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COMMUNAL ABLUTION BLOCKS IN ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

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The objective of this study was to explore existing and potential opportunities and challenges to the provision of communal water and sanitation (WASTSAN) facilities to low-income consumers living in informal settlements of eThekweni Municipality. This study was carried out in 31 informal settlements. In all, a total of 50 CAB sites were surveyed. CABs consist of two prefabricated shipping containers modified to meet appropriate communal sanitation standards. The containers (serving male and female users respectively) service 50 - 75 dwellings at a maximum distance of 200 m from the facilities. Male blocks have two washbasins, two urinals two toilets and two showers. Female blocks have two washbasins, two or more toilets and two showers. Provision is made for a store room and for (two) external laundry basins. The municipality has installed a total of 350 CABs in 125 informal settlements and is working towards increasing this number to 2 200 by 2015. CABs are an interim solution to the WATSAN backlog, while the municipality upgrades informal settlements into fully serviced homes.



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Results of the survey shows that a high proportion of household members use CABs to meet their WATSAN needs (CABs used for sanitation 80.8%; CABs used for fetching drinking water 75.3%; CABs used for showering 83.2%; children using CABs for sanitation 67.8%). Most of the respondents (97.9%) reported that they washed their hands the last time they went to the toilet. Less than half (43.1%) of those who washed their hands reported using soap. Respondents showed a strong desire for improvement to their sanitation systems. More than half (63.3%) of surveyed households were willing to pay for improved sanitation. On average, households were willing to pay R 112.13 per month for improved sanitation. This willingness provides opportunities for exploring innovative ways of entering the WATSAN market.

The distance of CAB sites from households was reported by 59% of respondents as a compelling factor for using competing sanitation alternatives such as pit latrines and open defecation at night. Security concerns and opening hours of CABs were also reported by respondents as some of the factors that encouraged the use of competing sanitation alternatives. Other challenges encountered in the earlier phase of implementation include the vandalising of steel pipes, blockage of pipes due to the use of newspapers and other material for anal wiping as well as poor and unhygienic conditions of CABs. Intervention strategies adopted include the replacement of steel pipes with plastic pipes, the provision of free toilet papers by the municipality and hiring of caretakers responsible for maintaining CABs. Through its education programme, the municipality has reduced the maintenance cost of CABs. A dedicated customer call centre facilitates communication between the municipality and CAB users. This has contributed to effective and efficient running of CABs in the municipality.

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