

## *Building a Learning Water Services Sector through Collaboration; the South African Experience of Masibambane (Let's Work Together) and WIN (Water Information Network)*

Thoko Sigwaza<sup>1</sup>, Ndala Duma<sup>2</sup>, Cllr. Nandi Maythula-Khoza<sup>3</sup>, and Louise Colvin

1. Director- Sector Collaboration Unit- DWAF, South Africa, Tel- +27 12 336 7049, Fax +27 12 326 3348
2. Co-ordinator- Water Information Network- South Africa,
3. South African Local Government Association (SALGA) Executive Member/ Councillor at the Metropolitan Municipality of Johannesburg
4. Consultant

### **Abstract**

This paper aims to highlight the South African experience of how a concentrated effort on building an organised Water Services (WS) sector has led to an enabling environment for knowledge sharing. The starting point was not knowledge management or lesson learning or information dissemination but a sector wide approach and collaboration, through which sharing and learning became a prime focus.

### **Introduction**

South Africa is a water scarce country and is one of the 30 driest countries on earth. It has a population of about 47 million people and there is a huge influx of legal & illegal immigrants from African countries. It is characterised by sophisticated & high levels of service on one hand (metros, towns previously white only, townships) and lack of basic services to the poor on the other (mostly to be found in ex-Bantustans) and fragmented service provision – municipalities, commercial enterprises (mills, mines, farmers etc), water boards, ex-Bantustans.

In 1994 at the turn of new democracy there were:

- 15.9 million people (40 % of population) without access to basic water supply
- 20.4 million people (51% of population) without access to basic sanitation
- 70% of these people below acceptable services lived in rural areas – but demographics are changing due to migration to urban areas in search of work.

### **History of water services in South Africa**

Before 1994 and as a result of the homeland system, which fragmented South Africa, no national institution was responsible for ensuring equitable and sustainable access to water supply or sanitation services. In 1994 DWAF took on water service responsibilities in many areas in the absence of any local authority to do the work. During this period, water services policy was established but DWAF undertook a great deal of direct service provision work which included operations and investment.

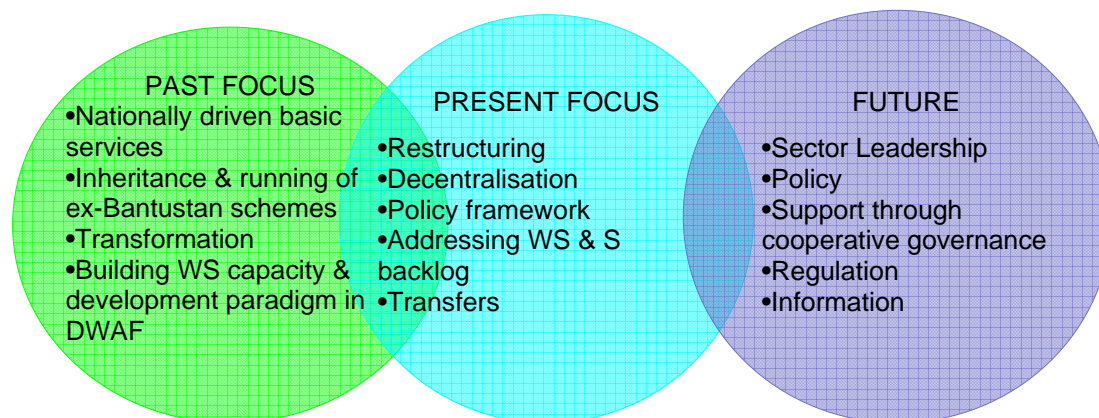
DWAF inherited and took over operation of around 315 bulk and 1032 rudimentary schemes hitherto run by ex-Bantustan departments, taking on the direct water services management function for first time.

DWAF drove the Community Water Supply and Sanitation programme (CWSS) focusing on rural areas, where capacity was weak whilst the Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) drove the Consolidated Municipal Infrastructure Programme (CMIP) focusing on urban and generally more capacitated areas

Between 1994 and 1999, local government policy was determined and by 2000 effective local government was in place and 284 municipalities were established. The direct responsibility for service provision began to pass to local government. In 2003 changes to powers and functions, resulted in 155 municipalities being given Water Services Authority status.

DWAF, working with DPLG and SALGA (and National Treasury) had to redefine its role with more focus on support and capacity development and eventually regulation - rather than direct service provision. Figure 1 below indicates past, present and future role of DWAF. The new approach has a long term approach (establishment of DWAF capacity for "developmental regulation" as the core focus for DWAF WS for the next decade) and short term approach (help in the transition to the new water service institutions).

**Figure 1: Department of Water Affairs in transition.**



### **Sector policy and strategy development**

The following policies have provided an enabling environment for WS delivery. They are listed below *White Paper on Community Water Supply and Sanitation, 1994*. The Government adopted the Water Supply and Sanitation Policy in November 1994 which attributed leadership for the sector to DWAF. The principles of this policy are:

- Development should be demand driven and community based,
- Basic services are a human right,
- “Some for all” rather than “all for some”,
- Equitable regional allocation of development resources,
- Water has economic value,
- The user pays,
- Integrated development,
- Environmental integrity.

*The South African Constitution 1996*: In terms of the Constitution everyone has a right to sufficient food and water and an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being. The responsibility for water services is that of Local Government subject to National/Provincial regulation.

*Water Services Act of 1997*: This act was a

- Developmental legislation, aiming to provide a supportive regulatory structure by clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the different sector institutions:-
- DWAF established as monitor and regulator – for both rural and urban areas.
- Water Services Authority - municipality designated as responsible for ensuring services. This governance authority cannot be relinquished.
- Water Services Provider actually provides water services to consumers & can be the authority itself, another municipality, a water board, a community-based structure or a private enterprise.
- The Act regulates the relationship between authorities and providers, requiring the relationship to be formalised in a contract

*Free Basic Water Policy*: South Africa’s pro-poor policy of Free Basic Water was introduced in 2001 as a realisation by Government that there are many South African’s that cannot afford to pay for

services so essential for health and basic needs. Households are entitled to up to 6 000 litres of clean water every month at no cost. Free Basic Water is Government's commitment to pushing back the frontiers of poverty. Already more than 27,6 million people are benefiting from the policy as implemented by over 70% of municipalities – but there is need to refine its implementation, based on sound billing systems, effective cost recovery and reaching the poor. Finalisation of a workable free basic sanitation policy is in process.

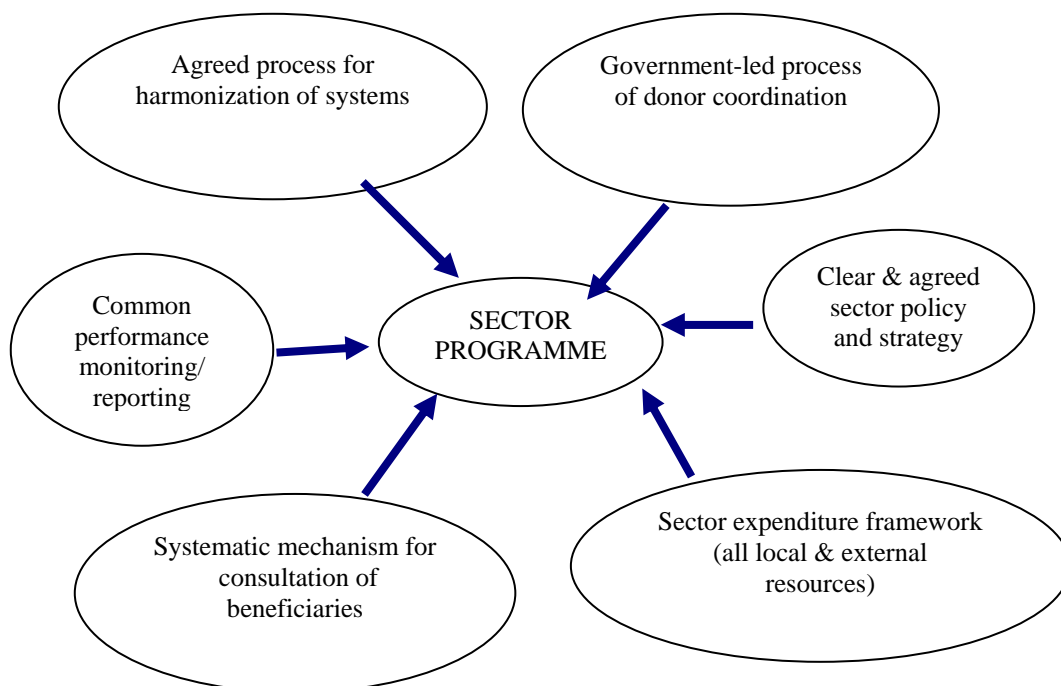
*Strategic Framework for Water Services (SFfWS), 2003:* In September 2003 the South African Cabinet approved a Strategic Framework for Water Services. The framework confirmed Water Services Authorities responsibilities as well as DWAF's role as a sector leader and regulator.

### Masibambane<sup>60</sup>

It was commonly accepted that a nationally driven infrastructure programme to address the backlogs was not sustainable and that municipalities must take this responsibility, thereby ensuring local level service delivery and accountability to customers. In 2000 Masibambane was initiated as a water services (WS) sector wide approach programme (SWAP). It had the six components of a traditional SWAP (see Figure 2):-

The contribution of Masibambane has been for the donors to pool their resources to support this transitional process across the sector. The approach has been led by the Cabinet approved local government programme and the inter-Departmental structures (eg MITT and more recently project Consolidate) established to promote work across all three spheres of Government.

**Figure 2: Elements of Masibambane**



In addition a main aim was to build a strong and organised sector through common identity and ownership, strong leadership, collaborative structures and processes, joint decision-making and alignment of strategies and programmes. National Treasury forced a process of decentralisation through redirecting the capital budget to local government.

<sup>60</sup> *Let's Work together* (in Nguni)

In the collaboration local government became a central player and through Masibambane support WS capacity in SALGA was built and strengthened for it to play a leading role

Sector fora were established at provincial level to enable collaboration around issues pertaining to better service delivery. These comprised mainly of municipalities. At national level the WS Sector Leadership Group (WSSLG) was established to strategically guide the sector and the Masibambane Coordinating Committee oversaw the development of sector work plans and reporting. Although government led, the sector structures included a wide range of non-governmental organisations.

In 2002 the WSSLG identified lesson sharing and learning as a sector priority and a sub committee was established to take it forward. A process of stakeholder consultations was embarked upon, out of which WIN was born

In 2003 the *Strategic Framework for WS* was collaboratively developed, which gave coherence and direction to the sector. Knowledge networking was identified as a key component of sector support.

A major thrust of Masibambane has been institutional development and reform and capacity building focusing on local government. However much of the expertise and knowledge in fact lies in capacitated municipalities, especially the cities. In the local government arena networks were established, such as the Cities Network with its WS Managers Forum, District Managers forums and the Local Government Knowledge Sharing Programme.

### Sector Collaboration Review - 2005

External evaluations of Masibambane had highlighted it as one of the most successful SWAP programmes internationally. However it was felt important to document and review sector collaboration, with the aim of gaining a more in depth understanding of how it worked, how to improve in a more structured manner and to share the lessons learnt.

Of key relevance was the fact that stakeholders identified information sharing & lesson learning as a key motivating factor and benefit for participating in sector structures and processes and yet at the outset it was not considered. Initially the primary motivation was to access funding. Through collaboration the value of sharing information, albeit informally, has been realised. A cross-section of stakeholders in the Eastern Cape were asked what their individual or organisational motivations for collaboration were in 2000 and then now; then what barriers or constraints to collaboration existed then and now. Below is a simplistic portrayal of their responses (which warrants more discussion than can be afforded here).

| DRIVERS FOR COLLABORATING | 2000 | Now  |
|---------------------------|------|------|
| Lesson Learning           | 0%   | 63%  |
| Working Together          | 63%  | 25%  |
| Legal Mandate             |      | 25%  |
| Delivery Capacity         | 62%  | 100% |
| Sector Leader             | 25 % | 25%  |
| Achieve Results           | 100% | 75%  |
| Money                     | 35%  | 0%   |

This diagram shows that the learning and the collaborating was in order to achieve better results and deliver better services.

Understanding and responding to the current need and issues is the single most important motivator for collaborating. People come together in the hopes of addressing their own interests and requirements. This is similarly true of learning and sharing. Information is valuable when it is needed and for a purpose. Therefore collaborating creates the environment whereby learning can take place and those facilitating or supporting or providing a knowledge service are better informed as to the learning needs of the target beneficiaries.

In dealing with learning one has to acknowledge the different stakeholder needs. We see that different agendas ('turf wars') and different interests and a lack of understanding (of what collaboration entailed) were barriers in 2000 – discussion and learning over the last few years have reduced these, but a lack of commitment to actually collaborating remains a barrier (i.e. people understand what it is about but are still not always interested). Capacity to actually collaborate is still a big challenge.

A learning alliance needs time and dedicated capacity; it also needs structure in order to be kept alive and relevant. All of this should drive it towards institutionalisation in the longer term. Learning about managing alliances is an important point. Respondents at both National and Provincial level gave their views on the pros and cons of institutionalising a learning alliance.

| <b>Arguments for and against institutionalising a learning alliance</b>                                  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>FOR institutionalising the learning alliance</b>  | <b>AGAINST institutionalising the learning alliance</b>   |
| More stability and security of investment  | More flexibility and freedom of operation   |
| More mainstreamed  | More risk-taking  |
| Less dependency on individuals   | Less buck-passing   |
| More conventional admin and management systems in place  | More innovative admin and management systems  |
| More access to conventional resources  | More creativity in locating new resources   |
| Potential for impact based on existing partner profiles / networks                                       | Potential for impact based on the fact that it is different from existing institutions          |
| More 'checks and balances' and greater accountability built into the working relationships – more formal | More opportunity for appropriate governance systems to be developed by partners – more tailored |
| Greater influence with donors and policymakers because part of the 'system'                              | Greater influence with NGOs and CBOs because outside the 'system'                               |
| Able to build on existing reputation / networks of partner institutions                                  | Free from any negative reputation / baggage of partner institutions                             |

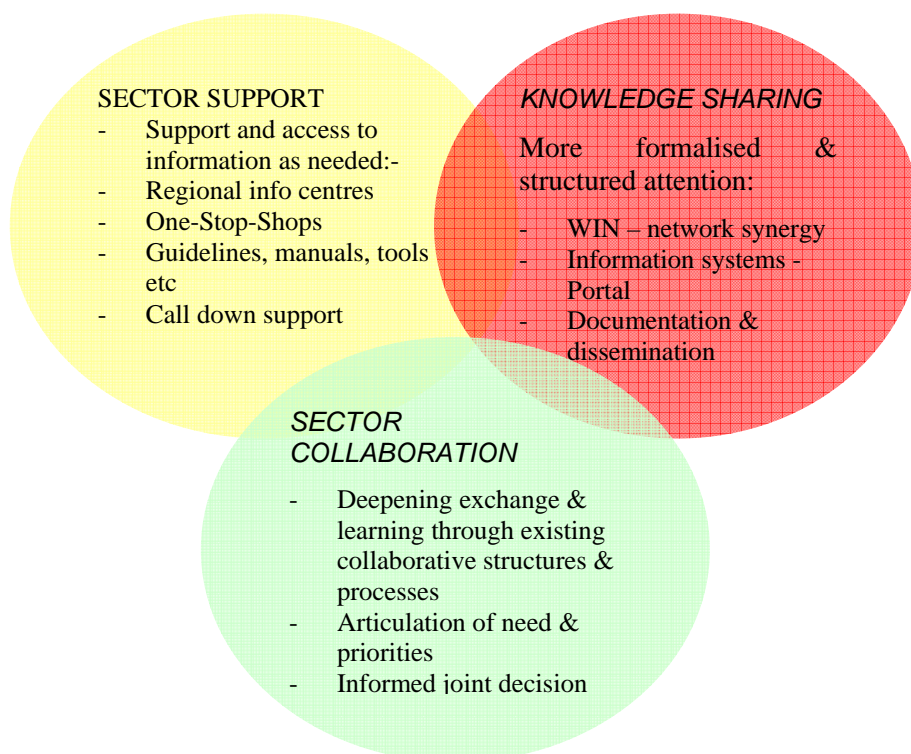
The Masibambane experience over the last five years has shown that learning and sharing are important sector needs. Meanwhile, knowledge management was a buzzword and Masibambane had instituted a Lesson Learning Framework to ensure a more structured approach. However the rather academic terminology and exposé of both tended to entrench mystification and alienation of WS practitioners (the target beneficiaries). Whereas on the other hand the mere meeting of minds and exchange through collaboration had led to an appreciation that knowledge sharing is not a rocket science and can be achieved in the normal course of events to institute working together. There has also been a realisation that lesson learning cannot happen in a vacuum; it needs to be part of a holistic sector approach

These have fundamentally influenced the approach now taken.

## Approach to Building a Learning Sector

The sector cuts across, within and outside government. In the case of South Africa there is an even bigger challenge, since the spheres of government are different and independent. This has created a challenge for an approach to building a learning sector.

There are three inter-dependent areas (Figure 3):



**Figure 3: elements of a learning sector**

In a country where meetings and workshops and verbal exchange is the modus operandi and decisions are made fast and under pressure, it is necessary to build on these processes and work smarter, ensuring good agendas, facilitation of participation and sharing, identifying and capturing ‘lessons’ and good practice. It is also important to cater for time to review and analyse information and give feedback. As collaboration matures participants are better able to articulate need and demand and seek out support. Key to responding is knowing where to find the information or expertise. WIN has a critical role to play in facilitating and strengthening the networks, putting people in touch, offering services and building knowledge sharing capacity. All of these are part and parcel of an overall support framework.

## The Water Information Network- WIN-SA

### Mission and Vision:

WIN’s vision is a well-organised and informed sector able to effectively deliver water supply and sanitation services to the people of South Africa.

The mission of WIN is to facilitate the creation of a well managed body of knowledge in the sector. This knowledge has to be, readily accessible and applied, leading to improved decision-making and performance, especially of local government.

### Brief history of WIN

WIN has gone through an inception phase, which was a collaborative process, since it involved key stakeholders coming together to define and refine the concept. This culminated in the drawing up of a Position Paper in May 2003. Between February and July 2004, a DFID funded study into information

needs was conducted. The results of this study were used as a basis for the process of developing a Business Plan for WIN which was completed in October 2004.

### **Governance and Accountability**

WIN is governed through a Steering Committee that is chaired by the Water Research Commission and it consists of the following organizations:

- The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF),
- The Department of Provincial and Local government (DPLG),
- The South African Local Government Association (SALGA),
- The Mvula Trust,
- The National Community Water and Sanitation Training Institute (NCWSTI),
- The South African Association of Water Utilities (SAAWU),

Supported by:

- The IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre (Co-Facilitator)
- The Department for International Development (DFID)
- Masibambane WS Sector Support Programme

WIN is ultimately accountable to the WSSLG, which meets twice a year. It is also accountable to a broader reference group that allows for a broader spectrum of participation. The reference group meets once a year.

### **Focus areas**

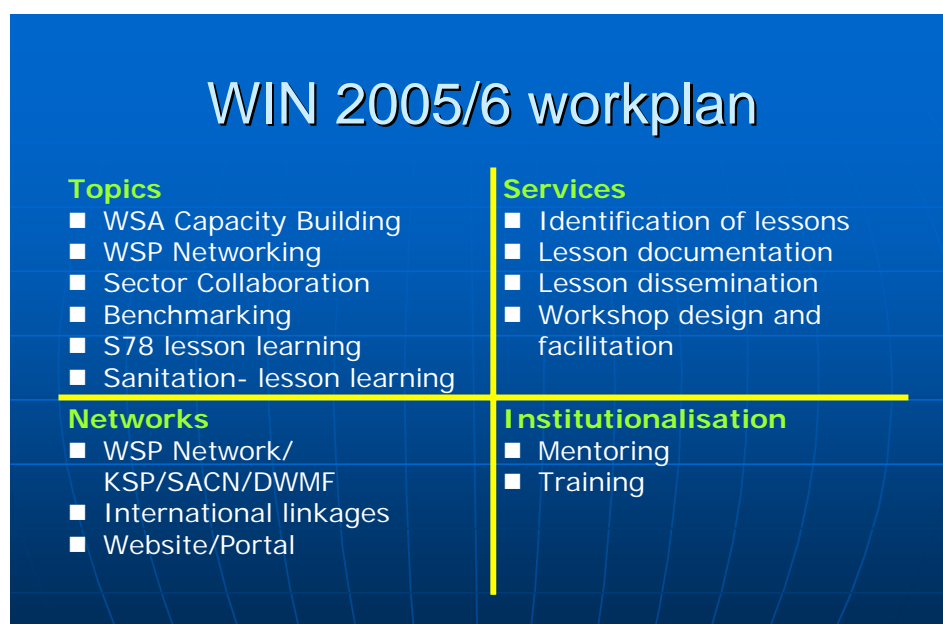
WIN is guided by a three year Business Plan that has the following focus areas:

- **Building the Network:** The focus area deals with strengthening, growing and capacitating the Network, whilst ensuring synergy across different sector KM initiatives.
- **Creating an information portal:** This area focuses on growing the WIN portal to be an information collection, dissemination and access point. This portal will be an interactive search tool, which users can engage with profitably.
- **Supporting provincial lesson learning and sharing initiatives:** WIN plans to provide a back up support facility to knowledge management needs at a provincial level. WIN plans to support an active process of learning and sharing lessons which will be fed back to service providers for better decision making.

There is an overlap and synergy across all three focal areas, and the benefit of each will be maximized by its linkage to the other.

### **Deliverables: 2005/6**

Below is a quadrant illustrating WIN deliverables for 2005/6. This emanates from the WIN BP (2005/6) and outlines WIN's signature contribution to the WS Sector.



- As part of its focus on network synergy WIN will give support to and work closely with various networks that serve as learning forums for local government.
- The need for learning has come more from local government which is facing major transformation challenges. It has a constant need to learn to perform better.
- Metros and District Municipalities have formed their own alliances for the purposes of information sharing and learning. These are the Cities Network and the District Water Services Managers Forum.
- These initiatives remain valid because they address issues of particular interest to local government
- The role of WIN is to facilitate learning across these different alliances to ensure synergy.

## Lessons Learnt

- Lesson learning cannot happen in a vacuum, it needs to be part of a holistic sector approach to institute working together.
- Collaboration should not focus on building a huge empire, but it should strengthen member capacity, because it is made up of members and what they are contributing, e.g. donor funding has gone to different institutions, . DWAF, SALGA, WRC.
- However successful collaboration does require dedicated capacity and that takes time. It also needs dedicated capacity, i.e. time, people, and resources.
- Good collaboration should be in line with trend of legislation and must be forward looking.
- Lesson learning must focus on tangible issues and ‘projects’ ,which support municipalities to deliver better services.
- Good collaboration requires clear governance, structures and accountability
- Support that goes out to and between, provincial and local government structures needs to be consistent.
- Members/ Partners have to feel that they are a part of the process; it needs to offer benefits to members. Benefits for which members must be willing to pay, e.g. the WIN initiative is looking at a self sustainability plan after three years where members will offer to pay for services.
- It is essential to build on the existing, and not to reinvent the wheel, for members to derive value from the collaboration