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VOICES OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENT RESIDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

WHAT THE METROS SAY THEY ARE DOING ABOUT BASIC SERVICES IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN THE LIGHT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by Debbie Budlender, June 2020



INTRODUCTION

In May and June 2020, the parliamentary portfolio committee for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) held a series of meetings at which mayors or deputy mayors and senior officials from each of the metros reported what they had already done, or planned to do, to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This brief highlights what the metros reported in respect of the delivery of basic services – water, sanitation, refuse collection, and soap or sanitiser provision – in informal settlements, as well as what they reported in terms of food parcels or other forms of nutritional support for households.

Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality

OVERALL STRATEGY AND BUDGET

Buffalo City reported that it planned to use R340 million received for infrastructure on COVID-19-related items such as electricity, access to water, sanitation, and de-densification. In addition, 70 percent of the municipality's normal catering budget and sponsorship not yet allocated would be used on COVID-19-related expenses.

WATER

Amatola Water had already installed 41 water tanks as at 10 June, and would provide a further 31 by the end of June 2020. Installation of seven tanks donated by COGTA was about to happen. The applications for the tanks had come through the Eastern Cape House of Traditional Leaders and were probably all for rural villages rather than informal settlements.

The metro itself had 13 water tankers that continued to deliver water, but some Department of Water and Sanitation tankers had been withdrawn. All 154 informal settlements reportedly had water, and water quality was monitored on a weekly basis. The City had provided additional standpipes in some areas (not necessarily informal settlements). Soap had been distributed to informal settlements in five wards, with delivery to the remaining wards planned by 21 May.





SANITATION

A total of 99 new toilet seats had either already been installed or were in process of being installed. The areas supplied were Bashe, Mazwi and Ntsenyego streets, Barberton, Mandela Park, Scenery Park, Dukashe, Eluxolweni, Moscow, Jiba, Siphumelele, Stonery Drift, Bakaneni, Power station, NU 9, Manyano Thembelihle, Mzamomhle, and Orange Grove.

REFUSE

The Solid Waste Department was in the process of distributing black refuse bags across all regions, but the report did not specifically name informal settlements in this respect.

FOOD

The mayor reported that the metro had provided food vouchers valued at R750 per household to 40 000 (or 4 000¹) households, with 800 households targeted per ward. The City reported that the list identifying beneficiaries was developed by ward councillors in consultation with ward stakeholders. The lists were given to supermarkets and individuals could then decide what they would like to purchase there.



City of Cape Town

OVERALL STRATEGY AND BUDGET

The City's Deputy Mayor expressed their gratitude to national government for allowing conditional capital grants to be used to cover operational costs associated with measures to address the pandemic. These funds had assisted, particularly with the provision of water.

Cape Town had developed a short-term 'suppression strategy' focusing on three priorities. The first was servicing existing informal settlements, the second involved providing temporary services to new, unserved informal settlements, and the third required putting in place additional health and hygiene measures to avoid the spreading of the virus at service sites. The City had also provided water, toilets, taps, and building materials in Empolweni, following a court order which had required the City to do this after a 'land invasion'.

WATER

The Informal Settlements Basic Services branch initially planned to provide water tanks for communities that did not have an existing potable water supply and which also had no available water tanks. Each tank would have four water taps, two of which would be for handwashing. The tank would subsequently have meter connections installed and be reticulated so as to avoid the costs of regularly filling the tanks using water trucks. A quote for 250 tanks was obtained, after which the number was reduced to 93 due to funding constraints. The national Department of Water and Sanitation provided a further 214 tanks.

¹The Parliamentary Monitoring Group minutes of the meeting have 4 000 at one point and 40 000 at another. If all 500 wards were each provided with 800 food parcels, the total would be 32 000. If only certain wards were provided with parcels, the 4 000 might be correct. The metro's presentations do not include information on food parcels.



The City identified 107 informal settlements that had not been served. However, some were on privately-owned land, which made speedy delivery difficult, if not impossible. This left 16 settlements on government-owned land. On further investigation the City, together with ward councillors, community leaders, and the service provider, concluded that in many areas there was insufficient space for water tanks, and in some areas agreement might not have been reached on issues such as the employment of local labour. Tanks were therefore installed in only four of the 16 identified areas, namely Monwabisi Park in Khayelitsha (214 tanks for 7 573 structures), Mwindweni-Makhaza Extension in Khayelitsha (83 tanks for 3 075 structures), Congo in Mfuleni (eight tanks for 353 structures), and Nkandla in Wallacedene (two tanks for 61 structures). Water tankers or taps and standpipes were to be used for the remaining areas.

As at 7 June, 99 of the 214 tanks from national government had been installed, with the rest to be completed by 12 June. More than 39 700 kilolitres of water had been supplied to informal settlements through these tanks at a total setup cost of R1 313 million for the initial 93 tanks, plus an estimated operational cost of R3 153 million per month. The City was using 28 trucks daily to service and refill the tanks. A total of 173 informal settlements without tanks were also being serviced by 27 trucks. It is not clear if these were the same trucks as were being used for areas with tanks.

Phase 2 began on 6 May after the City received 214 of the 244 tanks from the national department, and by 7 June 199 tanks had been installed. The City had planned to complete all 214 tank installations by 12 June. Some of the set-up costs and operational costs would be recovered from Rand Water.

Of relevance beyond informal settlements, the City said that they did not disconnect water supplies if consumers did not pay, but instead restricted water supply for debt purposes. This restriction essentially allowed a resident to receive approximately 750 litres of water per day at 2.4 bar pressure, which was the minimum pressure in the City. The City had suspended restrictions on both water and electricity for debt purposes in the middle of March, before the lockdown commenced. This amount was above the World Health Organization's requirement.

SANITATION

The City reported that janitorial services (which form part of the Expanded Public Works Programme and employ local community members) provided cleaning and cleansing services for toilets in some informal settlements, and that this initiative had been expanded in the context of the pandemic.

FOOD

The City said that the mayor had prioritised food distribution to supplement what was provided by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), although this was outside the City's constitutional mandate. An MP said the majority of ward councillors in Khayelitsha, Philippi, and Gugulethu had been given 30 food parcels, and asked for clarity on the mechanism used for distribution and whether all wards were covered. The City undertook to report back on this.

City of Johannesburg

WATER

The City of Johannesburg reported that Joburg Water had collaborated with the Department of Water and Sanitation to set up 10 dedicated teams to maintain standpipes in informal settlements. Already before the lockdown, the national department had assisted the City to increase the number of chemical toilets. By 12 May, 2 676 standpipes had been maintained, and 1 421 new chemical toilets provided. In addition, 926 extra water tanks had been delivered, although it is not clear if all of the extra tanks were for informal settlements.





REFUSE

The City reported that Pikitup had increased the number of shifts from two to three for specified areas, including informal settlements.

FOOD

By 12 May, the City had provided 45 291 food parcels to indigent families and to those who were referred because they had lost income due to COVID-19. The mayor reported that councillors were not permitted to deliver food parcels, but some had organised with nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) to do so within their wards. He indicated further that the City was not comfortable with NGOs distributing 'on their own' as this could result in some households receiving from multiple sources and also start 'food riots'.

By 12 May, 59 organisations had donated food, medical equipment, and clothing, or made buildings available for quarantine. Joburg Market Agents donated 35 000 kg of vegetable parcels to the City's Food Bank.

For the peak COVID period, the City proposed entering into partnership with food manufacturing companies to provide a million households with a food pack valued at R350 per parcel, using an e-voucher system. They planned to approach the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa to assist with the negotiation of prices and security of supply, and to issue licenses to local shops in 'deprived' wards to pack food and redeem vouchers.



Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality

WATER

Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality reported that prior to the pandemic there were 1 511 standpipes across the 119 informal settlements, and a further 37 standpipes as well as 187 water tanks had been provided since then.

The metro's mayor said that, as far as he was aware, all informal settlements had been provided with chemical toilets. These were serviced twice a week. He undertook to investigate whether this had happened on an illegally occupied stand about which there had been a petition.

The Council said that the reduction in revenue collection would not affect essential service delivery and maintenance, including the provision of water. It could, however, delay improvements in service delivery.

FOOD

In mid-April, the metro established a food bank at the fresh produce market in Springs to supplement food relief provided by the Department of Social Development (DSD). The food was donated by 118 diverse donors, and the metro did not contribute financially. By the beginning of June 2020, 20 680 food parcels had been distributed benefiting 128 400 residents.

The metro reported that residents were required to apply through the call centre or by email, after which DSD fieldworkers assessed whether they were eligible. Both the officials collecting food parcels and the beneficiaries were required to sign registers, and applicants' details were captured in a database to avoid double-dipping. The distribution was not limited to South Africans. The metro aimed to distribute 1 000 food parcels each day, and 5 000 on 'Siyaqhuba Fridays'. It said that it ensured that the nutritional value of the parcels was adequate.

There was conflicting evidence as to whether food parcels were provided to ward councillors to distribute, or whether councillors and ward committees worked with the DSD fieldworkers in identifying needy families, with the parcels being distributed by churches and other organisations.



eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality

OVERALL STRATEGY AND BUDGET

The eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality had partnered with the United Kingdom Prosperity Fund in respect of water, sanitation, and waste services in informal settlements to mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The partnership, which still needed the agreement of eThekweni Water and Sanitation, would include a WhatsApp community survey to monitor service delivery.

WATER

eThekweni reported that by 2 May it had installed 76 water dispensers, 256 of 1 000 planned static tanks, and 181 chemical toilets. It is not clear how many of these were installed in informal settlements. The City had also provided hand sanitiser for 155 communal ablution blocks in informal settlements. Over the course of April it conducted 232 inspections of water and sanitation availability and general environmental hygiene in informal settlements.

Food

The City's delivery of food parcels targeted mainly rural wards. In addition, each of 87 wards received 1 000 food vouchers. An EFF MP said that party politics influenced the delivery of food parcels, and that the fact that the parcels were delivered at night hampered transparency. The mayor contested this. He said that each ward received the same number of parcels, that community mobilisers played a role in the process, and that social workers were responsible for analysing progress. NGOs were also assisting with service delivery, including 'analysing' beneficiaries.

