

Customer Services User Manual

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HS/123/12E

ISBN (Series) 978-92-1-133404-3

ISBN (Volume) 978-92-1-132536-2

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Acknowledgements

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Utility Management Series for Small Towns

Customer Services User Manual

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FOREWORD

Municipal authorities and urban service providers are being increasingly challenged to deliver sustainable services in a rapidly urbanizing world with complex problems resulting from the interplay of climate change, resource constraints and the adverse effects of a sluggish world economy. The need to improve the coverage and efficiency of urban basic services, such as water supply, sanitation, energy, drainage and transportation, has never been greater.



It is now well recognized that the essential pre-condition for improvements in the delivery of urban services, is to establish effective and well run institutions within the framework of a policy environment that promotes investment, a commercial approach to service delivery, managerial autonomy and accountability to key stakeholders, including customers and the Government.

With its mandate to promote sustainable urbanization, UN-Habitat has been in the forefront of international efforts to build the capacity of urban water utilities to face the challenges of expanding access to water and sanitation while improving the efficiency of service delivery. Through its regional and national programmes and the Global Water Operators Partnership Alliance, UN-Habitat provides capacity building for urban water utilities with a focus on business planning, water demand management, improving billing and revenue efficiency, energy audits and planning for climate change adaptation.

The Lake Victoria Region Water and Sanitation Initiative is one of the regional programmes in Africa that has demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating capacity building for urban water utilities with modest investments to improve infrastructure. The first phase of the Initiative has now been completed with impressive improvements in extending access to water and sanitation while enhancing the managerial capacity and operational efficiency of the utilities in the ten pilot towns in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The utilities which have benefited from the capacity building programme have experienced significant improvements in performance in key areas such as revenue enhancement, an expanded customer base and reductions in non-revenue water.

The six training manuals which are included in this Compendium of Training Materials are based on the practical experience of delivering the capacity building programme for urban water utilities in the Lake Victoria Towns. They encompass the key areas of utility management and operations and it is hoped that they will contribute to the knowledge base of training approaches and best practices in the water utility sector in small urban centers.



Joan Clos

Under-Secretary-General, United Nations
Executive Director, UN-Habitat



PREFACE



Small water utilities face unique challenges in delivering water and sanitation services to their customers. With a limited revenue base and few opportunities to benefit from economies of scale, they often suffer from severe skill shortages and a long legacy of underinvestment in infrastructure and capacity enhancement. To overcome these challenges, the small utilities need to maximize their operating efficiencies and ensure optimum utilization of their assets.

Since the year 2006, UN-Habitat has been working with national and regional partners in East Africa to implement the Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Initiative (LVWATSAN) which seeks to address the water and sanitation needs of small secondary towns in the Lake Victoria Basin. A capacity development programme in utility management and operations has become an integral component of this Initiative, which was started in 10 towns and is now being expanded to another 15 towns in the 5 East African Countries which share the Lake Victoria Basin.

The implementation of LVWATSAN has generated a solid body of knowledge and experience in enhancing the capacity of small utilities to improve their financial viability and operating efficiencies. This experience has been applied to produce a series of Manuals which can be used as training materials to improve the operating performance of small utilities.

The Block Mapping Procedures Manual is part of a Compendium of Training Manuals for Small Water Utilities, produced by UN-Habitat in six (6) volumes, as follows:

Volume 1: Finance Policies and Procedures Manual

Volume 2: Customer Services User Manual

Volume 3: Block Mapping Procedures Manual

Volume 4: Water Audit Manual

Volume 5: Leakage Control Manual

Volume 6: Reduction of Illegal Water Use Manual

The Manuals were produced through a collaborative effort between UN-Habitat and the National Water and Sewerage Corporation of Uganda within the framework of a fast track capacity building programme in utility management and operations which targeted seven small utilities in the towns around Lake Victoria.



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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ES	External Services
ET	Expert Team
LVWATSAN	Lake Victoria Water & Sanitation Initiative
MD	Managing Director
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NWSC	National Water & Sewerage Corporation
PIP	Performance Improvement Plan
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic & Time Bound
UN	United Nations

GLOSSARY

Customer Charter

Is an Official declaration of an Organization's / Business Commitment to serve its customers

Customer Slogan

Slogans are statement of norms that direct the conduct of staff in customer service. It espouses the values of the company in serving customers.

Service Standards

Standards are the promises that Organizations make to their customers about the level and quality of service they can expect. They should be SMART

Performance Improvement Plans

Short Term tactical strategies for achievement of long term goals and long term strategic plans.

Customer Complaints Registers

A log of customer complaints detailing time of complaint, person receiving the complaint, action take and feedback given to the customer



Customer Service Performance Indicators

Measures of customer service efficiency.

Body Language

Gestures, postures and way in which we walk and sit or send information to the customers.

Customer Satisfaction

Pleasant feeling a customer gets when he/she receives a service or product as a result of customer

Front Office

Office dedicated as the first contact for customers. It is usually located at the front of the office for easy access by customers

Mains Extensions

Water Service / Supply Lines



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CHAPTER 1

Background



Inspection of the booster pumps. Photo © UN-Habitat



Water Utilities have an important responsibility to provide safe and reliable supplies to their customers. Customer Service is one of the key commercial functions in any Utility. The responsibility of customer service unit lies with the Head of the Commercial department who is the overall supervisor of the customer service activities.

The Lake Victoria Region Water and Sanitation Initiative has provided many useful lessons on the importance of a customer service unit in an organizational Structural set-up, the appropriate office set-up framework for customer service, and the staffing. The manual also provides comprehensive guiding principles governing customer service along with the attendant codes of practice and procedures for effective customer service. Finally it outlines strategies of how to implement Customer service policy.

Small urban utilities, with all the challenges that they face, there is high need for implementing customer service policy to aid in service delivery and consumer and utility provider relationship.

1.1 Capacity Building

To strengthen the capacity of the Utilities in delivering effective service, UN-Habitat identified, the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) through its External Services Unit as a suitable partner with potential experience within the region and competence to carry out fast track capacity building programme.



In partnership with the NWSC, UN-Habitat embarked on a the task of developing training modules and a comprehensive training programme that would result in: improved sustainability of the investments in each of the utilities, predicated on adequate cost recovery systems; an expansion of the revenue base; improved customer relations as well as more effective operational systems geared at reduction of unaccounted for water.

During the execution of the capacity building programme, an expert team (ET) was deployed during the period from the 11th to the 29th of June 2007 to carry out a situational analysis and training needs assessment in the towns of Muleba and Bukoba in Tanzania and Homa Bay and Kisii in Kenya. Based on the findings of the training needs assessment, a fast track training and programme was developed. The programme included training of Change Agents from the utilities, preparation and implementation of short term performance improvement plans and on job training. The priority areas for the programme included: billing & revenue collection, water demand management focusing on unaccounted for water and customer care.

The customer care training was geared at enhancing the knowledge and skills of the staff in Customer handling. This course provided the participants with skills on how to:

- ☐ Build profitable relations with customers of the Utility, based on systematic approaches;
- ☐ Cut down customers' response time and learn how to express the company's closeness to the customer;



- ☐ Set a new dimension that differentiates the Utility from other service providers;
- ☐ Set standards for customer care in the Utility
- ☐ Appreciate what customer care means both to the customer and the organization
- ☐ Understand how different customers behave
- ☐ Understand how to handle different types of customers
- ☐ Effectively communicate with customers
- ☐ Understand how to relate to customers
- ☐ Help customers to get a better view and appreciation of the offers of the organization
- ☐ Understand how to capture and manage customer complaints
- ☐ Understand how to utilize customer complaint information

1.2 The Customer Services User Manual

The Lake Victoria Region Water and Sanitation Initiative (LVWATSAN) was designed to achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets for water and sanitation in small urban centres. To achieve this, the Utility Corporations managing the towns around the Lake Victoria Basin needed to operate in an effectively controlled environment and adhere to the highest standards of service internally and externally. To sustain expected levels of customer services, these Corporations needed guiding policies and procedures to back up the intensive capacity building already provided. This training manual presents a detailed description



of policies, procedures, standards and performance indicators meant to guide customer service for Water and sanitation utilities operating in small urban centres.

1.3 Structure of the Manual

The Volume 2: Customer Services User's Manual is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Background and Rational: Presents the perspectives of water supply in the Lake Victoria Basin, the Visions and Missions of the water operators, the role, goals and objectives of customer service.

Chapter 2: Customer Service Key Result Areas and Performance Indicators: Briefly outlines the key result areas that guide customer service, the service standards, performance indicators, rewards and penalties.

Chapter 3: Organization, Structural Set-up and Logistics: Presents the placement of customer service within the Organizational Structural set-up, the appropriate office set-up framework for customer service, and staffing.

Chapter 4: Customer Service Policy and Procedures:
Provides comprehensive guiding principles governing customer service



along with the attendant codes of practice and procedures for effective customer service.

Chapter 5: Strategies for Policy Implementation: Provides an overview of strategies for implementation of the Customer Service Policy.

CHAPTER 2

Key result areas and performance indicators



Water Testing workshop for Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation project in East Africa. Photo © UN-Habitat



2.0 Introduction

To enforce quality service delivery, Customer Service and Handling should be guided by the following Key Result Areas and Customer Service **SMART** Standards against which the utility should measure its capability in providing and improving services to its customers.

2.1 Key Result Areas

To provide clean, reliable and safe drinking water to the population within the jurisdiction of the utility the following should constitute the customer service key result areas:

Customer Service Key Result Areas

- ☐ To promptly connect all eligible applicants to our service lines
- ☐ To set-up community kiosks to serve communities who may not be able to afford individual house connections
- ☐ To correctly and timely bill all consumers for services consumed
- ☐ To collect payment for services consumed
- ☐ To disconnect services from delinquent customers
- ☐ To re-connect customers who have met stipulated requirements
- ☐ To promptly respond to customers needs and expectations



2.2 Customer Service Standards

2.2.1 Responsiveness

All technical related issues should be responded to within 24 hours and all commercial issues should be responded to within 12 hours (*this performance indicator can be changed based on what the utility can actually handle*)

2.2.2 Billing

- ☐ All customers on supply should be billed monthly
- ☐ All customers should receive their bills by the 15th day of each month (*or on the day as per the Utility's practice*)

2.2.3 Payments

All payments and adjustments to customers' accounts should be updated and reflected in the bills within the respective billing month

2.2.4 Disconnection

All customers due for disconnection should be served with a dully signed seven days' notice.

2.2.5 Reconnection

All customers eligible for reconnection should be reconnected within 24 hours of clearing the obligations.



2.2.6 Customer Service

- ☐ Front Desks to serve customers should be set-up at each office, well furnished and with appropriate front desk staff.
- ☐ Customer Surveys should be carried out every quarter to establish the customer perceptions towards services deliveries.

2.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

To achieve the set standards, the Commercial Manager should monitor customer service performance based on the following framework:

i) Frequency of Monitoring

The Commercial Officer responsible for customer services should produce performance reports based on standardized reporting formats namely monthly, quarterly, bi-annually and annually. The reports should cover service status regarding all the key result areas above.

ii) Indicators to be monitored

The following indicators should be monitored:

- ☐ Number of complaints received (broken down by type)
- ☐ Number of complaints responded to
- ☐ Percentage of complaints responded to
- ☐ Average response time to complaints of technical nature
- ☐ Average response time to complaints of commercial nature



iii) Rewards and Penalties

Where the commercial department/section in an office is unable to meet set targets by close of the year, sanctions to be determined by management should be imposed. Rewards should similarly be instituted for staff that are able to achieve their targets after assessment at the end of the year.

CHAPTER 3

Organization, Structural Set-up and Logistics



Stake holders meeting. Photo © UN-Habitat



3.0 Introduction

Customer Service is one of the key commercial functions in any Utility. The responsibility of customer service shall lie with the Head of the Commercial department who shall be the overall supervisor of the customer service activities. Customer Service shall be structured as follows:

3.1 Organization

- ❑ The Commercial Department should have a Customer Service Section which should be headed by a Commercial Officer or a Commercial Assistant depending on the nature of activity of the town.
- ❑ Each Utility office must have a Customer Service Office or a Front Desk whose role shall be to:
 - Receive and attend to customers
 - Receive, Log and route customer complaints
 - Monitor action on reported customer complaints and give feedback to customers
 - Maintain the customer complaints reporting and resolution system
- ❑ The customer service office shall handle all matters pertaining to customer inquiries and complaints.



3.2 Location and Space of Customer Service Office

In order for customer service to be done quickly and efficiently the following factors should be considered when designing a customer service office:

- ☐ The customer service office should be located at the front of the office structures. This should reduce the amount of time the customer spends moving through the system.
- ☐ The customer service office should be spacious enough
- ☐ The customer service office should be well furnished with the following:
 - Customer chairs, benches and tables
 - Notice boards (with brochures and publicity material)
 - Suggestion box
 - The customer service counter placed near a large service window (at least ten meters long).
 - Sufficient tables, chairs and filing cabinets for the front desk staff
 - Appropriate Air Conditioning/fan
- ☐ Places of convenience such as wash rooms, and toilets for customers should be well positioned
- ☐ The customer service office should be accessible to pay offices where customers can easily make payments whenever necessary.



3.3 Office Set-up and Ambience

- ❑ The offices should be well ventilated, lit, painted and cleaned.
- ❑ Communication networks should be fitted: telephones, fax machine and a good computer system with appropriate software to deal with all customer issues.
- ❑ The office set-up and décor should clearly promote the Corporate Identity of the Utility by having the following:
 - Office colors blending with the Utility's Corporate colors
 - Offices with clear and gleaming sign posts
 - Utility Vehicles branded with Corporate Colors
 - Offices with clear display of President/Head of State, Managing Director and Board Chairman's portraits, Utility and National Flags at Reception/ Managers Office
- ❑ All other Office Premises and installations should:
 - Be clean and well maintained office premises and Installations
 - Have a well maintained compound
 - Have adequate Security
 - Have clean and well maintained steps, verandas, shields, etc
- ❑ Proper and Attractive Office Setup
 - A well maintained, clean and tidy Inner Office setup
 - Office Furniture should be in a good state
 - Front Office Desks should be well laid out and maintained
 - Clearly well displayed Customer Charter, Utility Vision and Mission



- Properly laid out Furniture, Cabinets, Files, Documents, and equipment to reflect a good image
- Good lighting systems
- Interior color (paint) blends with the office furniture
- Adequate waiting seats for customers

3.4 Staffing

- ☐ The head of the commercial function in the utility should be the overall supervisor of the customer service function.
- ☐ An officer at an appropriate scale should be assigned the direct role of managing the customer service activities of the Utility.
- ☐ All front desk offices must be assigned a dedicated front office staff to attend to customer inquiries and complaints.

CHAPTER 4



The Customer Policy & Customer Service Procedures



Facility inspection. Photo © UN-Habitat



4.0 The Policy Statement

The staff and Board of Directors of the **utility** hereby pledge to offer its current and future customers the highest quality service and to provide a level of customer care, which will at the very least, meet their expectation. Our commitment is to at all times, act in the best interest of our customers and continually improve our standards of quality in every aspect of our services.

4.1 Goal /Purpose of the Policy

Goals of the customer service policy

- ☐ To offer good quality water and sewerage services
- ☐ To create satisfied customers
- ☐ To have satisfied and well motivated staff

The Customer Policy has three goals

4.2 Organizational Values that promote the Policy

- ☐ Integrity
- ☐ Punctuality
- ☐ Accuracy
- ☐ Transparency
- ☐ Truthfulness
- ☐ Discipline
- ☐ Respect



☐ Smartness

☐ Loyalty

4.3 Scope of the Policy

The services guided by this policy include but are not limited to the following:

4.3.1 Extension of Water / Sewerage Services

It is the duty of any water utility to serve the population within its jurisdiction with clean, reliable and safe water services. In order to do this mains extensions of water and sewerage services shall be made to areas established in order to have the necessary demand potential.

4.3.2 Service Connections

Where mains extensions are made, the utility should commit to connect all applicants to its service. Apart from making direct connections to individual applicants, it should connections to community kiosks to serve communities who may not be able to afford individual house connections should be set up.

4.3.3 Billing and Bill Distribution

It is the responsibility of the utility to correctly bill its customers for services consumed and timely distribute the bills to the customers.



4.3.4 Collecting Payments

It is the responsibility of the utility to collect payments for services consumed and wherever possible engage debt collectors to collect the revenue on the utility's behalf.

4.3.5 Disconnections

Where customers default on payments or violate the set policies and procedures, the utility will be forced to disconnect the services and institute stipulated actions for any committed offences where applicable.

4.3.6 Reconnections

Disconnected customers who meet stipulated requirements in the code of practice should be reconnected.

4.3.7 Customer Services

It is the duty of the utility to satisfy its customers. To do this the utility should continuously listen to the needs and expectation of our customers.

4.4 Codes of Practice for Application of the Policy

4.4.1 Code of Practice for Staff

- ☐ Welcome a customer with a smile
- ☐ Put the needs of the customer first



- ☐ Treat a customer with courtesy, consideration and respect
- ☐ Listen and respond appropriately to every customer
- ☐ Have qualified and supportive staff to deal with every customer directly
- ☐ Deal with all customer issues with efficiency, fairness and integrity.
- ☐ Provide customers with relevant written information where suitable
- ☐ Be as reliable, honest, friendly as customers would like us to be
- ☐ We must ensure that the product we give our customer is of good quality.
- ☐ Be cautious when handling customers
- ☐ Never quarrel with a customer, Never abuse a customer even when he/she is abusive and arrogant
 - Know that the customer is always right even when he is wrong
 - Never engage a customer in a defensive argument
 - Always serve a customer with a smile
 - Aim at winning and retaining a customer
 - All staff must be smart – clean uniform and protective clothes must be provided, and always carry identification.
 - Serve customers effectively, just in time and avoid long procedures in handling customers' complaints
 - Be knowledgeable staff where they are to be exposed to customers
 - Be patient when handling a customer



- Never be arrogant to customers
- Be responsive to customer demands
- Be unique in the eyes of a customer
- Increase customer knowledge
- Listen to the customer
- Always answer customer queries whether verbal or written
- Be available to customers
- Always offer help to a customer
- Always know that “Customer is King and the reason for your existence”

4.4.2 Factors Governing Staff Conduct in Customer Service

Attitude of staff involved in the customer service

Positive Attitude

Portray a positive attitude all the time. If you expect to do well, you will be successful.

Courteous

Should always be polite, whatever the circumstances.

Attentive

Listen, show interest, be alert and observe customers; give them your individual attention.

Helpful

Understand that they are there to provide a service, and must demonstrate that to customers.

Caring

Make customers feel that they matter, that they are individuals and not just one of the crowds



Appearance of staff involved in the customer service

Positive Attitude

Portray a positive attitude all the time. If you expect to do well, you will be successful.

Dress

Wear appropriate dress, be tidy and clean. We reflect the image of our organization.

Voice

Understand that their tone of voice will convey as much information to the customer as the words we use, so we must sound interested warm and sincere.

Body Language

Know that their gestures, postures and way in which we walk and sit all send information to the customer.

Smile

Understand that people respond to a smile.

Eye Contact

Is a way of acknowledging people, building a relationship, establishing rapport and making customers.



Approach of staff involved in the customer service

Confident

If they approach the customer with confidence, they develop trust

Knowledgeable

The customer must feel that we know how to do our job; that we are competent and efficient Body Language:

Acknowledgement

Always signal the customer's presence by looking at them and greeting them

Welcoming

They all need to feel liked and approved of Eye Contact

Customer Relations to be adopted by staff involved in the customer service

- ☐ Regard The Customer is the KING
- ☐ The Customer is the Reason They Exist
- ☐ Treat Customers with Courtesy, Consideration and Respect
- ☐ Listen and Respond appropriately to every Customer
- ☐ Deliver what the Customer Wants plus one Percent
- ☐ Take Personal Presentation as very important.
- ☐ Take Ambience, Physical appearance of the structures and Cleanliness of the Environment as an important factor of business
- ☐ NEVER be too busy for our customers
- ☐ Recognize and Reward Well Paying Customers
- ☐ Keep anticipating customer needs and provide for them



4.4.3 Codes of practice for Customer Complaints Handling

It is in the objective of the Utility to serve its customers diligently. Due to diversity of the needs of customers, effective customer handling calls for proper Customer Relationship Management. The following Code of Practice and Procedures shall govern customer complaints handling

i. Complaints Reporting

Customers can report complaints through one or all of the following avenues:-

- ☐ Written communication,
- ☐ By telephones,
- ☐ Through e-mails
- ☐ Personal Walk Ins.

ii. Guiding Principles

- ☐ All customers reporting complaints shall be attended to in person
- ☐ All staff will receive customers with courtesy
- ☐ All customers will be treated equally
- ☐ All service offices / areas will maintain the customer complaints register for documenting and tracking actions of the complaints
- ☐ All customer complaints shall be acted upon



- ☐ Dedicated telephone numbers and email contact address shall be made available for customer communication
- ☐ All written complaints will be replied back in writing
- ☐ A framework for monitoring effectiveness of handling customer complaints shall be instituted

iii) Customer complaints handling procedure (refer to Box 1)

- ☐ All complaints will be received by the customer care desk
- ☐ All customer complaints will be logged in by the appropriate officers at the front desk who will take relevant customer details
- ☐ Customers shall be informed of the minimum and maximum time to resolve each case
- ☐ All complaints that can't be resolved by the Front Desk officers will be routed to the appropriate section for action
- ☐ All actioned complaints will be duly signed by the relevant officers
- ☐ Feedback will be given for all actioned complaints
- ☐ Quarterly surveys shall be carried out to establish the customer perceptions towards services delivered.

Responsible Staff

Front Desk Staff, Commercial Officers, Meter readers, Cashiers, Office Secretaries and Top Management



iv. Customer Complaints Reporting and Resolution Systems

Each service Area shall put in place a standard Customer Complaints Reporting and Resolution System. The system shall effectively be used for

- ☐ Logging and routing of complaints Received
- ☐ Monitoring and evaluating action taken on complaints received
- ☐ Monitoring and evaluating complaints not acted upon
- ☐ Evaluating average time taken to act on complaints
- ☐ Monitoring and evaluating feedback to customers.

4.4.4 Codes of practice for Extension of Water and Sewerage Services

i. Prior to making any water supply extensions, the Utility shall undertake to

- ☐ Carry out demand surveys to establish the demand, willingness and ability to pay for water services using questionnaires and interviews
- ☐ Meet with the Local authorities to discuss any issues pertaining to mains extension such as land issues, etc.
- ☐ Carry out a cost benefit analysis to establish the following: -
 - the viability of the mains extension
 - cost of the mains extension



- Population density of the area
- The expected level of new connections
- Break even period
- Pay back period

ii. Where an extension line is found to be non viable, but the need to provide water is deemed necessary, then the utility has a social mission to provide water at the ruling tariff.

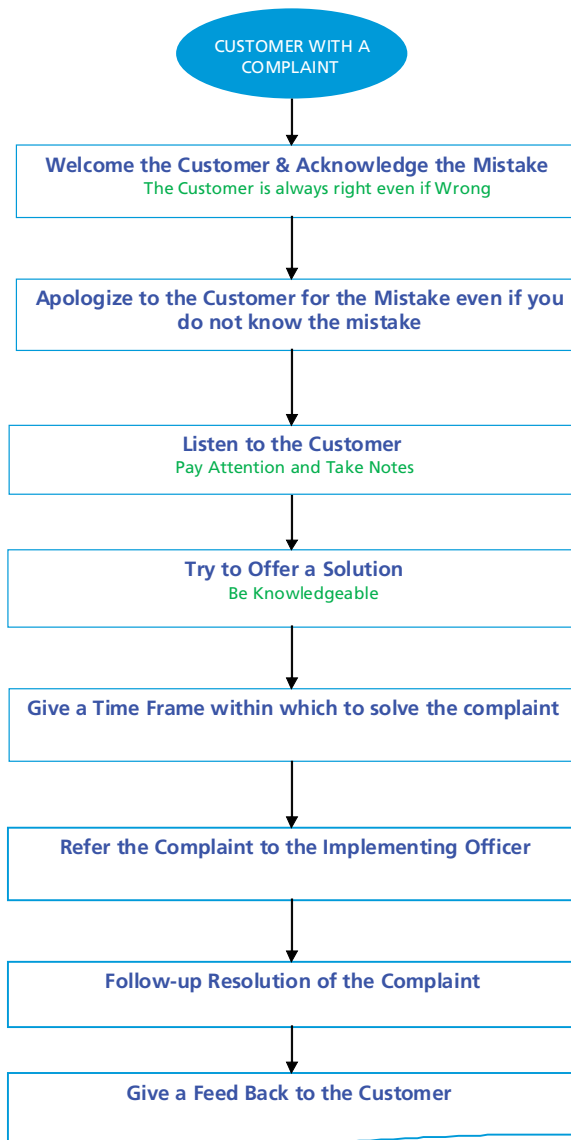
iii. The Utility shall extend Water Supply to all areas established to have potential demand.

iv. The utility shall carry out public awareness sensitisation through media, strategic alliances, visits about the following

- ☐ Availability of Water services
- ☐ Location of our contact offices
- ☐ Price of our water services
- ☐ Public Health safety and advantages of consuming improved water



Steps of managing customer complaints





Responsible Staff

Technical Department, Meter Readers, Surveyors, Billing, Customer Services section, finance department

4.4.5 Codes of practice for New Service Connections

- ☐ Customers shall be within the designated service area
- ☐ Applicants should be willing to accept the Utility's new connection policies
- ☐ Applicants shall take charge of all encumbrances which are not the responsibility of the Utility prior to connections
- ☐ Capability of the applicants to pay for services according to the terms and conditions of the utility shall be determined and confirmed before a service connection is made
- ☐ Applicants shall prove true ownership of the properties for which they want the connection
- ☐ The Utility shall make available new connection forms free of charge at all its service points.
- ☐ The front Desk officer will always be available to guide every applicant on how to fill the form correctly and register completed forms.
- ☐ The Utility shall carry out a survey of the customer premise and determine requirements for the connection within 24 hours of registering the application forms.
- ☐ New connection fees will be received at any nearest cash office.



- ☐ Connection is effected within one day, once the pipe laying works is completed and all connection fees are paid.
- ☐ Every customer is provided with a meter at a rent fee levied at billing.
- ☐ During new connection, notices/tips are left behind to customers on how to maintain their service lines, regarding leaks and economical use of water.
- ☐ The Customer will receive the first bill one month from connection.

Responsible Staff

Technical Department, Meter Readers, Surveyors, Billing staff, Customer Services section, finance department.

4.4.6 Codes of practice for Billing and Bill Distribution

The Utility must pledge to provide an accurate billing system through an internationally recognised and a secure billing process that complies with the best practice principles that will include: -

- ☐ Monthly meter readings to establish actual consumption.
- ☐ Kindly requesting customers to allow staff to have access to all meters at all times for purpose of meter reading and repair.
- ☐ Timely bill production by the 10th of each month or as agreed for a particular utility.
- ☐ Staff to physically distribute bills to customer premises by the 15th of every month or as agreed by the utility.




- ☐ Making prices easy to understand and providing the detail a customer may need.
- ☐ Promptly taking action for any billing problem.
- ☐ Allowing the customer to lodge in any complaints regarding errors that might be discovered on bills to the nearest service point.
- ☐ Complaints on erroneous bill shall be acted upon within 12 hours.

Responsible Staff

Billing Staff, Meter Readers, Customer Services Section, Operations and maintenance, finance department

4.4.7 Codes of practice for Payment of Services

- ☐ Customers shall pay their bills in accordance to the utility's terms and conditions.
- ☐ Customers shall pay for the service at any of the Utility's official paying points and designated banks.
- ☐ No cash payments shall be made to staff apart from authorized cashiers.
- ☐ Payments shall be in cash or cheques.
- ☐ Customers whose cheque(s) is/are dishonoured by the bank due to insufficient funds shall be liable to a penalty of 25% of the cheque value.
- ☐ Customers can make advance payments.

- 
- ☐ Official receipts shall be issued for all payments made.

Responsible Staff

Cashiers, Front Desk Staff, Meter Readers, Billing staff, Customer Services section, finance department.

4.4.8 Codes of practice for Meter Management

- ☐ All meters shall remain the property of THE UTILITY
- ☐ All suspected defective meters must be reported by Customers to the utility office, who is the sole authority to establish its condition.
- ☐ All meter repairs / tests will be done free of charge by staff.
- ☐ The utility shall provide a well-equipped workshop at to test and repair meters.
- ☐ A meter registration error of 5% (\pm) shall be tolerated.
- ☐ Meter testing shall be the ultimate proof of water consumption.
- ☐ Consumption for metered services shall be based on the meter reading and associated charges shall be in accordance with the existing tariff.
- ☐ Customers who intend to leave the premises should give a two months' notice of their intention to vacate the premises.
- ☐ The cost of replacing or repairing a damage due to the



negligence of the customer will be borne by the customer.

- ☐ The cost for replacing defective meters shall be met by the utility.
- ☐ All meters shall be installed in accordance to the utility's specification and standards.

Responsible Staff

Technical Department, Meter Readers, Surveyors, Billing staff,
Customer Services section, finance department

4.4.9 Bill Dispute Procedures

- ☐ Customers shall report the disputed bill(s) to the respective area office or Head Office.
- ☐ The Utility shall immediately investigate the authenticity of the disputed bills.
- ☐ Where proved that the complaint is genuine, it shall be adjusted within the month of approval to correct the anomaly.

Responsible Staff

Technical Department, Meter Readers, Surveyors, Billing staff,
Customer Services section, finance department



4.4.10 Codes of practice for Arrears / Debt Management

The Utility may:

- ☐ Accept payments for arrears by instalment upon making agreements.
- ☐ Offer discounts to well paying customers.
- ☐ Consider amnesty to disconnected accounts as a way wooing them back to service.
- ☐ Wherever necessary, engage debt collector(s) to recover debts.

Responsible Staff

Technical Department, Meter Readers, Surveyors, Billing staff, Customer Services section, finance department

4.4.11 Code of practice and procedures on Disconnection

It is unusually for the utility to intentionally disconnect its esteemed customers, but under un-avoidable circumstances, disconnections may occur. The following are the codes of practice and procedures that should be adopted whenever the need to disconnect arises:

- ☐ All customers who have not paid their bills for at least three consecutive months should be considered eligible for disconnection.



- ☐ All properties found illegally connected must be disconnected and subjected to a fine as per the utility's policy.
- ☐ All properties found with meter by-pass must be disconnected and subjected to a fine as per utility's policy.
- ☐ Drawing water from the distribution main using pumps is illegal. Any body found in this practice, must be disconnected and subjected to a fine as per the utility's policy.
- ☐ Customers who fail to honour payment agreements must be disconnected.
- ☐ Disconnected customers found illegally reconnected, must be disconnected again and subjected to legal actions.

The following procedures should be observed as utilities implement disconnections;

- ☐ Defaulters who have not paid for at least three consecutive months must be served with a seven days' notice.
- ☐ Other illegal consumers must be disconnected instantly without notice.
- ☐ After seven days' notice, if a customer has not turned up to settle their debts, they should be disconnected without any further notice.
- ☐ All disconnected non paid customers should be subjected to the utility's debt collection procedures.



4.4.12 Conditions for Reconnection

Customers who have been disconnected shall only be reconnected upon the following conditions:

- ☐ After making full payment.
- ☐ After entering into agreements for payments by instalments.
- ☐ After it is proved that the customers was wrongly disconnected.
- ☐ After it is proved that the customer was wrongly billed.
- ☐ Where the disconnection was due to the utility's operational and maintenance activities.
- ☐ All disconnected customers due to illegal consumption will be reconnected after being subjected to utility's penalties and established connection procedures.

CHAPTER 5



Strategies for Policy Implementation



Community participates in the water project by digging trenches for water pipes. Photo © UN-Habitat



5.0 The Customer Charters

Customer charter confirms publicly the roles and responsibilities of the utility and the rights of its customers.

5.1. Purpose of Customer Charter

To make the functions of the utility transparent, create service accountability and friendliness with customers, the utility shall define each service provided by it and the obligations of each party (service provider and customer). Through this, it shall be exposing the efficiency and reliability of the service it renders.

Sample Customer Charter

Our Customer Charter shall

- ☐ Tell Customers the Standards of Service to Expect
- ☐ Tell Customers what to do if something goes wrong
- ☐ Tell Customers How to make Contact
- ☐ Help Employees by Setting out clearly the services their organisations provide

5.1.2 Declaration of Services provided


- ☐ A clean and safe water supply
- ☐ Disposal of sewage from houses connected to sewer system



5.1.3 UTILITY Obligations

a) Applications for new connections and meters

- i. Application forms shall be available from the Customer Service Unit and supplied at a reasonable fee or free of charge.
- ii. Acceptance or rejection of the filled in forms shall be acknowledged within seven days from the day of application (Customer Service Unit).
- iii. Payments shall be accepted in full or in instalments.
- iv. Payments shall be accepted by cheque/cash.
- v. Acknowledgement of payment shall be given immediately.
- vi. In the event of un cleared cheques the payer will be fined.
- vii. The connection will be made within seven days from the day of full connection fee payment.
- viii. The applicant/customer should pay an estimated advance bill for three months.
- ix. All connection processes should be done by the Utility.
- x. All meters will be installed at a distance not greater than 36m from the distribution main.
- xi. The customer will be obliged to protect and maintain the meter.
- xii. The meter will be supplied by the Utility.
- xiii. In case of meter damage the customer will pay the sum equivalent to the cost of a replacement meter.

- 
- xiv. All materials from the tapping point up to the meter should be approved by the UTILITY.

b) Options for payment of bills

- i. The first bill shall be issued within one months from the date of connection.
- ii. Bills shall be issued monthly and shall be delivered by the 15th of every month or as agreed by the utility.
- iii. Receipts will be issued for all payments immediately.
- iv. Disconnection of a water/sewerage service will be carried out with notice of 7 days after the due date of payment.
- v. Bills will be despatched by (i) Post, (ii) Hand and (iii) Despatch book.

c) Complaints and requests

- i. Customer complaints/requests shall be attended in person, writing or telephone.
- ii. Customers will be informed of the minimum and maximum time to attend to each case.
- iii. All written correspondences shall be replied within 7 working days from the mail receiving date.
- iv. Emergency team should be available 24 hours a day.



d) Service assurance

- i. Quality: The utility's water shall be clean and safe to meet required standards.
- ii. Quantity: To be determined for each Utility.
- iii. Changes or service interruptions will be informed in not more than 12 hours of occurrence.
- iv. Assured minimum hours supply/day.

5.1.4 Customers' obligations

- i. Promptly pay bills.
- ii. Protection and maintenance of water meters.
- iii. Prompt report of leaks, illegal connections, water theft and water sabotages.
- iv. Give accessibility to utility staff (Bearing Identify Cards and/or uniformed)

5.2 The Customer Appeal System

- i. A customer, who disagrees with an event decision, shall have the right to appeal the decision to UTILITY's Appeals Committee. The Appeals Committee is designated to hear all formal appeals of events decisions and to render a final decision on each appeal. The customer shall be advised of the right to appeal by an appropriate message. Customers shall be notified in writing of the right to appeal on Final



Notices mailed by the Utility to the mailing address on record. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Utility and received prior to disconnection of service and include the following information:

- ☐ Account number
- ☐ Person requesting appeal
- ☐ Service address
- ☐ Mailing address if different
- ☐ Other occupant names- Telephone number
- ☐ fDate submitted- Narrative of appeal- Printed name
- ☐ Signature

- ii. Upon receipt by the Utility's Customer Service Appeals Committee of a written appeal from a customer or applicant, Utility shall investigate the appeal and report the results, in writing, of its investigation to the customer or applicant within ten (10) business days from Utility's receipt of the written appeal. The Utility shall prepare a written record showing the name and address of the customer or applicant involved, the date and nature of the appeal, and the disposition of the matter. It shall retain records of the appeal pursuant to its record retention policy.
- iii. Pending resolution of the appeal, the customer's obligation to pay undisputed and subsequent charges continues.



- iv. A customer or applicant who has an appeal pending with the Utility may receive continued service provided:
 - ☐ No evidence of theft of service, tampering or fraud is discovered, and
 - ☐ A bona fide appeal exists in which the facts asserted by the customer or applicant may entitle the customer or applicant to service.
- v. If the conditions in subsection (iv) of this section are not satisfied, the Utility has no obligation to provide continued service. The Utility will give the customer or applicant notice in accordance with its Policy and Procedure prior to disconnecting service.
- vi. If the customer refuses to accept delivery of the written decision or fails to comply with the Appeals Committee decision, the Utility may proceed with immediate collection efforts without further notice, including, but not limited to restriction or disconnection of the customer's service. The written decision of the Appeals Committee is final when issued.
- vii. Appeals are only accepted from the Utility customers, applicants, or their authorized agent.



5.3 Customer Feed-Back Tools

5.3.1 Suggestion Boxes

The Utility shall have a suggestion box conveniently placed where customers can easily gain access to it. Possible locations shall be, but are not limited to the Front Desk/Customer Service area, or the cash receipting point.

The suggestion box shall be opened at least once a week and customer feedback analysed.

5.3.2 Customer Perception Surveys

The Utility shall regularly carry out Customer Perception Surveys to obtain customer feedback. The surveys shall be in form of self administered questionnaires requesting for customers' feedback with regards to the following aspects of utility service:

- ☐ Timeliness
- ☐ Reliability
- ☐ Ambience
- ☐ Staff Care
- ☐ Product Quality



5.3.3 Other Feedback Sources

- ☐ Strategic Alliance Meetings with Civic Leaders, Community Leaders, Community groupings, etc
- ☐ Focus Group Discussions

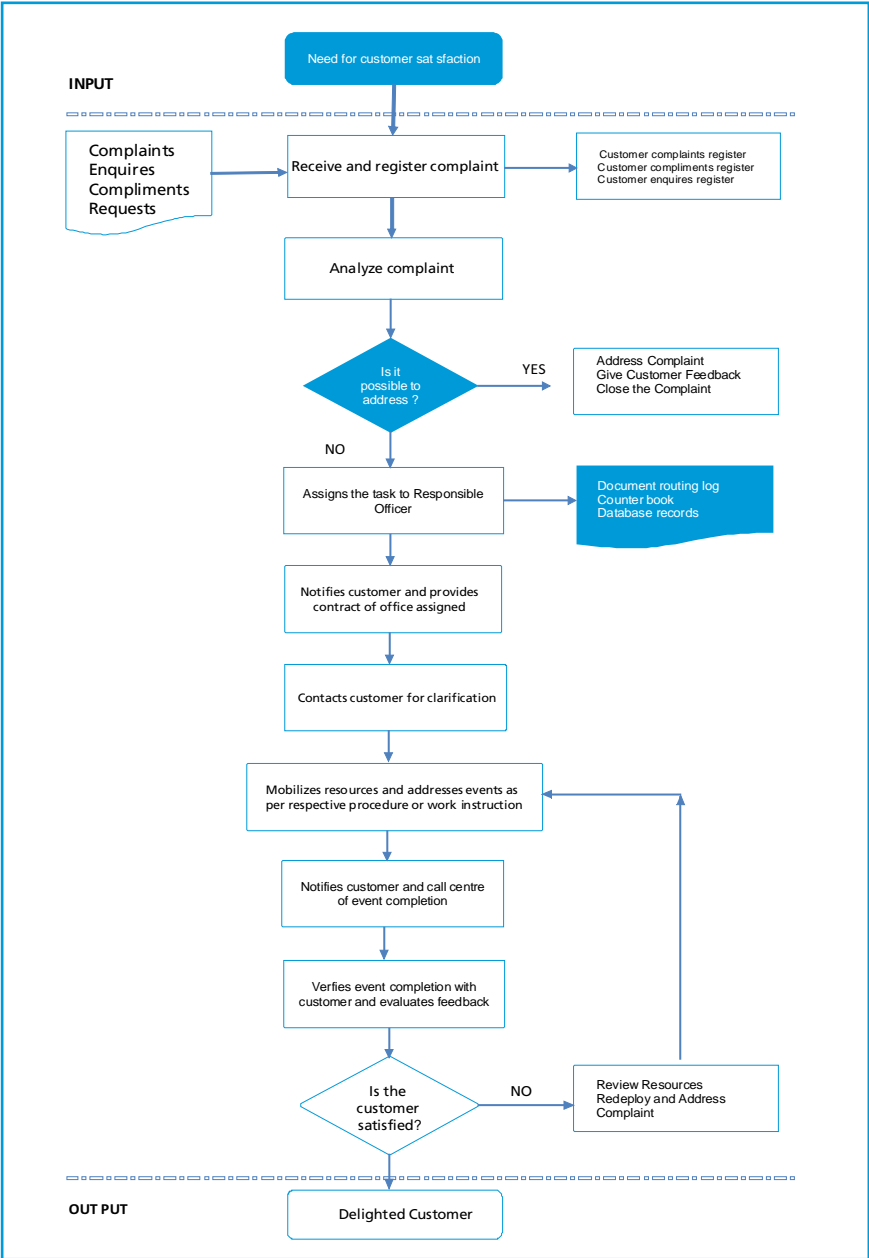
5.4 Customer Service Slogans

Slogans are statement of norms that direct the conduct of staff in customer service. It espouses the values of the company in serving customers. To create an inner culture of good customer service, the Utility shall:

- ☐ Develop customer service slogans
- ☐ Publicize the Slogan
 - Using Print & Electronic Media
 - In the Letter Heads
 - In Offices
 - In Facilities (vehicles, plants, etc.)
 - Advertising media
- ☐ Practice the Slogan
 - Walk the Talk

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: CUSTOMER SERVICE FLOW CHART



This manual is part of a Utility Management Series for Small Towns. It can be used either as a training module to support the delivery of capacity building programmes in utility management and operations or as a reference manual to guide operations and maintenance staff in designing and implementing programmes to reduce the rate of Unaccounted-For-Water. When used by urban water utilities, the manual should be widely circulated to ensure that all staff and Supervisors involved/working in concerned Departments/Sections receive a copy. This will ensure a systematic and consistent approach to the implementation of an Illegal Water Use Reduction Strategy.

HS/123/12E

ISBN (Series) 978-92-1-133404-3

ISBN(Volume) 978-92-1-132536-2



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