

Veolia Water Initiatives: 24/7 water supply services in Nagpur, India

Dominique Gatel, Veolia

Short summary

The City of Nagpur decided to provide 24/7 water supply to every home of the 2.7 million inhabitants, including the 800,000 slum dwellers. This ambition sharply contrasts with the initial situation, as some inhabitants had access to water only 30 minutes a day. To achieve this goal, the city of Nagpur decided to upgrade/develop the assets and implement volumetric tariffs, in the frame of a PPP, which was awarded to Veolia-India for 25 years, starting in 2012. A special purpose entity, Orange City Water (OCW), was created in a joint venture with Vishvaraj Environment Ltd., one of India's leading civil engineering and services companies.

The upfront benefit is that the 24/7 access to tap-water reduces the costs for households, who no longer need to buy water from street vendors and water tankers. The tariffs setting include social tariffs for the vulnerable customers, together with transparent communication and social mediation. Veolia-India is convinced that community engagement is paramount for the success of the project, and created the "Social Welfare Team", as part of the OCW Customer Services. The project staff work to inform about the 24/7 water supply scheme and pro-actively respond to slum inhabitants' questions and requests, as well as engage will local bodies, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Issues addressed:

WASH (inequalities, schools, health centers, refugee camps, women and girls)

- Affordable 24/7 water supply at all homes
- Relief for women & girls daily tasks

Water resources management (water-use efficiency, integrated water resources management, transboundary cooperation, sustainable extraction and supply of freshwater)

- The OCW production capacity close to 750 million litres/day (e.g. Increase)
- Leakage gradually reduced from the initial 60%
- Connection and accurate-timely billing

Water quality (pollution, dumping of toxic materials, wastewater management, recycling, reuse, restore ecosystems and aquifers)

- Uninterrupted supply drastically reducing cross-contaminations, enabling water to comply with the WHO standards.

Risks (mortality, economic losses caused by natural and human-induced disasters)

- Expected reduced burden of disease, thanks to continuous supply to all, and to the improved quality of the water supply.

Tools for implementation:

Capacity development:

- Social engineering. A team dedicated to social mediation and information, the *Social Welfare Team*, was designed to meet the customer expectations and find solution to problems.

Who is involved?

- OCW
- Customers
- Associations
- Municipalities

What were the objectives of the intervention?

- Upgrading the water supply from intermittent to 24/7 water supply for all + enforcing tariffs including social tariffs+ High Standard customer service is a revolution for the inhabitants.
- Ensuring that the population would buy in new water connections and pay their bills regularly was critical to the sustainability of the project.
- Therefore, OCW readily created a dedicated unit within the Customer Services Department, the “Social Welfare Team”. The Team engage with stakeholders before, during and after the works to promote access to water for all (including the people who live below the poverty line), and find adapted specific solutions.

Implementation challenges

- The local population (especially in the slum areas) needed to be convinced to opt for a house service connection: many were reluctant in fear that the financial burden would exceed their already tight budget, and also doubted that Veolia India would actually be able to provide water continuously / round-the-clock.
- Sourcing qualified people able to lead the mediation and deliver information, building the right messages and empowering the right people.

Main task/activities undertaken / Tools used:

- All OCW departments provided input during the conceptualization phase, including the Operations and Works Department. As such it is a cross-sectorial and multidisciplinary initiative.
- The Social Welfare Team innovates as it gathers people from all backgrounds: social workers, engineers; people from various religious groups, social origins and gender. This mix aims at:
 - *engaging with a very wide array of stakeholders such as women groups, NGOs, pressure groups, the media;*
 - *answering all queries: technical, financial (on the billing system), health related (on the impact of safe water on hygiene practices).*
 - *feed-back to operations to fix possible issues*
- The Social Welfare Team explains the rehabilitation program and help inhabitants to apply for the connection, facilitate the connection processes, guiding customers about water consumption and bill/water charges etc. after the connection.
- Engagement with stakeholders and customers: The Social Welfare Team has conducted 1,340 meetings and workshops over the past year, e.g.:
 - *Mohalla* meetings with selected people (local leaders) and the officials of Nagpur Municipal Corporation
 - Group meetings with customers
- Workshops with schools, students, parents, teachers.

Main outcomes / impacts (what has changed?)

- A sustainable potable water supply now is in place, providing people with safe, affordable, drinking water
- Billing effectively changed from the previous flat rate to the volumetric tariff;
- Customers were given the attention they needed by the OCW set-up. For the first time in India, the water tariff structures are explained to the customers by the Social Welfare Team.
- Timely complaint management: The past system offered no customer support, whilst the grievances of customers are now addressed within 1-3 days.

Lessons Learned:

Triggers:

- Political decision to go to 24/7 safe, and economically sustainable, water supply for all.
- Track-record of Veolia as a game changer in the state of Karnataka “Demo-Zones”, where Veolia proved capable of ramping-up intermittent poor quality supply to 24/7 safe water for all in sizable cities (several 100,000 inhabitants).

Drivers:

- Mismatch between the MDGs and the state of play in Indian cities.
- Consciousness of the social, health, and environmental, burden of the intermittent water supply, leading to a suite of sub-optimal arrangements.
- Veolia India embraces the need to provide help to the population with newly installed water meters, understanding their water bills, adapt to the 24/7 water supply, and take care for other issues.

Barriers:

- Strong involvement needed to train the Social Welfare Team on regulation and water-by-law
- Building appropriate tools to communicate to the public
- Keeping the team motivated
- Interfacing the work of Social Welfare Team with the works

What has worked well?

- The project meets tremendous success: access to safe water for all, including the slum dwellers, is becoming a reality, with social acceptability and financial sustainability.
- Veolia radically innovates with its specific Team within the customer services department, devoted to listening to, and informing, customers.

What can be improved? Computerize the surveys with geo-localization tools.

The way forward:

- The Nagpur contract is fully operational at an unprecedented scale; Since the majority of Indian cities are faced with similar problems, local authorities now have a proven option.
- Veolia-India was awarded a host of newer contracts: in the cities of Bangalore (Indian Institute of Science), Ilkal and Bijapur, and in New Delhi (Nangloi contract).
- In all cases, the experience with the Social Welfare Team is an asset to address the challenges of these radical changes.