



Communicating Tariffs

A guide for
local government in
South Africa, Namibia
and Botswana

TRANSPARENT
TARIFFS



TARIFFS

Tariffs provide one of the most significant sources of revenue for a municipality. They are also a key point of engagement between local government and the people they serve. A municipality speaks directly to its citizens when it sends them an invoice for services rendered. Having citizens/customers understand the tariff charged is therefore a key component for transparent local governance.

Tariffs offer a unique opportunity for municipalities to inform, educate and influence their customers and to establish a communication which is transparent, accurate and customer-oriented. By communicating how tariffs are calculated and which strategic decisions the municipality is making around its finances, consumers' willingness to pay may be affected...

The purpose of **COMMUNICATING tariffs** is to assist municipalities to communicate transparent and understandable tariffs to citizens. It takes citizens' concerns regarding tariffs as its starting point, and suggests a set of basic methods and some good ideas that can be used to explain tariffs. It also recommends communications methods to inform citizens regarding tariffs.

The tools for explaining tariffs derive from the **SETTING TARIFFS** guide, which covers how tariffs are determined by calculating the cost of a service and then developing tariff policies, which result in a tariff structure and actual tariffs.

The guide is written with a citizen-oriented focus and is tailored for small to medium-sized municipalities, where small but tangible changes in the communication on tariffs are preferred over more complex options.

The target audience for the publication is municipal officials looking for inspiration on how to improve communication on tariffs and Councillors who need to respond to the concerns of their constituents.

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Communicating tariffs

— an example from Mymuni

This guide shares the story of good tariff communication practices in Mymuni. These examples are simple, realistic, and practical for any other municipality to implement.

In this Guide, *municipality* refers to all local government structures, including local councils.



What Mymuni citizens wanted to know about tariffs

Last year in December the CFO (Chief Financial Officer) reported to council that revenues for the first half of the financial year had fallen and that he was worried about covering all the budgeted costs. He blamed the economic recession and increased unemployment, and proposed that planned maintenance be put on hold to cut costs. However, the technical manager opposed this, as service interruptions were increasing due to infrastructure failures.

They decided to table the problem at council. Councillors were worried, as they had seen service delivery protests increasingly reported on the TV news. That was not the kind of publicity Mymuni wanted. So they mandated the finance and technical portfolio committees to jointly propose a way forward.

At its January meeting, Council decided to implement a campaign to encourage citizens to pay for services. The idea was get citizens to understand tariffs, why they needed to pay for services, and the consequences of not doing so.

They formed a small task team to plan and drive the campaign, consisting of the CFO, Technical Manager, Communications Officer (CO) and three councillors who volunteered. The CFO was at first sceptical about consulting citizens, but he agreed to be on the task team, to ensure that the approach was practical, cost-effective and did not raise citizens expectations that could not be met.



The CO, Sarah Sibakhulu, suggested that they first find out what citizens knew about tariffs, and what questions they had. She proposed that she and the three councillors speak to people themselves, to find out. They decided to start internally to practice – after all, they were also citizens who paid tariffs.

Speaking to officials and councillors

Sarah proposed speaking to small groups that she called 'focus groups'. She explained that it was not necessary to speak to everyone, as a representative sample would give the same result. They spoke to 25 of the 250 officials, and all 20 ward councillors, as they were to consult their local committees. Each group was asked just two questions

What do you know about tariffs? (i.e. what you pay for municipal services)

What questions do you have about tariffs?

Speaking to citizens

The task team then spoke to citizens in informal settlements, low-cost housing areas, middle class suburbs and the well-off area as well as business people and heads of institutions. They started with local area or ward committees, dividing them into 3 smaller groups, which then shared their responses. After speaking to all the local committees, they realised that they were not hearing any new questions, so the sample was probably sufficiently representative.

Sarah analysed the responses and identified the most common and important concerns. The tariff task team (TTT) then developed responses to just these concerns, and decided how best to communicate each response to citizens. They realized the value of including the CFO and Technical Manager, as they had many of the answers.

MORE ABOUT ●●●

Guidelines for focus groups

A focus group is a small group interview (about 5 people) used to get in-depth views or feedback, test a proposal, or understand people or a situation better. Participants can be chosen as a random sample, or be leaders in a community or sector.

A focus group needs to have a clear purpose, e.g. to consult community leaders on the proposed tariff increases. A focus group usually has one session of one to two hours, depending on the extent of content or complexity of the matter.

You need a well-formulated question or set of questions (max. 5), and responses and key points are noted by a scribe. You can ask further questions to explore what comes up in the group. Try to get balanced participation by asking for the views of quieter people.

Allow brief discussions, but don't let the process get side-tracked.

Before running focus groups in the community, test-run one internally with a group of officials and/or councillors, and then review and evaluate the session with them. This allows you to practice, learn from feedback, see how





? What am I paying for?

” The Mymuni tariff task team decided that this information needed to be readily available to all citizens. The CFO thus prepared a chart for water services, that showed the different direct costs, the overhead cost and subsidy. The chart showed an imaginary water bill cut into pieces, to show how the total monthly cost is made up of different costs.

COMMUNICATION METHODS

The team decided this information would be communicated

- in the Mymuni website and in the newsletter
- in an article in the local newspaper
- the chart would be explained to all councillors, who would in turn show and explain to the local/ward committees.
- all service payment desk officials would have the charts on hand and be able to explain them to citizens, if they enquired.



COSTS included in a WATER BILL



Photos on this page from Water Supply Services, O&M Handbook, Northern Cape



? How are tariffs determined?



Many citizens had this concern, and also wanted to know if everyone paid the same tariffs. The task team decided that to understand this, citizens would need to be aware of

- how the baseline cost is calculated
- the tariff schedule, based on tariff policies

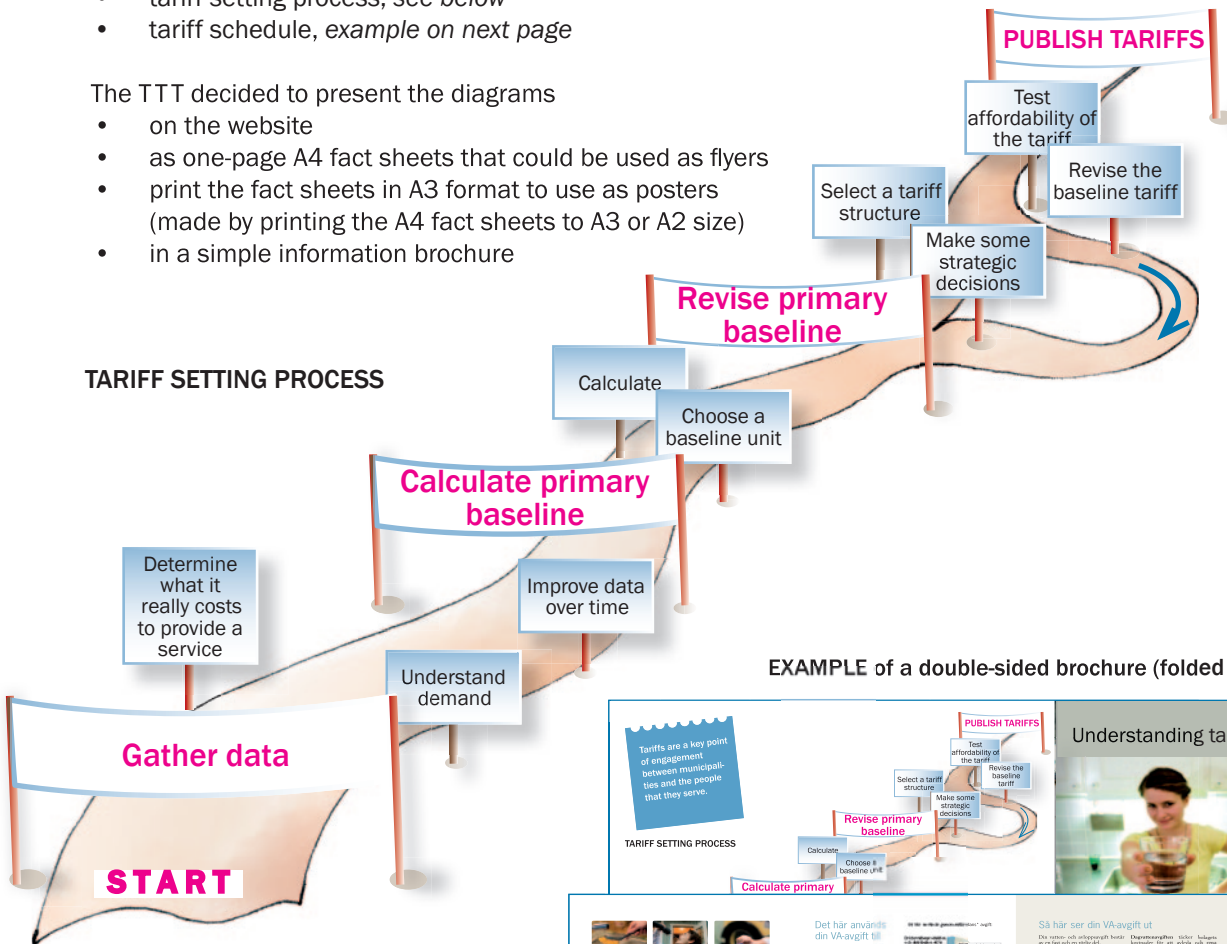
COMMUNICATION METHODS

- tariff setting process, see below
- tariff schedule, example on next page

The TTT decided to present the diagrams

- on the website
- as one-page A4 fact sheets that could be used as flyers
- print the fact sheets in A3 format to use as posters (made by printing the A4 fact sheets to A3 or A2 size)
- in a simple information brochure

TARIFF SETTING PROCESS













EXAMPLE of a double-sided brochure (folded in 3)



Mymuni Municipality TARIFF SCHEDULE 2011-2012

COSTS in Mymuni currency Afri (Af)

TARIFFS	RESIDENTIAL	2010/11	2011/12	% increase
 Property Rates	The first 15 000 (50 000 for those earning less than 3 500 per month) of value of all residential property is exempted from property rates. All property valued above these amounts is subject to the percent per Afri	0,0058	0,0063	8,62%
 Electricity	Basic availability levy	27,00	34,00	25,93%
	Consumption charge per kWh (Kilo Watt Hour) consumed	0,85	1,07	25,88%
 Water	Basic availability levy per stand or meter connection	57,75	61,22	6,00%
	Consumption charge per month per KI (1.000 litres)			
	1 – 6 KI	0,00	0,00	0,00%
	7 – 15 KI	5,73	6,07	5,93%
	16 – 30 KI	7,65	8,10	5,88%
	31 – 40 KI	9,11	9,65	5,93%
	Above 40 KI	10,96	11,61	5,93%
 Sanitation/ Sewerage	Premises are used exclusively for residential purposes – per month	76,90	81,53	6,02%
 Solid Waste/ Refusal removal	Per standard container or bag. 1 removal per week – per month	76,45	81,04	6,00%
TARIFFS	INDUSTRIAL/BUSINESS and OTHER INSTITUTIONS	2010/11	2011/12	% increase
 Property Rates	Industrial, Hotel, Business, Guest House All property valued is subject to the percent per Afri	0,0115	0,0124	7,83%
 Electricity	Basic availability levy (Tariff A1 – Delivery – 400/230 Volt)	650,00	807,42	24,21%
	Consumption charges:			
	KVA – demand per Kilo Volt Amperes	128,14	141,22	10,20%
	KwH – Kilo Watt Hour per unit consumed	0,27	0,34	25,93%
 Water	Basic availability levy per stand or meter connection per month	57,75	61,22	6,00%
	Consumption per month per KI (1.000 litres)			
	1 – 30 KI	7,78	8,24	5,91%
	31 – 40 KI	8,99	9,52	5,90%
	Above 40 KI	11,48	12,16	5,92%
 Sanitation/ Sewerage	Per toilet per month	76,90	81,53	6,02%
	Per urinal per month	38,45	40,78	6,06%
 Solid Waste/ Refuse removal	Per standard container for three (3) removals per week	299,48	317,45	6,00%

Refer to the Mymuni Tariff Policy for further information on how tariffs are set. Comments on tariffs can be given via the Mymuni Call Centre 0000 000000.

See also page 8 showing information on the back of this »Tariff Schedule« page

DID YOU KNOW?
...that a rising block tariff encourages water saving!

Myriam Municipality
TARIFF SCHEDULE 2011-2012

Costs in Myriam Currency Aht (A)

Category	2011/12	2012/12	% Increase
Property Rates	0.0000	0.0000	0.00%
Electricity	27.00	34.00	25.93%
Water	0.00	0.00	0.00%
Sanitation/Sewerage	0.00	0.00	0.00%
Solid Waste/Refuse removal	0.00	0.00	0.00%

Description of rates, service charges and increases in the charges



Property Rates

Property rates is a tax levied on the assessed value of property to pay for non profitable services delivered by the municipality such as street lighting and disaster management. It is a tax and not a value added service charge therefore it attracts no VAT.

This year's increase in your property rates bill is as the result of the revaluation of property values which takes place every three (3) years.



Electricity

The cost of providing electricity to consumers includes the purchase of bulk electricity and the operation and maintenance costs of the municipal distribution system to distribute it to consumers within the municipally boundaries.

This year's increase in the cost of electricity is principally due to the large increase in cost of bulk purchases by the supplier of electricity.



Water

The cost of providing water to consumers includes the purchase of bulk water, its storage and the operation and maintenance costs of the municipal distribution system to distribute it to consumers within the municipally boundaries.

This year's increase in the cost of water is principally due to the increase in operation and maintenance costs resulting from the need to repair large sections of leaking pipes in the older distribution system.



Sanitation/Sewerage

The cost of providing a sanitation/sewerage service includes the return flow of waste water as well as sewerage and the operation and maintenance of eco friendly treatment works.

This year's increase in your charge, apart from inflation adjusted salaries and wages, is due to an upgrade in the sewerage treatment works to more eco friendly standards.



Solid Waste/Refuse removal

The cost of refuse removal includes not only collection and removal of solid waste but also the operation and maintenance of complex land fill sites which preserve the environment. Street cleaning and hazardous waste management are also part of the service.

This year's increase in your charge is principally due to the increase in the operational costs associated with the management of the land fill site.



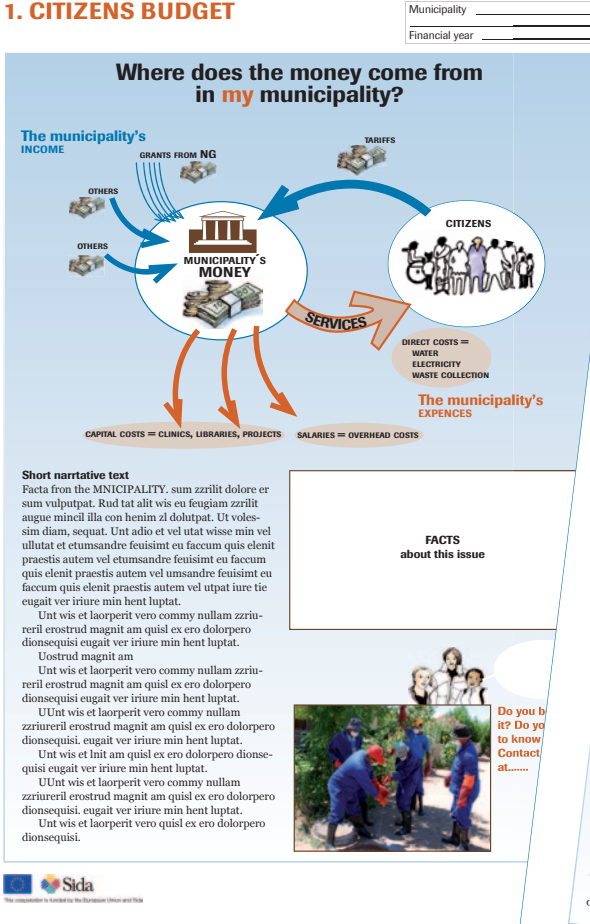
COMMUNICATION METHODS

The TTT also decided that all councillors and service payment desk officials should understand and be able to explain different fact sheets to citizens, and that this was best done visually, using diagrams. They contracted a consultant with expertise in developing visual communication materials to develop a one page fact sheet for each of the key questions.

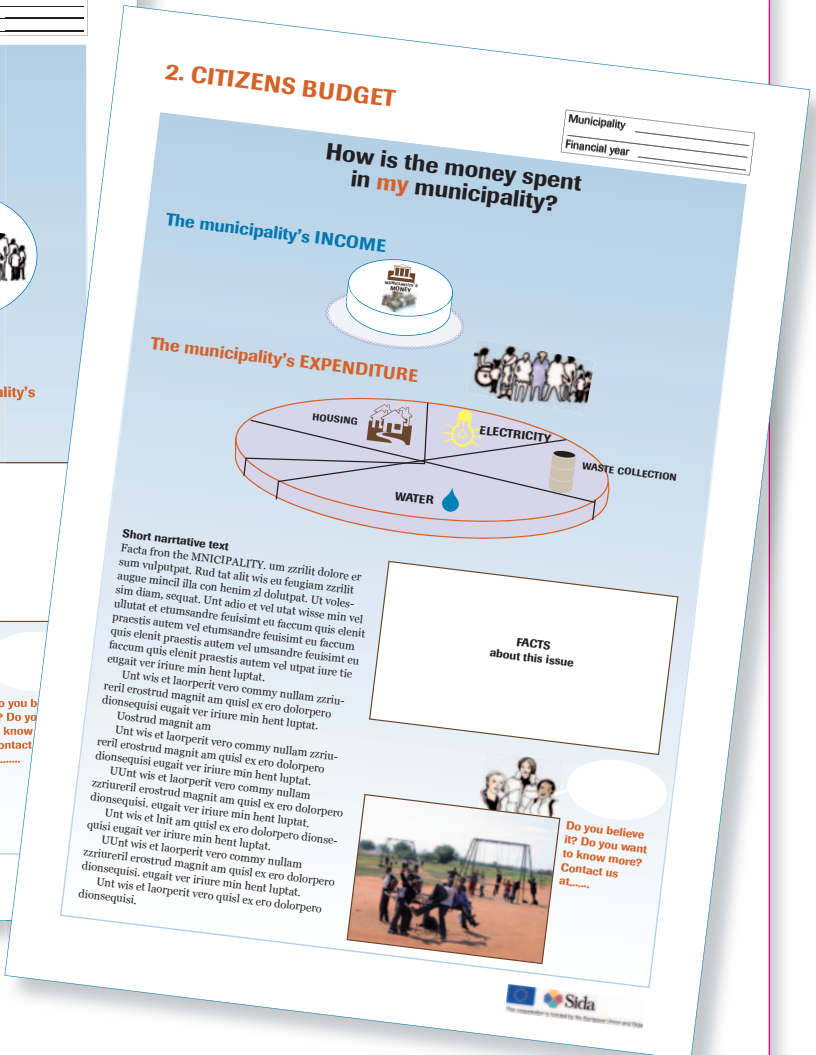
Councillors were then trained to use these fact sheets to communicate this information to local/ward committees. The fact sheets were put on the Mymuni website, on municipal notice boards, and one was published each month on a new *Did you know?* feature page in the Mymuni newsletter.

EXAMPLES of budget fact sheets

1. CITIZENS BUDGET



2. CITIZENS BUDGET





? How do Mymuni tariffs compare to tariffs in other municipalities?

” This question was mainly asked by business people. The Mymuni TTT decided to do a comparison of tariffs for trading services with three similar municipalities.

However, they realized that higher or lower tariffs could not be considered good or bad in themselves, as low tariffs may be based on a failure to cover the necessary costs and poor service quality, while high tariffs could indicate full covering of costs and a high quality service.

COMMUNICATION METHODS

As most citizens might simply want the lowest tariffs, they decided to only communicate the comparison to business people, and to explain the above, and assure them that Mymuni was committed to providing high quality services at reasonable costs

- via email
- at a business roundtable meeting with the Mayor and Municipal Manager to present and discuss the new budget and tariffs.

It is a good idea to compare your tariffs to those of other similar municipalities, to get a sense if your tariffs are too high or too low. However, this should not be done out of context. Tariffs need to be benchmarked together with service levels and quality, and the respective cost structures involved.

Low or high tariffs are not good or bad in themselves, but raise questions as to why they are low or high, and what the consequences of such tariffs will be.

For example, low tariffs could be based on either efficiency, or neglecting to cover full costs, e.g. by skimping on maintenance. High tariffs could also be either a sign of inefficiency, or covering all the costs entailed in providing a good and sustainable service, e.g. by maintaining infrastructure properly.

MORE ABOUT ●●●

Guidelines for benchmarking

To benchmark means to compare with a standard. The origin of the term is that a set measurement was actually marked on a workbench, for example by a carpenter who needed to cut a number of planks to the same length.

Today, benchmarking commonly refers to inter-organisational comparison of performance standards. It is usual to compare your organisation's performance with the best practice example available, and then try to equal or exceed this standard.

Benchmarking can also lead to learning how a high standard is achieved, though businesses are generally unwilling to share such information with competitors. However,

municipalities should be willing to share information on good practices that enable high standards, to help each other serve citizens better.

Benchmarking methods include

- accessing published performance standards
- requesting information on standards, e.g. via email
- an interview with a relevant person (face-to-face or telephonic)
- going on 'learning journeys' to visit other organisations to see and hear about their performance standards and good practices.



? How is my bill calculated?

Many citizens wanted to know how to read and understand their bills and how these were calculated. The task team decided to ensure that all councillors and service payment desk officials could show citizens how to calculate a bill and explain the tariff structure on which the calculation is based, using the tariff schedule and calculation examples. They should also be able to explain how to understand the bill itself.

To achieve this, the CFO developed and presented a two-hour training session in which this was explained to them, discussed and practiced.

COMMUNICATION METHODS

- improve the layout of bills to clearly show the consumption, tariff and cost per tariff block, i.e. the actual calculation
- give bill calculation examples for different consumer types, and for different consumption levels, where the rising block tariff applied
- put an info page on the website on HOW BILLS ARE CALCULATED
- DID YOU KNOW? boxes on all bills. A new tip and interesting fact about tariffs and municipal finances can be presented each month, in a simple and graphic way

MARS MUNICIPALITY page 1
123 Green Street, Mogale 9876
P.O. Box 64321, 9876
www.marsmunicipality.co.za
VAT no. 1234567890

Mrs AB Chetty
11 Blue Avenue
Blueridge
9876

Tax invoice number: 12345/12
Date: 03/02/2009
Address: 11 Blue Avenue Street, Blueridge 9876
Stand Number/Portion: M12-345
Township: Estate
Property Size: 1000m²
Number of dwellings: 1
Date of valuation: 01/07/2007
Municipal valuation: R900,000

Last month's invoice	R 565.00	
Payment received 15/01/2009	R 500.00	Thank you!
Interest on outstanding amount	R 6.50	
Balance	R 71.50	Outstanding
This month's charges	R 1274.98	See back for detail, VAT and structure
Total due	R 1346.48	Payable by 1 March

Save our precious water. Do not wash dishes under a running tap. Electricity is expensive. Please switch off when not in use.

Important!
Your services will be cut off or restricted if your payment is late. Interest will be charged on outstanding amounts. Contact Customer Care for any queries or if you need to arrange a payment plan. Payments can be made at any municipal Service Centre, Post office, Easy Pay, bank (Account branch code 6432), cheques should be made out to 'Municipality'. Use the invoice number.

Customer Care 0800 123 4567

Compare your water usage
Your average usage for the invoice period: 174 litres per day
Your average usage for the invoice period: 592 litres per day

Compare your electricity usage
Your average usage for the invoice period: 1000 kWh
Your average usage for the invoice period: 1000 kWh

EXAMPLE of an good practice bill layout from the Water Research Commission: Towards standards for municipal invoices in South Africa orders@wrc.org.za

MARS MUNICIPALITY page 2

Invoice Details	Subtotals	Totals
Property rates		R 326.67
Period: 31 days		
ERF 99 99 Residential property		
Property rates: R900000 x R0.04/12	R 326.67	
VAT	R 0.00	
Electricity		R 592.80
Period: 31 days	Meter number: 0001123	
Meter readings: 234 (actual reading taken on 31/12/2008)		
1234 (estimated for the period 01/01/2009 to 31/01/2009)		
Usage: 1000kWh		
Usage Charge: 1000 kWh at R0.47 / kWh	R 470.00	
Fixed Charge	R 50.00	
VAT	R 25.11	
Water		R 204.49
Period: 31 days	Meter number: 26981	
Meter readings: 123450 (actual reading taken on 30/12/2008)		
123474 (actual reading taken on 31/01/2009)		
Usage: 24 000 litres (24 kilolitres)		
Usage Charge: (6000 litres free basic water / (16500 litres at R3.33/1000 litres) + (6000 litres at R7.10/1000 litres) + (4000 litres at R13.15/1000 litres)	R 129.38	
Fixed Charge	R 50.00	
VAT	R 25.11	
Sewerage		R 103.14
Period: 31 days		
Usage: 13 000 litres (13 kilolitres)		
Usage Charge: (3866 litres free) + (3867 litres at R4.01/1000 litres) + (5155 litres at R8.52/1000 litres) + (112 litres at 9.32/1000 litres)	R 60.47	
Fixed Charge: Based on stand size	R30.00	
VAT	R 12.67	
Refuse		R 47.88
Period: 31 days		
Fixed charge	R 42.00	
VAT	R 5.88	
This month's charges (incl VAT)		R 1 274.98

AGE ANALYSIS					
Total amount outstanding	This month's charges	30-60 Days	60-90 Days	90 Days +	Instalment plan
R 1 346.48	R 1 274.98	R 71.50	R 0.00	R 0.00	

Please return this slip if you pay by mail

Invoice Number: 0123456/12
Total Due: R 1346.48
Date Due: 1 March 2009
Total Amount Enclosed

Easy Pay, Post Office, ABSA City of, Account number: 123456789, Branch code: 632778, Reference: 0123456/12



Why is the tariff increase necessary?

The Mymuni TTT realized that though increases were 'a fact of life', they were nevertheless a very sensitive issue, particularly if an increase was more than the inflation rate, as it directly affected citizens' pockets. They decided that in order for citizens to understand why the increase was necessary, the mayor should explain tariff increases for major services, as part of her budget speech.

COMMUNICATION METHODS

The CO arranged for the Mayor's speech to be reported in the local paper, as a good summary, which she provided. The speech (which she helped to write) also explained the importance of citizen's understanding the Mymuni budget and tariffs and of paying for services. She also arranged for the local community radio station to broadcast the speech, followed by a phone-in programme, with the Mayor and CFO present to respond to callers' questions.

The budget speech and Citizens Budget summary were put on the Mymuni website and in the newsletter, as this had been standard practice for some years already.



Excerpt from the Mayor's budget speech



...And now we come to the issue of tariffs for services. As you know, municipalities provide most local services to communities.

To do so, we need to charge citizens for what they receive and use, in order to cover our costs. Without the income from your payments, we cannot deliver

services. At times we need to increase tariffs by more than the inflation rate, but when this is the case, we are committed to fully explaining why this is necessary.

This year we have one instance – the water tariff will increase by 9%, while inflation is only 6%. The reason is that

the cost of bulk water from the water board has increased by 15%, due to the cost of financing the new pipeline to our town. Fortunately, we don't need to increase the tariff by 15%, as the bulk water is only one of a number of costs involved in providing water services...



Internal tariff communication in Mymuni

The Mymuni TTT realized that good public communication on tariffs required well-informed councillors and service officials, and that this in turn required good internal communication on tariffs. They proposed the following methods

- The finance portfolio committee (FPC), which was responsible for the tariff policy, should also oversee internal learning and training related to tariffs for both councillors and service officials
- The CFO would work with the HR/training manager and CO to develop and present short tariff training/learning/discussion sessions for officials and councillors
- Understanding tariffs was introduced as a session in service improvement training for customer service and payment desk officials, and in the budget training for all councillors
- The CO was mandated to develop simple and graphic materials for use in both internal and public tariff communication, based on five key diagrams/tables, as essential tools for communicating and explaining tariffs. See the tariff communication checklist on page 14.

The Mymuni approach was to link and strengthen tariff learning and communication to existing processes and structures wherever possible, particularly those concerning budgeting, billing and payment.

The tough questions – and opportunity for internal communication and learning!

The Mymuni TTT realized that there were various difficult questions, to which they had not responded. Few people asked such questions, so they decided not to provide public responses to these questions, but to be prepared to deal with them when necessary on an individual basis. They proposed that the finance portfolio committee (FPC) take up this task. (The Mymuni FPC was chaired by the Mayor, and they knew she was not one to duck a challenge.)

The FPC soon discovered that this challenging exercise led to real learning. The CFO proved invaluable as a source of expertise on difficult financial issues. The discussions were so interesting that they decided to share and discuss the outcomes with all councillors in monthly 'learning meetings'.

Learning sessions

At Mymuni, they had already discovered that you don't need training in order to learn. Learning sessions are possible wherever there is an issue of concern, a challenge, question or problem to solve. Just make the time, get the right people in the same room and start talking. All you need is a clear objective and a good chairperson/facilitator. A flipchart is the most useful tool in such sessions.

In addition to developing solutions and improvements, the added bonus is that such learning enhances interaction with colleagues and job satisfaction.

Existing structures and processes

The Mymuni TTT decided to use existing structures to communicate about tariffs wherever possible. They decided to

- present and discuss tariffs at council, ward committee and ratepayers association meetings.
- include tariffs in municipal forums and public hearings on budgets, organized and advertised as annual events at the appropriate time.
- encourage face-to-face direct communication by well-informed councillors and officials
- use community radio, which is widely listened to by poor and rural communities, as well as others. Use your local station to communicate municipal information, including on budgets and tariffs.

The last two methods were important for reaching poor and illiterate/semi-literate people who don't access print or electronic media, and who are often in difficult financial circumstances.

TARIFF COMMUNICATION TOOLS' CHECKLIST

Tariff communication tools (TCTs)		Mymuni
1	Clear tariff schedules for trading/billed services	√
2	Tariff process diagram/flowchart	√
3	Summary of tariff policies	√
4	Trading service cost-structure diagrams	√
5	Cross-subsidization diagram	√
6	All tariff communication tools (TCTs) are on the municipal website	√
7	TCTs are shared in the municipal newsletter	√
8	TCTs are posted on municipal notice boards	√
9	Copies of TCTs are available to citizens on request	√
10	TCTs are shared in a local newspaper	√
11	All councillors and service staff have, understand and can use hard copies of the TCTs to explain tariffs to citizens	√
12	TCTs are presented and explained to local/ward committees	√
13	TCTs are presented in life skills/civic education lessons in local high schools	√
14	Tariff increases are presented and explained on local radio programmes	√
	ADD YOUR OWN IDEAS	√

REFERENCES

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Effective Public Participation and Communication, 2000. The Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington (MRSC)

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Transparent Tariffs, P3

The guide to effective participation, 1994. D Wilcox



What am I paying for? How are tariffs determined? How is my bill calculated? Why is the tariff increase necessary?

COMMUNICATING TARIFFS takes citizens' concerns regarding tariffs as its starting point, and suggests a set of basic methods and some good ideas that can be used to explain tariffs. It also recommends communications methods to inform citizens regarding tariffs. The purpose is to assist municipalities to communicate transparent and understandable tariffs to citizens.

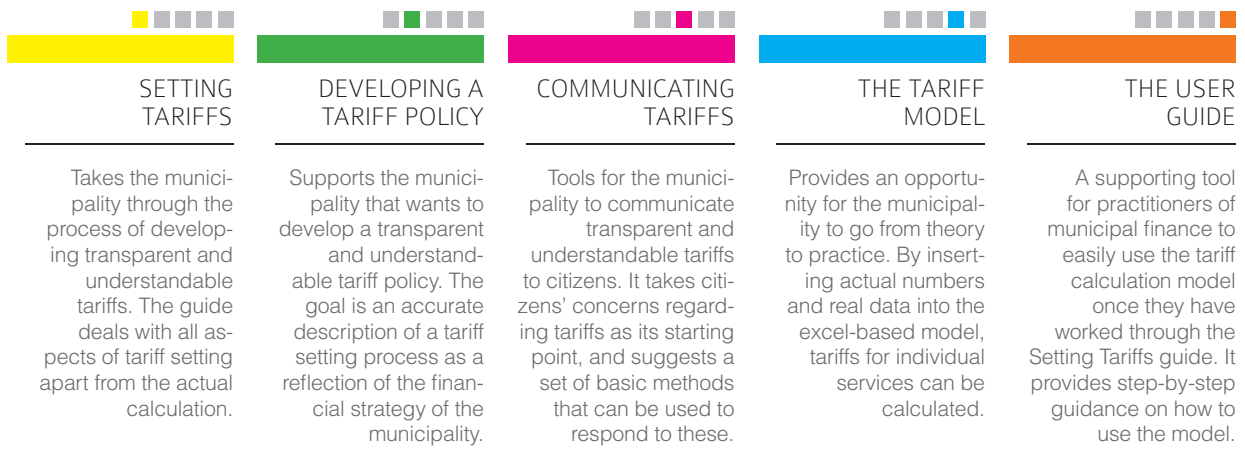
A USABLE DOCUMENT AIMED AT:

- ▶ **Municipal officials** looking for inspiration on how to improve communication on tariffs.
- ▶ **Councillors** who need to build responses in relation to concerns among its constituents.

The guide is written with a citizen-oriented focus and is tailored for small to medium-sized municipalities, where small but tangible changes in the communication on tariffs are preferred over more complex options.

The tools for explaining tariffs derive from the SETTING TARIFFS guide.

THE TRANSPARENT TARIFFS TOOLBOX HAS FIVE COMPARTMENTS



TRANSPARENT TARIFFS is developed by the national associations for local authorities in Sweden, South Africa, Namibia and Botswana and has been tested in a selected number of municipalities during 2010-2011.



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