customers visited signed up for debt relief	1 170
Total value of agreements	R 12 101 860

1 170 arrear customers visited during the period 2012 to 2014 signed up for debt relief. The total value of these agreements was r12 101 860.



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• Reduction of unaccounted for water

KPI description last name		TOTAL
Un-metered sites identified		7 736
Suspected illegal connections identified		1 114
Application Forms	Qadi - bothas hill	566
	Nhlungwane	203
	Thornwood	1 011
	Ogunjini	453
	Ward 99	5 217
	Non-revenue (NR7)	5 148
	General	4 267

- 64 public leaks were reported and fixed
- 7 736 unmetered sites but which had water were identified
- 1 114 suspected illegal connections were attended to
- 16 865 applications for new meters were processed for various areas

• Educate customer with regards to sustainable use of water services

KPI description	TOTAL
Households visited	55 957
Customers visiting EWS in response to a CSA visit (A3)	3 866
Forced leaks reported	226

At each one of the homes visited, customers were educated about various water issues depending on priority issues faced by individual households.

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LEARNINGS

Some valuable lessons have been learned through the CSA programme.

These include:

- Household level visits sensitize customers to the seriousness of payment issues and sustainable water uses
- Generally customers do take steps to attend to water issues after a visit
- It is difficult for indigent customers to get to an EWS office and household visits are a welcome convenience
- Visibility of EWS at community level is an indication that EWS is prepared to go the extra mile to help its customers

CONCLUSION

The innovative customer engagement model in the form of household level customer service have yielded extremely positive results in addressing overall EWS objectives, especially those related to increase in revenue, debt level decrease, reduction of unaccounted for water and customer education on sustainable use of water services.

