

Harnessing a Water Services Vulnerability Assessment Tool for Supporting Good Governance and Performance

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Abstract

The challenges faced by South Africa municipal utilities in the provision of water services are considerable. The MuSSA supports improved business management and performance by the municipal utilities by (i) conveying the current overall business health of water services to both technical and support functions, (ii) indicating the future likely performance of water services provision, (iii), providing a lead-in time for preventive action (early warning), (iv), providing an educational tool & common language as to municipal vulnerability between technical & non-technical officials, municipal officials and elected officials, and (v) guides alleviation of Key Vulnerabilities via Municipal Priority Action Plans

Keywords

Business health checks; strategic self-assessment; municipal priority action plans; assessing and managing water services vulnerability

INTRODUCTION

Following the introduction of a revised municipal dispensation in South Africa during December 2000, Local Government has recently emerged from a prolonged transition to face a new range of challenges. A growing economy and urbanisation have resulted in increased demand for economic infrastructure, and this against a backdrop of many municipalities' facing key challenges relating to water resources, ageing assets and infrastructure, deteriorating operations and maintenance, a severe lack of skilled personnel, and inappropriate use of funds. A national assessment confirmed that many South African municipalities are in trouble, with 23 municipalities in a critical state and a further 99 municipalities at high risk (see Figure 1 below). Chronic services delivery weaknesses are tipping over into outright service emergencies in a growing number of municipalities.

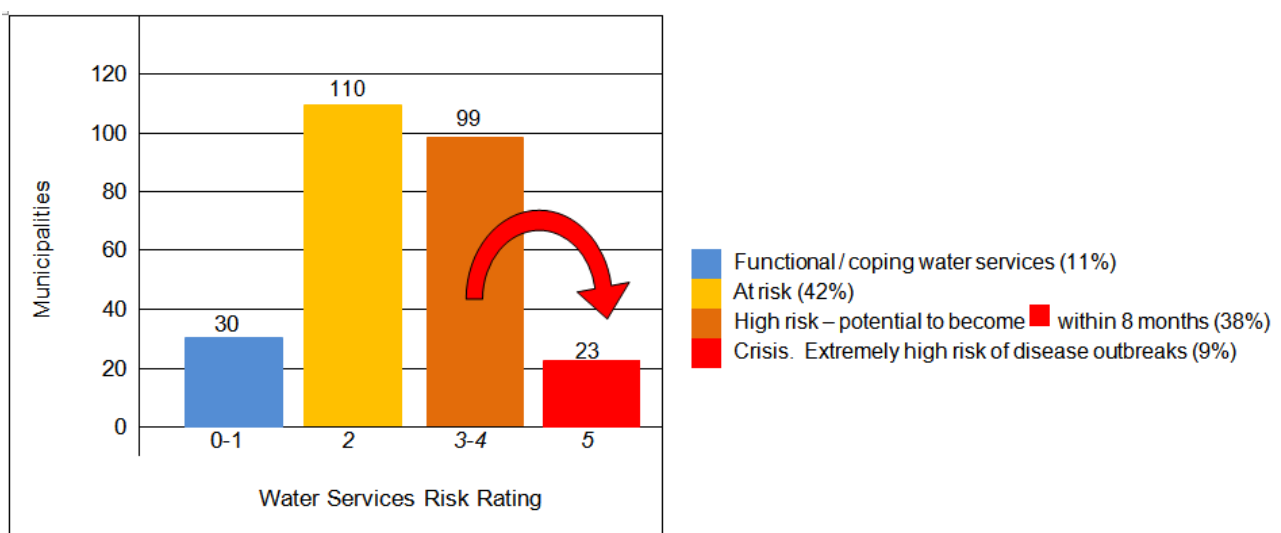


Figure 1: Risk Rating of Water Services Provision by Local Government Municipalities

Municipal performance monitoring via self-assessments is thus increasingly recognised as a key

driver of improved service delivery, through programmes such as water services benchmarking. For performance monitoring to become effective two complimentary processes are necessary. The first process presents a set of actions and strategies required to make things happen, as shown below.

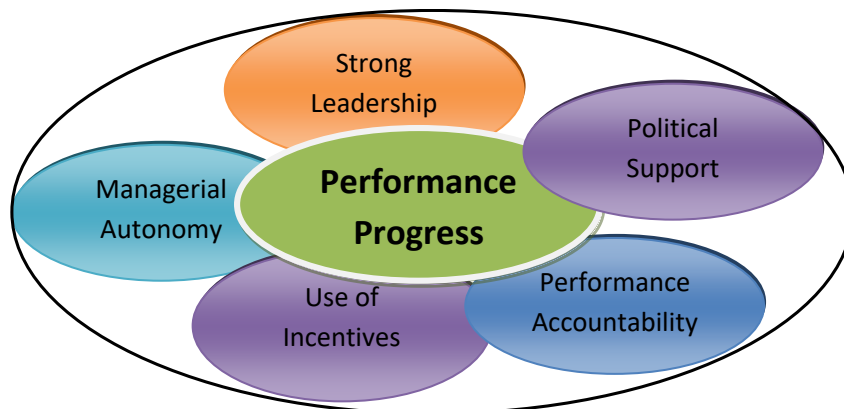


Figure 2: Key Success Factors to Performance Progression

The second complimentary process is the array of checks and balances to make sure that what was promised is actually delivered. As shown in Figure 3 below, the Municipal Strategic Self-Assessment (MuSSA) tool (i) establishes the baseline vulnerability affecting performance, and (iv) monitors and provides feedback. Whilst the Municipal Priority Action Plan (MPAP) tool (ii) plans and designs the strategic actions addressing the identified Vulnerability and (iii) assigns actions and resources.



Figure 3: Municipal Priority Action Plan Approach

METHODOLOGY

Harnessing a Municipal Strategic Self-Assessment to Support Good Governance, Benchmarking and Performance Management

In order to both better understand the status of municipal water services and to assist to ensure effective and sustainable water services the Department of Water Affairs (DWA) facilitates an annual national Municipal Strategic Self-Assessment (MuSSA) survey and analysis.

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The annual completion of MuSSA is overseen by DWA through a structured “self-assessment” interview process, in which each municipality is taken through a series of 5 simple municipal performance “essence questions” per each of 16 business attributes reflecting a range of performance, governance, and development indicators. The MuSSA completion is via a web-based self-assessment, management and development tool, which can be updated at any subsequent stage by the municipality.

Step One: Establish Baseline Vulnerabilities: The MuSSA presents a process that focuses broadly on the overall "business health status" of the municipality, so that areas of vulnerability relating to the sustainability of municipal water services provision can be readily identified. As the MuSSA is a self-assessment, the assessment can be regarded as the perceived status of performance by each WSA. The MuSSA outputs are automatically provided at municipal level (see Figure 4 below), regional and national level.

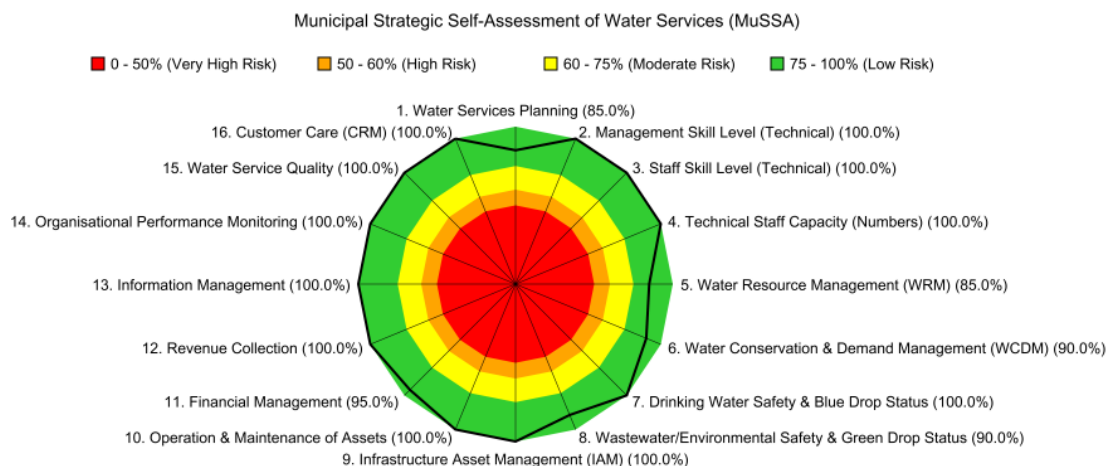


Figure 4: A typical Municipal Strategic Self-Assessment indicating vulnerability against key Municipal Water Services Business Health Requirements

Step Two: Strategize Requisite Approaches: Once the MuSSA findings are consolidated, strategic approaches are workshopped with top level management of a WSA and Prioritised Actions are finalised, as seen below:

7. Drinking Water Safety & Blue Drop Status		MuSSA Status	Comments and Current Interventions	Proposed Strategic Approach	Agreed Strategic Action
7.1	What is your average Blue Drop score for your WSA?	50% - 75% (Good)	None	Investigate the outstanding items as per the new BDS criteria for population.	
7.2	Have you registered ALL your supply schemes, monitoring programmes, sample points, laboratories and users on the BDS?	Yes, strongly agree	None	No action required	
7.3	Have water safety related issues (including those identified via the Blue Drop Certification programme) been tabled to Council for action?	Yes, strongly agree	None	No action required	
7.4	Have sufficient funds been made available to address these identified water safety related issues?	No, disagree/Don't know	None	Inform council as to the latest BDS publication. Adopt the findings from the WSP for budgeting purposes.	
7.5	Have required corrective actions/remedial measures to address these identified water safety related issues been successfully implemented?	No, disagree/Don't know	None	Implement and adopt the findings of the WSP. Refine present management incident protocols.	

Step 3: Assign Actions and Resources: In conjunction with the above description of “What needs to be done”, tasks are allocated in terms of responsibility (Who), duration (by When) and costs.

Step 4: Monitoring and Feedback: Monitoring of the implementation of the MPAP is crucial to ensure that there is a proactive approach to resolving prioritised actions. Adoption of the MuSSA and associated MPAP by Council is a key step to ensure implementation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All 166 Water Services Authorities (urban & rural) across South Africa participate in the annual MuSSA, with the participation rate in 2010/2011 being 97%. This assessment is used to draw attention to and to address vulnerabilities in water services provision at local government level, regional and national levels. Advanced level participation, through sector supported Municipal Priority Action Plans (MPAPs), is expanding incrementally.

With the ongoing strengthening of the Department’s Regulatory Function, the MuSSA’s primary role is as a municipal self-management tool that (i) provides a strategic level assessment of the business health of the municipal water services function, (ii) flags the vulnerability of key areas of the municipal business (as opposed to gathering deep technical data), (iii) guides the development of strategic level Municipal Priority Action Plans (MPAP) per municipality, and (iv) directs and facilitates regional government supportive responses.

At a municipal level, both DWA and South African Local Government Association (SALGA) assist in engaging with municipalities to develop Municipal Priority Action Plans (MPAPs). These are carried out in an interactive/workshop based approach to secure support of both municipal technical officials and municipal elected officials.

An example of a regional government response to rolled-up MuSSA outputs is shown in Figure 5 below.

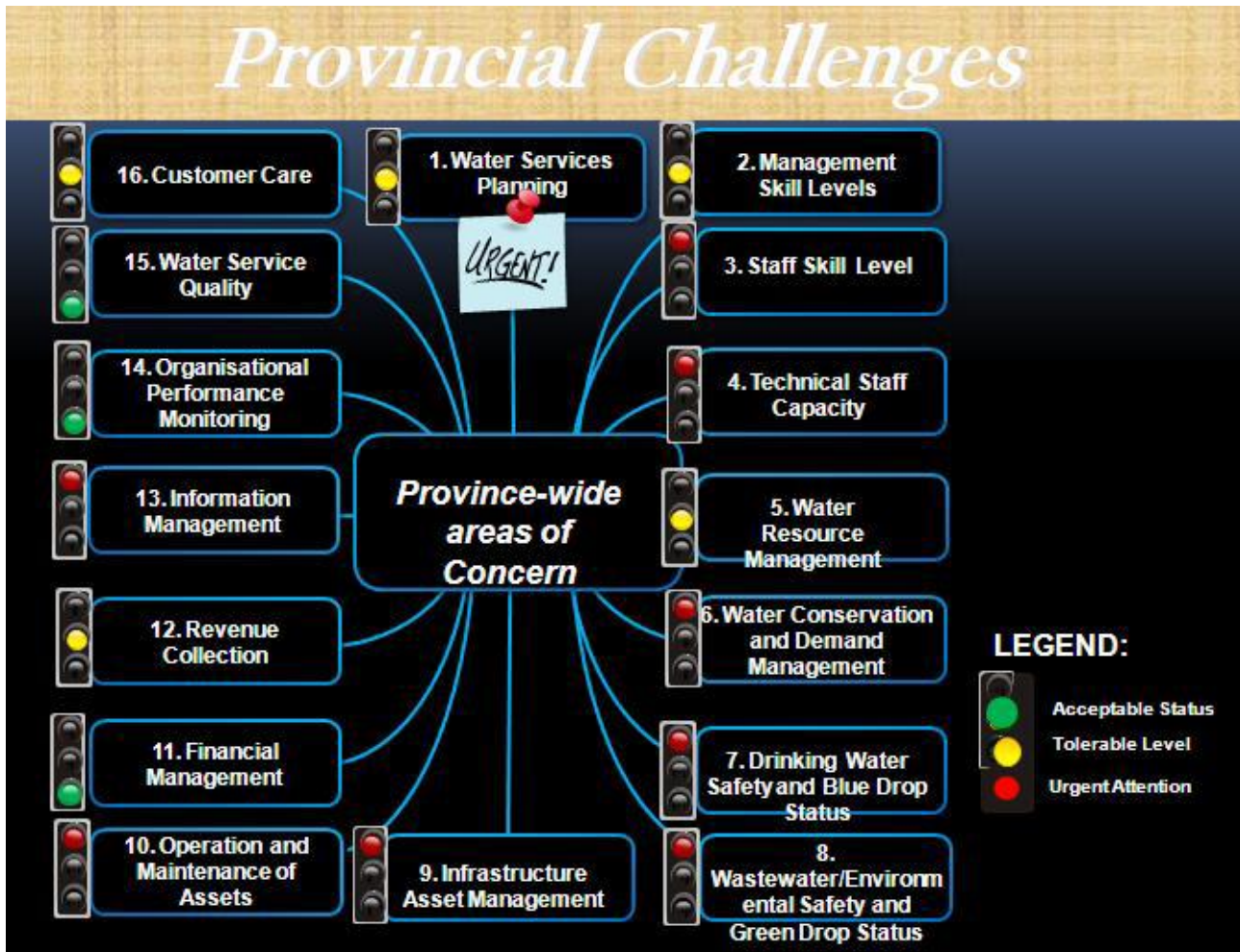


Figure 5: An Example of a Regional Level Response to key Municipal Water Services Vulnerabilities identified via the MuSSA Process

The 2011 MuSSA was completed by 97% of municipal Water Services Authorities, and found to be of great use in directing strategic actions to reduce vulnerability. During the 2012 MuSSA process, the MPAP process will be initiated starting with KwaZulu Natal and the Eastern Cape.

Indicators of success of the initiative include: (i) gradual reduction in the overall Vulnerability Index score across all participants, (ii) gradual reduction in Vulnerability Score per the 16 key functional business attributes across all participants, (iii) creation of pockets of excellence on specific business attributes and the use thereof in peer based lesson sharing (iv) growing adoption of the use of the Municipal Priority Action Plan as a means by which elected officials (non-technical) and appointed officials (technical) jointly recognise and resolve areas of business vulnerability, (v) increased use of information to support improved regional and national support to municipalities by other parties (e.g. skills development) and (vi) alignment to municipal benchmarking processes. Overall, a key indicator would be to have sustainable water services businesses at local government level.

CONCLUSIONS

The challenges faced by South Africa in terms of providing sustainable, effective, and efficient municipal water services provision during a period of economic and population growth,

urbanisation, environmental challenges, lack of skilled personnel, and inappropriate use of funds are challenges common to most of the developing world.

This paper provides feedback on a well-structured nationwide initiative whereby ongoing Strategic Level Vulnerability Management processes harness both (i) Municipal Strategic Self-Assessments (MuSSA) and (ii) Municipal Priority Action Plans (MPAP). The ability of this relatively straightforward process to facilitate alignment between technical and elected municipal officials is contributing substantially, in a very practical sense, to improvements in (i) municipal self-management, (ii), sector aligned development of local government, and (iii), national policy development and regulation in South Africa. The approach, methodology and learning's ought to be of strong interest to other countries seeking to improve the management, planning, financing and governance of water services provision.

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