

Eastern Cape piloting of CSIR research to improve water services reliability

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ABSTRACT

Operation and maintenance partnerships, using the basic principles of franchising, are being piloted with considerable success in the Eastern Cape. Under the guidance of a franchisor, trainee franchisees are well advanced with initial cleaning and the routine maintenance of the sanitation facilities at 400 schools. Service delivery has improved so much that the Department of Education is pressing for rollout to a further 1 000 schools.



SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE CAN EXCLUDE (OR ENHANCE) ACCESS TO EDUCATION

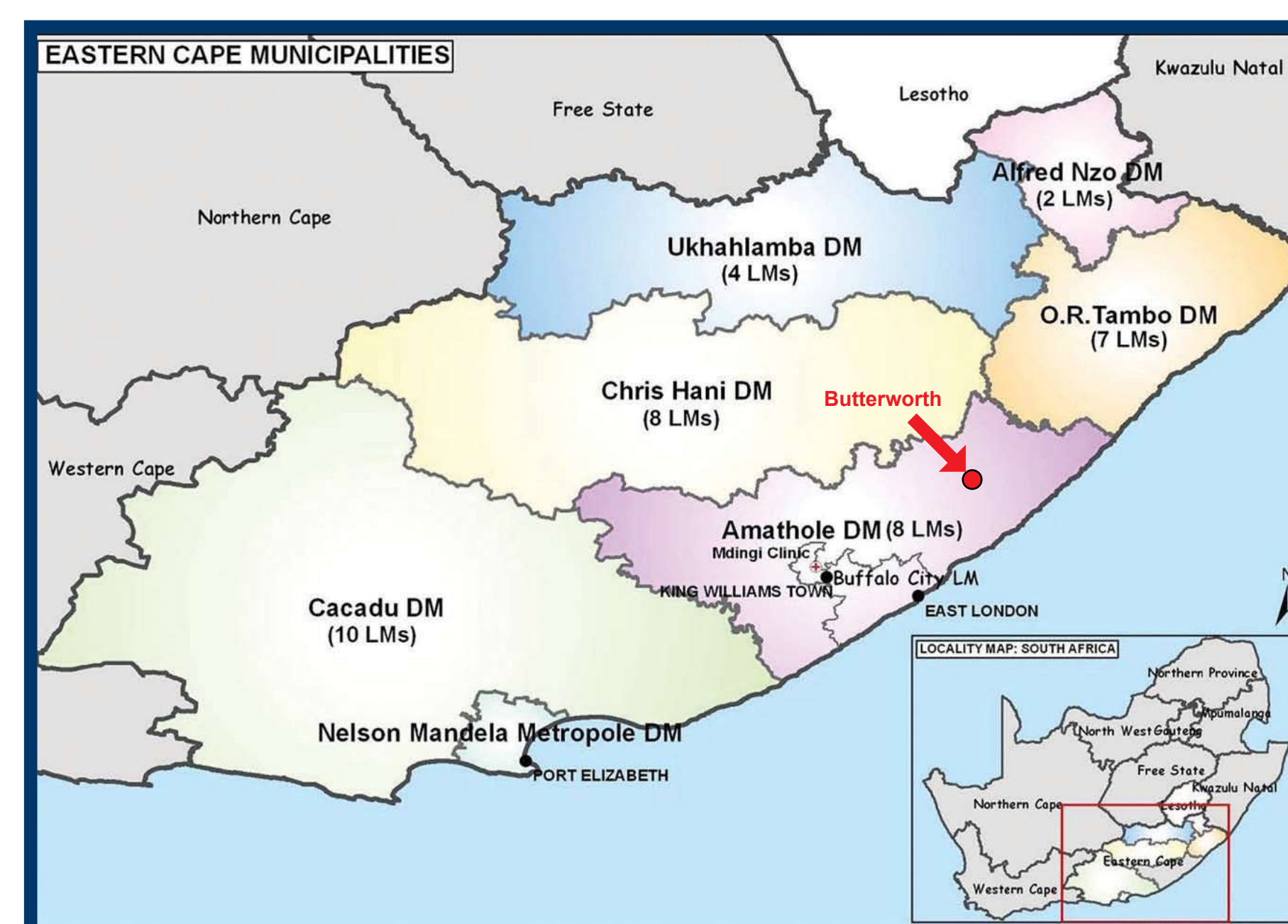
The built infrastructure of many South African schools leaves a lot to be desired, not only in terms of facilities that these schools have lacked from the outset, but especially in the way in which so much infrastructure, provided when the school was built, has since been neglected. When water supply, sanitation and hand-washing facilities are insufficient, or missing altogether, schools more readily become places where diseases are transmitted. Interventions at schools not only lead to safer in-school learning environments, but are investments – when one teaches a child, one teaches the whole community.

Quantitatively more important than the safety aspect can be the way in which infrastructure can exclude (or enhance) access to education. Every day, countless learners – especially girls – are deprived of contact hours at school directly because of lack of maintenance of the physical infrastructure (specifically the water and especially sanitation facilities) at their schools. When sanitation facilities are inadequate, learners may have to find a toilet outside the school premises and this may lead them to being absent from the classroom for up to half an hour. They may even go home to use the facilities there – for many rural school learners, who would have had to walk considerable distances to get to school, this will mean that they would not return to school that day. Girls who are menstruating would often rather not go to school than have to deal with the lack of privacy. **Improving the sanitation facilities could therefore almost double the contact hours for many learners during the course of the year.**

Neglect of school infrastructure, causing a learner's school day to be interrupted and/or cut short, results in a partial withdrawal of access to learning from that learner. Improved sanitation (and water) facilities, hygiene education and the promotion of hand washing inevitably lead to less sickness and also to improved school attendance – not just in terms of less days absent from schools, but also to increased time on tasks each day. This increased attendance by healthier learners must lead to better examination results.



THE PILOT



An innovative programme whereby emergent micro-entrepreneurs are trained and mentored to provide the planned routine cleaning and maintenance services of sanitation facilities at schools is being piloted in the Eastern Cape. The programme – utilising concepts formulated by the CSIR, and developed by the CSIR in collaboration with the Water Research Commission (WRC) – is one of partnerships founded on skills and incentive principles akin to those of franchising.

This concept of a franchising partnership model for the operation and maintenance of water services infrastructure is now being tested and evaluated at some 400 schools in the Butterworth education district.

Early in 2009, this pilot was agreed to by the CSIR, the WRC, the Eastern Cape Department of Education (DoE), Irish Aid (Ireland's government programme of assistance to developing countries) and Amanz'abantu Services (Pty) Ltd. (The latter is a service provider based in East London with a footprint covering the whole Eastern Cape.)

The CSIR, funded by Irish Aid through the WRC, is providing policy, technical and other assistance necessary to facilitate the pilot programme. The CSIR is monitoring the progress of the pilot, and will later disseminate findings with a view to replication in other franchising partnerships for operation and maintenance of other types of water and sanitation facilities.

Locally-based micro-entrepreneurs – trainee franchisees – are working in partnership with the franchisor Impilo Yabantu which has been set up by Amanz'abantu. Irish Aid is funding concept development, while the maintenance services which the franchisees are providing to the schools are being paid for by the schools from their budgets annually allocated for operation and maintenance of infrastructure.

Before starting work, the franchisees received appropriate training from Impilo Yabantu and assistance with setting up their businesses. Impilo Yabantu continues to provide structured learning in the form of on-the-job specific skills training and mentoring, and also further skills and business training as and when necessary. Impilo Yabantu is also responsible for quality assurance.

Thus the programme is establishing and supporting locally-based micro-enterprises (mostly women-headed) for the provision of appropriate and locally-based service solutions. It is creating jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, and, through facilitating workplace learning, upskilling rural people – as well as improving schools sanitation facilities.

Progress with cleaner sanitation facilities in the schools that form part of the pilot project is evident. The franchising partnership concept, as it is being applied in the Eastern Cape schools pilot, is after only a few months already proving successful in greatly improving the state of sanitation and hygiene at the schools it has reached to date. The emphasis is on the quality and reliability of the service delivered, and the viability of the franchisor and franchisees.

The state of the sanitation facilities at the pilot schools has so much improved that the Department has requested that the programme be rolled out to a further three education districts, adding another 1 000 schools.

As funds permit, it will be necessary to extend the programme to the routine maintenance of the water facilities at schools. Some remediation would inevitably be required in most schools. Whereas the great majority of rural schools do not have access to a piped supply but have been designed and built to harvest rainwater, in far too many cases sections of gutter are missing, downpipes are missing, tanks are fouled and/or taps are broken. Currently, children have to bring water with them to school. Another area badly needing attention at nearly all schools is the disposal of solid waste.

A franchising partnership model for the operation and maintenance of water services infrastructure is being tested and evaluated at some 400 schools in the Butterworth education district.

