

## Call for entrepreneurs to develop intelligent water management solutions

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Wasting water in a country that's as dry as South Africa is almost a sin, and a very expensive one at that. But while there's growing awareness around the need to protect and conserve the country's water resources, at consumer level, millions of litres are lost every year, as well as millions of rands.

What's needed is a new domestic water management and billing model, says Larry Symington, CEO of MyWater a specialist manufacturer and ICT company.

"The present system is letting everyone down," he says. "It's been in operation since 1947 and is grossly outdated. It's also costly, requires special skills, has not kept pace with technology developments, and is not a fair system for an economy as diverse as ours."

Symington says a new model is required to reverse the current trend, where only 10 % of consumers' accounts are in 30 days, while 80% are 90 days or more in arrears, as recorded in the Local Government Revenue and Expenditure report released by The National Treasury in August 2013.

"This situation has a serious impact on the municipalities' cash flow and hampers service delivery, a situation we are constantly reminded of in the press," he adds. "The same report also mentions that suppliers and creditors stand a 50/50 chance of being paid on time. This is not a situation that is conducive to attracting innovation."

In real terms, 40% more water than is needed is pumped, treated and purified at present. In addition, South Africa is looking to Cuba – a country with its own urban water problems – for engineers and geo-hydrologists to help it tackle its looming water infrastructure crisis, according to Water Affairs Minister Edna Molewa.

"Many municipalities are trying to tackle these issues on their own, but the lack of specialist technology skills is placing undue stress on municipal officials who do take an interest," says Symington. "Their ability to hold manufacturers accountable is unfortunately hindered by supply chain management policies, a system which also fails many people, as faulty products land up in municipal graveyards, all at ratepayers' expense."

Symington says that consumer participation is sorely needed, as is earlier access to water usage information, a modern billing model, and communication. “Communication is critical, especially in poorer areas. What’s also key at this stage, is to get buy-in from all consumers and the only way to do that is to have solutions tested by those who have to use them – the consumers themselves.”

He suggests that municipalities open up the billing platform and encourage entrepreneurs to apply their minds to the development of workable systems, in line with free market thinking, which allows supply and demand to act as a regulator, rather than government policy.

Symington says it’s estimated that between R7 billion and R11 billion worth of water is lost down the drain every year, and that this represents a vast amount of money that could be made available to entrepreneurs, creating employment and enabling them to participate in the economy.

“We need to see systems being developed and tested in conjunction with volunteer consumers and the private sector. It’s time to open up the platform so that manufacturers can compete with each other to produce solutions based on competitive pricing, service and product reliability – all factors needed to survive in business generally. South Africa is alive with innovators. The municipalities must realise that they will be the biggest beneficiaries of these advancements, as they will in time inherit a fully functional and tested system accepted by all communities.”

The team from MyWater have also developed a water consumption calculator app, which calculates how much an average household should be spending on water each month.

<http://waterconsumptioncalc.appspot.com>

Source: <http://companies.mybroadband.co.za/blog/2013/11/08/call-for-entrepreneurs-to-develop-intelligent-water-management-solutions/>