

Nwasco

WATER WATCH GROUPS

**INVOLVING CONSUMERS
IN MONITORING
WATER SUPPLY AND
SANITATION SERVICES
IN ZAMBIA**

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1. WATER WATCH GROUPS IN ZAMBIA

The regulator's Eye on the Ground

Consumer representation and protection in a commercialised monopolistic environment becomes a critical requirement particularly in a situation where the services involved are basic human needs of water and sanitation.

Following the reorganisation of the Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in Zambia, where service provision has been decentralised to the local level and commercialised, it became imperative to keep a watchful eye on the service providers. The National Water Supply and Sanitation Council (NWASCO), the regulator, has been established with mandate under the Water Supply and Sanitation Act of 1997, to ensure improved service delivery and sustainability, and safeguarding consumers from exploitation.

WWGs are voluntary consumers groups established and supported by NWASCO in order to give the water consumers a voice.

Guidelines have been developed and issued out to the service providers on how to meet service delivery standards. NWASCO receives regular reports from service providers and verifies them during inspections. In addition, however, it is very important to obtain the customers' perception on the quality of service they are getting and how their complaints are being attended to.

NWASCO has a very lean structure with offices in Lusaka only. However, in wanting to ensure that NWASCO is present on the ground for first hand

CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF WWGS

“... WWG concept is a brilliant initiative aimed at helping consumers through regular monitoring of service delivery by water providers at the grassroots level....”

information and addressing consumer complaints, Water Watch Groups (WWGs) have been established, comprising customers from the service areas. The WWGs have delegated power and duties from NWASCO. Membership to the WWG is voluntary and does not attract any remuneration for the services provided. NWASCO, however, endeavours to provide WWGs with stationery, transport, and

other necessary logistics to enhance their smooth operations.

Establishment of Water Watch Groups

Since NWASCO began operations in 2000 it has been very conscious of costs, yet wanted to be present on the ground and ensure effective consumer representation. Due to poor service delivery and the increasing number of unresolved complaints, many people were willing to serve as volunteers as long as they received authority to deal with the service providers. Thus NWASCO started setting up voluntary consumer groups with delegated authority called Water Watch Groups (WWGs). The Lusaka WWG was the first to be set up as a pilot project in 2002.

The demand for WWGs has increased with more people getting to appreciate the value addition and impact on the ground. Consequently in towns where there are no WWGs, people are requesting to be recognised as WWGs. However, due to the demand of monitoring as well as the cost involved, NWASCO has been cautious with the rate of establishing WWGs.

FUNDING FOR WWGs

Cost of establishing a WWG

Below are some incurred costs:

Adverts, Interviews, Induction,

Basic start-up costs, PA system

Totals = **\$4, 500**

Running costs per WWG

Transport, Communication, Meetings

Totals = **\$750/quarter**

WWGs' publicity materials are done by NWASCO. Funds are disbursed quarterly to WWGs in form of grants, which must be accounted for.



Some Water Watch Group members

Establishment of WWGs has therefore been phased. So far 8 WWGs have been established across the country. WWGs are now present in Kitwe, Chingola, Ndola, Luanshya, Mufulira, Kasama Lusaka and Mpika. It is NWASCO's plan to eventually have a WWG in each major town and four additional WWGs are going to be established every year.

WWGs have been accepted by both consumers and providers as vital groupings that ensure standards of service are adhered to and consumers enjoy quality service.

The map depicts where the Water Watch Groups currently exist;



Objectives of WWGs

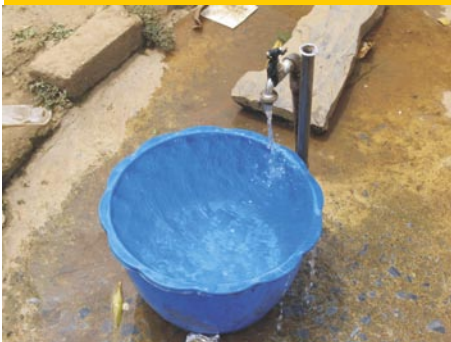
The main objective of WWGs is to represent consumer interests in the water and sanitation sector



Poor consumer awareness risks lives



Provider responding to complaint



Improved quality of service

The objective is met by ensuring the following:

- a) Improved communication between consumers and providers.
- b) Create awareness among consumers of their rights and responsibilities as well as the role and functions of NWASCO.
- c) Give sufficient feedback on public opinion to NWASCO. This information should be adequate to enable NWASCO to adjust regulation according to the requirements of the sector.
- d) Improved quality of service, particularly speeding up the resolution of consumer complaints.

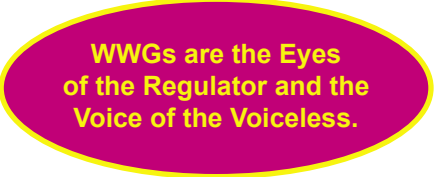
2. FUNCTIONS OF WATER WATCH GROUPS

Functions

The WWGs perform the following functions:

- a) To represent the interests of consumers in the WSS Sector
- b) Follow up unresolved consumer complaints
- c) Improve communication between consumers and providers
- d) Arbitrate in conflicts between consumers and service providers
- e) Sensitise consumers (i.e. the poor) on their rights and obligations
- f) Educate consumers on the role and functions of NWASCO
- g) Collect information on performance of providers
- h) Inform NWASCO on effectiveness of the regulations and propose possible adjustments
- i) Create public awareness of WWGs existence – through public meetings, seminars, workshops, exhibitions

The WWG in carrying out consumer sensitisation, mainly use the media, popular theatre in Peri-urban areas, participate in workshops and debates, and open air meetings. Consumers are sensitised on their rights and obligations; on the proper use of water and timely payment of bills as well as guarding against vandalism through the holding of public meetings. The media is used as a forum for exchange of information with WSS customers. Promotional materials are also distributed and used as a source of information.



**WWGs are the Eyes
of the Regulator and the
Voice of the Voiceless.**

Activities of WWGs include:

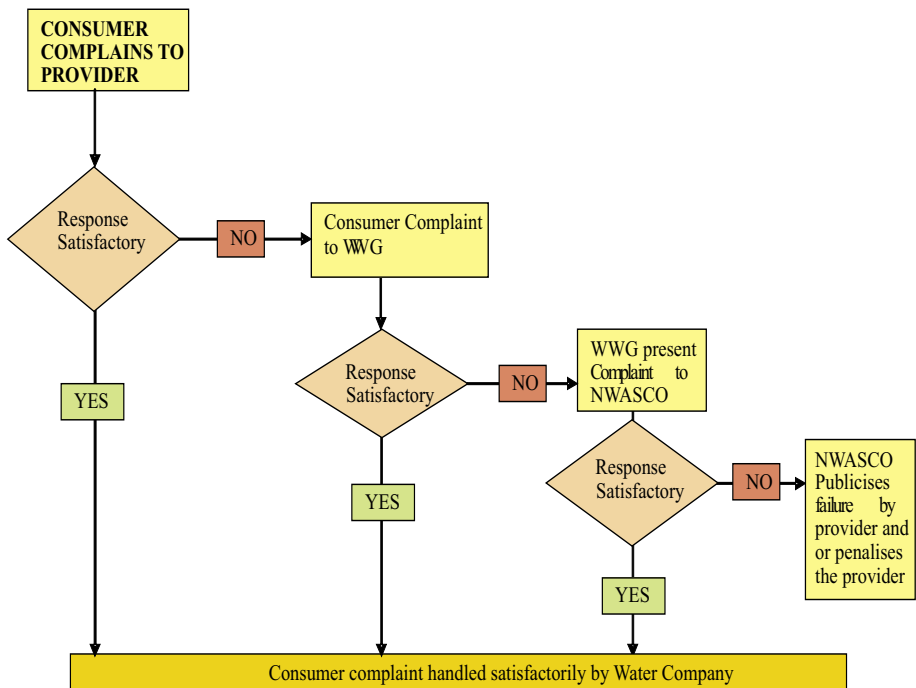
- Holding public meetings with consumers
- Holding meetings to review/validate complaints
- Engaging in outreach and publicity programs via sensitization meetings, TV and Radio broadcasts, media fora
- Submitting periodic reports to NWASCO including feedback from consumers
- Participation at workshops, conferences etc.
- Recruitment, training & orientation of new WWGs

Interaction with Service Providers

NWASCO's management officially notifies the provider of any established WWG(s) in an area. In order for the WWGs to fulfill their responsibilities effectively, the service provider has to name a senior employee as a contact person who is authorised to deal with all issues brought forward by a respective WWG. The contact person should be available to the WWG whenever necessary.

The WWG and the provider must come up with an agreed schedule of meetings to handle complaints. WWGs often invite area managers from providers to public awareness meetings to respond to questions related to the water providers from the consumers. The service provider has to display contact details of WWGs in all pay stations and offices to which customers have access.

The following chart explains the consumer complaints procedure:



A challenge that has now been overcome was to change the Service Providers' perception of the WWG concept, which was viewed with apprehension and suspicion. Instead of viewing them as partners and arbitrators with consumers, WWGs were perceived as opponents and watchdogs whose aim was to frustrate efforts of the providers. Gradually, the service providers have started accepting the WWGs and identified them as an interface between consumers and the regulator that help utilities understand consumer needs better.

CUs' Perception of WWGs now:

“...useful interface between consumers and the regulator that help utilities understand consumer needs better...”

WWGs' ACHIEVEMENTS:

- WWGs received and handled more than 50,000 complaints between 2004/2005 as a result of increased public awareness.
- Providers have started resolving customer complaints expeditiously.
- There is a clear change of attitude by the CUs towards customer.
- Consumer knowledge on WSS issues has improved - empowerment on rights and obligations.
- Improved behavioural change by consumers – (e.g. willingness to pay, reduction of vandalism).
- The Lusaka WWG facilitated the setting up of a Lusaka Water and Sewerage Company Office in Chunga after cases of vandalism and non-payment of bills in the area. This was attributed to the lack of presence of the provider in the area.
- The Kasama WWG quelled down planned protests in Kasama over lack of public consultations before implementing a new tariff.
- WWGs are increasingly being recognised both locally and internationally, hence their participation in local and international fora. The Lusaka WWG participated in the Tokyo Water Action Contest after being selected from over 870 entrants.

Things WWGs watch out for

The basis for measuring the performance of providers is the service level guarantee document, which the providers sign with NWASCO and issue out to customers as the minimum quality of service to be provided. The WWGs look out for the following:

- **Drinking Water Quality**
The aesthetics of the water provided such as appearance and smell
- **Hours of supply**
The time of continuous water supply at connections (household, communal points)
- **Billing for Services**
The period of the bill and time for payment
- **Client Contacts**
The response time to customer complaints, requests for meters, new connections, and access to offices of the provider
- **Interruption of Water Supply and Blockage of Sewer**
Notification of consumers of both planned and abrupt water supply interruptions and measures to correct the situation. Quick amelioration of sewer blockage
- **Pressure in the Network for Water Supply**
Sufficient pressure in order to meet the customer demands
- **Unjustified Disconnections**
Entitlement to compensation for unjustified disconnections by the provider
- **Sewer Flooding**
Ensure that there are as few households as possible flooded with sewer during a year



Ensuring minimum quality of service



3. HOW TO BECOME A WWG MEMBER?

Selection Process and Training

Identification of people to serve on the WWG is done publicly through advertisements in the print and electronic media. Interested people apply for membership with detailed CVs. The response is normally overwhelming.

Who can be a WWG member?

- Resident in an area serviced by a provider
- A good record of paying his/her water bills
- Be willing to work on voluntary basis
- Have no criminal record
- Be willing to undergo training in the operations of WWGs and,
- Be at least 21 years or above

General knowledge of water supply and sanitation issues is always an added

Short-listed applicants are interviewed from which six to nine are selected and trained on how to go about their work. Reference checks for selected members are mandatory. While membership is drawn from all sections of water consuming publics, NWASCO takes into account salient factors such as knowledge of water supply and sanitation matters and professional mix on the team. WWG members are appointed in their personal capacity based on skill, experience,

background and not as representatives of any particular interest group, especially political parties.

The major challenge has been to correct the impression that the WWGs concept is not employment but voluntary work for the good of all water users. Many people who applied mistakenly assumed it was like the UN voluntary service with a good allowance.

Induction of WWG members includes training in understanding the legal framework and the performance requirements expected of providers.

These are based on guidelines set by NWASCO. A consumer complaint procedure is clearly outlined to WWGs and the feedback process to NWASCO. The training is conducted over a period of two days and includes other basic administrative matters such as complaints record keeping, reporting, understanding a water bill, etc.

Important: to keep out politicians to avoid the WWG to be used as political instrument!



LWWG addressing consumers

Tenure of Office

WWG members are appointed for a renewable period of one year. WWGs and NWASCO sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). **NWASCO** issues identity cards and formally introduces the WWG members to the Management of the Commercial Utility in a service area. The term is short to allow for checks and balances and easy replacement of ineffective and unsuitable members. Members may terminate their term of office in event of relocation or other circumstances but are obliged to inform NWASCO management two weeks prior to their termination of the contract.

NWASCO may terminate the term of office of any member for gross misconduct, on conviction of a criminal offence, if a member chooses to involve oneself in politics or any other valid reason. A replacement will be chosen whose term expires at the same time as the rest of the WWG members. Replacements are often made from the past applicants and recommendations from WWG members.

4. EXPANSION PLANS

The WWG concept has proven to be an effective tool of involving consumers in the monitoring of water supply and sanitation services and ensuring quality service delivery. This explains the demand to have as many established in many areas around the country.

Consumer Water Group (CWG): Appreciating the WWG concepts' effectiveness, two local utility regulators have approached NWASCO in a bid to replicate the concept. The Energy Regulation Board (ERB) and the Communication Authority of Zambia (CAZ) as regulators of Energy and Telecommunication sectors are collaborating with NWASCO to share best regulation practices among other things. This includes the formation of a formal Regulatory Alliance whose MoU was signed November 8, 2005, and the formation of the Consumer Watch Group (CWG) formalised on June 10, 2006, with functions similar to those of the WWGs, but encompassing the three sectors. There are plans to extend the CWG concept wherever WWGs exist.



ERB, NWASCO & CAZ signing an MOU for consumer watch group

5. LESSONS LEARNT

- Consumer involvement is key to the success of water sector reforms.
- WWG members must be committed, focused, and operate under clear objectives.
- WWG activities have to be adequately funded.
- The volunteer concept has proven to be an excellent tool for reinforcing consumer protection.
- It is very important to integrate health messages into WSS programs in order to have a holistic approach.
- It is essential to pay specific attention to low income urban areas where the quality of service provision is usually lags behind.



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