

11. Responsive to user needs. The process needs to respond to and meet the needs of the water services managers.

Process and timing

The benchmarking process is managed in terms of an annual cycle as follows:

- **July and August:** Municipalities collate and finalise their performance data for the previous financial year ending 30 June.
- **September and October:** The service provider visits participating municipalities to collect the performance data.
- **November:** The performance data is analysed, quality control checks are undertaken and results are presented to an Annual Benchmarking conference at the end of November.
- **December:** An annual benchmarking report is produced and data is published on the worldwide web.

Participation

All municipalities who are water services authorities and/or water services providers are eligible to participate. Participation requires the written authorisation of the municipal manager.

Incremental roll-out

The first round commenced with the participation of about 40 municipalities. It is planned to increase this to about 80 in the second year and to about 120 in the third year.

Choice of indicators

All participating municipalities must agree to benchmark themselves using the compulsory regulatory performance measures as defined in the National Water Services Regulation Strategy. Additional indicators are voluntary and may be designed for appropriate groupings of municipalities in consultation with the water services managers themselves.

Who to contact

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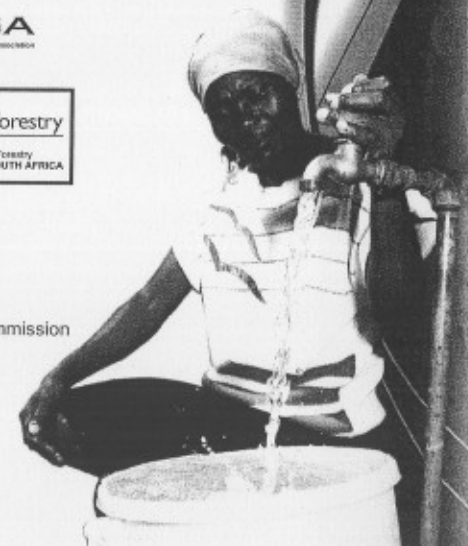
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The South African National Benchmarking Initiative for Water Services

A joint initiative of;



Water Research Commission



Challenges facing municipalities

The South African water sector faces four key challenges in the short and medium term:

- To increase affordable access to water supply and sanitation services;
- To ensure that the services provided are sustainable;
- To develop the necessary capacity to meet the above two challenges; and
- To improve performance so as to meet the above challenges in the most effective and efficient way.

The role of benchmarking

Benchmarking can play a very important role in helping the sector to assess the extent to which water services providers are meeting these challenges and, in particular, to what extent sector performance is improving over time. More significantly, benchmarking can help to identify best practices from which others can learn as well as areas most needing improvement.

A national initiative

The National Benchmarking Initiative is a joint initiative of SALGA, DWAF and WRC. The goal is to promote improved performance of water services by all water services providers in South Africa. The initiative undertakes annual benchmarking of key performance indicators for the provision of water

Ethekwini Municipality is the implementing agent. Palmer Development Group in association with Africon and EarthTech (Canada) are the service providers.

Ensuring success

The initiative aims to develop a sustainable benchmarking process which benefits participants and caters to their needs. The following principles inform the implementation of the initiative so as to ensure success:

- 1. Ownership of the process by senior water managers.** The senior water managers must believe in the usefulness of the benchmarking programme, fully support the process and *be directly involved*.
- 2. Peer review.** Peer review of benchmarking outcomes is a powerful mechanism not only to communicate the outcomes but also to ensure active participation in the process.
- 3. Moving from knowledge to changes in practice.** If benchmarking does not lead to improvements in performance, then the benefits of the system are questionable. Linking this programme to changes in practice implies significant involvement of senior water managers in the benchmarking process. In addition, learning and change is more likely where water managers interact on a regular basis and share common concerns.
- 4. Incremental and selective rather than comprehensive.** Ambitious benchmarking schemes have floundered due to a poor benefit to effort relationship. For this reason, the programme will focus on a few well

6. Assessment of reliability. The source of data and its reliability must be well understood when measuring performance.

7. Quality assurance and audits. The process of collecting, entering and checking data needs to be based on sound quality assurance practices.

8. Software. The software used needs to be both flexible and user friendly.

9. Sustainability. Payment for the benchmarking service by the beneficiaries of the service is a clear indication of the value derived and of commitment to the process. The sustainability of the benchmarking system will only be guaranteed if the initiative is funded by the WSAs themselves in due course.

10. Professional expertise and experience. A sound benchmarking system is dependent on sound professional expertise on the part of the service provider undertaking the data collection and data analysis.

