

MSUNDUZI ASSOCIATION OF RESIDENTS, RATEPAYERS AND CIVICS (MARRC)

Tel: 072 536 2978 E-mail: msunduziarrc@gmail.com
PO BOX 100969, SCOTTSVILLE PIETERMARITZBURG 3201

A Case Study conducted by the Msunduzi Association for Residents, Ratepayers and Civics

October 2020

Billing shambles – Residents upheavals and challenges: lack of respect and poor customer service

(Preliminary draft report¹)

¹ This preliminary draft report was compiled under the auspices of MARRC, a civic organisation. The information gathered and recommendations offered are purely based on the case studies undertaken. The author in no way benefits financially and does not claim professional status.

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Billing case study report

1. Executive summary

The case study conducted by the Msunduzi Association of Residents, Ratepayers and Civics (MARRC) was a culmination of enquiries and complaints that various Resident and Ratepayer Associations (RRAs) received from residents on major billing issues and problems in their respective areas.

The methodology used for the case study was sampling 25 residents through interviews from the 100 detailed emails, WhatsApp community groups and media coverage. The interviews took an average of an hour each, which included hearing the billing issues/problems experienced by residents and reviewing all accounts during the dates of disputes. A questionnaire template was developed to assist with the interviewing process and capturing vital information to prepare for reporting purposes.

We have analysed all email correspondences, interviews with participant's accounts and anecdotal discussions and we include, below, a detailed synopsis of the real billing issues/problems. The following are findings of the case study of all account queries and include

- estimate readings
- illegal and or questionable items added to accounts
- unlawful disconnections
- consumer's engagements with numerous municipal staff to resolve their billing queries
- consumer's being told to pay exorbitant amounts upfront then their query will be attended to
- accounts dating back as far back as 2009 remain unresolved to date
- ongoing travels to AS Chetty building
- emails and telephone calls on trying to resolve queries
- residents that have installed prepaid electricity meters are still been charged for electricity
- rates not transferred to the correct householder
- erratic delivery of accounts
- number of queries on property rates where some have municipal values have doubled and consumer lodged dispute
- R57,7 million was given to the municipality(date??) to write off debt in Greater Edendale which was not fulfilled – what has happened to the R57,7 million? This further illustrates that the current billing system is completely dysfunctional and needs a major overhaul to have it resolved once and for all.

These points further illustrate that the current billing system is completely dysfunctional and needs a major overhaul.

Through this case study, we came across many adverse effects experienced by residents. Initially, this case study was activated to identify billing issues, but what we discovered was that residents across the Msunduzi district were facing much larger problems with their dealings with the municipality that were impacting them not only financially, but have also had many negative effects on their mental health and wellbeing.

Every month, hardworking, honest, law abiding citizens are being disconnected due to erroneous bills, whilst thousands of "real culprits" are circumventing their responsibilities and essentially stealing services delivered. It appears that Msunduzi does not have the political or management capabilities to deal with these larcenists.

Msunduzi Residents & Ratepayers can and will not allow this to continue.

It is well noted that government has a wide spectrum of well-drafted laws and policies that are good plans on paper and poorly implementation on the ground. The 'Batho Pele White Paper' and 'Back to Basics Concept and Approach' papers are prime examples of this, as the Msunduzi municipality employees do not appear to follow or implement these principles.

The case study has revealed the frustrations of the residents in their dealings with municipal staff and poor customer service received. The poor treatment and unprofessional behaviour levelled to residents by the Msunduzi municipal staff have violated the constitutional rights of residents.

Furthermore, the case study provides recommendations and possible solutions and it is hoped that the municipality would consider implementing these recommendations and solutions in order to address the billing shambles. Addressing the illegal water and electricity connections would level the playing fields and provide a fairer system, especially for those who have legitimate queries and who dutifully fulfil their obligations for better service delivery.

The case study conducted by MARRC illustrates our vision to promote and work towards a Msunduzi Municipal area in which all people are accorded social justice, respect and dignity by the provision of equitable services.

MARRC will hereby be monitoring the Msunduzi municipality on these processes and if these recommendations and solutions are not addressed through the correct channels and engaged on, we will have no other option but to institute legal action against the Msunduzi municipality as part of their failure and dereliction of their local government mandate as espoused in the South African Constitution.

MARRC would like to officially thank and express our appreciation to all 100 residents who came forward to share their experiences.

2. Background

MARRC is a constituted, non-profit, voluntary and non-political civil society movement. An umbrella body of constituted local Residents and Ratepayer's Associations and Civic Organisations in Msunduzi who represent various constituencies in different localities within the Msunduzi Municipal jurisdiction. The constituencies have diverse challenges and varied views and opinions, but the same overall public benefit interest.

Our intent is to promote active citizenry which entails solution driven activities to promote effective service delivery, social justice, accountability, unity and ubuntu across the Municipal area of jurisdiction.

When the major billing issues were brought to the attention of MARRC by various Residents and Ratepayers Associations, MARRC invited residents, via various social media platforms and printed media, to share their experiences.

The response was overwhelming. Over 100 emails and WhatsApp messages were received, not to mention the large volume of telephonic calls. This alone told us what we had long suspected. There was a major problem and many residents had tried every possible avenue without success and were now at their wit's end.

All emails received were detailed and included attachments of participant's accounts and email correspondence with the municipality's billing department.

The case study commenced on the 1st of September and was concluded on the 16th of October 2020. Most of the complaints range from as far back as 2009, with the majority remaining unresolved to date.

The case study took 45 days to complete to collect and collate this large amount of data, indicating that upon deeper investigations, there are likely to be so much more. The responses received are but the tip of the iceberg.

The responses came from all areas of Pietermaritzburg and included areas in the northern areas, Imbali, Woodlands, Hayfields, Cleland, Pelham, Scottsville, Clarendon, Athlone, central town, which was a wide representation of all residents. It has been mentioned on numerous occasions in the Witness paper that there is also a low intake of indigent with only about 5000 residents registered as indigent out of the 60,000 that should be registered.

3. Methodology of the case study

The methodology used for the case study was to sample 25 residents from the 90 detailed emails received through interviews that were made on an appointment basis. The interviews took an average of an hour each, which included hearing the billing issues/problems experienced by residents and reviewing all accounts during the dates of disputes.

A questionnaire template was developed to assist with the interviewing process and capturing vital information to prepare for reporting purposes after each interview. The questionnaire captured the following questions:

- Assess for any discrepancies on the account – one may find that the high billing, for example is in respect of estimates as opposed to actual reading confirming the consumer's usage.
- Timeline: How long has this problem/issue been going on for?
- How many times did you physically go to the AS Chetty building to sort out the problem/issue? How did you get there? Taxi, own vehicle, lift, other? We needed to calculate the number of trips and the costs incurred thereto by the consumer.
- How long did it take you to resolve the problem/issue? Number of hours, days, months, years.
- Are you employed, a business owner, unemployed or a pensioner? – (This is to ascertain the number of hours or days that the consumer was away from their workplace and the loss of income incurred as a result thereof.
- How did you engage with the municipality to resolve problems/issues? Telephone, email or visit in person at AS Chetty building?
- What were the adverse effects experienced by residents?
- How would you rate the Msunduzi municipality customer service at AS Chetty or in general to resolve/deal with your problems/issues/queries?

1 = Poor

2 = Average

3 = Good

4 = Excellent

The template was further defined as a MARRC document to form a 'Utilities Query Form'.

The first interview was held on the 12th of September 2020 and the final interview on the 16th of October 2020. In total, 25 interviews were held.

All correspondence received by us relating to the case study will be made available as further evidence of the frustrations faced by residents regarding their billing issues/problems that remain unresolved. This would further illustrate the vast problems with the billing system at large.

Other methods used to survey the billing issues and problems was anecdotal references through discussions with residents in the streets, workplace and public meetings. This further illustrates how problematic the billing system is.

Attachments to the report will also include media articles that reported on the billing problems as well as letters to the editor by residents complaining about the billing problem.

MARRC has continued to receive emails, WhatsApp messages and telephonic calls long after the closing date for information relating to billing issues. These residents do not know where else to turn for assistance.

4. Case studies - A Synopsis

After all, emailed correspondences were analysed, interviews with participants were concluded and anecdotal discussions were had, a detailed synopsis of the real billing issues/problems was completed and can be found below.

This case study has displayed, in great detail, the shambles of the Msunduzi municipality's billing system currently in operation. This is further illustrated by a media article that appeared in the Witness on the 5th of October 2020, entitled ***"Achilles heel of Msunduzi – Administrator says the costly SAP financial system presented a huge dilemma to the city"*** Presenting a report to council, Msunduzi administrator Scelo Duma revealed the municipality had already spent more than R250 million on the system, which was still plagued with problems.

The SAP challenges include the following:

- incorrect billing due to errors in meter readings and estimates
- high levels of reliance on consultants even for basic transactions and reporting
- inadequate training or lack of assimilation to new technology
- the scratched out modules remain outstanding (never implemented)
- both budget and planning as well as the IDP modules are key to mSCOA compliance and costs to date do not include the costs of litigation, which are unknown at this stage.

The question one should ask is whether SAP will ever work and will the billing shambles be resolved once and for all?

The following are findings from interviews and email correspondences from residents and are substantiated from their respective accounts and recording keeping. Residents should be commended for keeping immaculate records and filing systems that is vital in raising disputes with their accounts.

- Water estimate for 24-month period (**Interview report reference 0109**) and all accounts viewed included estimates. This despite residents emailing water and electricity readings which included photos of readings;
- Illegal/questionable items added to account
 - Instalment plan arrangement withdrawn for R9016.99 on 30/11/2019 account. What is this? (**Interview report reference 0109**)
 - August & September 2020 accounts are the same (**Interview report reference 0110**)

- Card variable charge: R58.80 and card fixed charge: R30.04 – what is that?
- Disconnection fee added to account but resident was never disconnected and have not had a reversal of the disconnection fee;
- Electrical meters removed and reinstalled by the municipality without owner's consent **(Interview report reference 0209)**;
- Unlawful disconnections - Accounts up to date every month but despite this, residents are disconnected. See following Witness article that illustrates the frustrations and inconvenience experienced by residents who are up to date with their accounts <https://www.news24.com/witness/news/pietermaritzburg/city-tenants-electricity-routinely-cut-off-because-of-citys-bungling-20201026>;
- Ongoing emails, telephone calls and visit to AS Chetty to try and resolve issue to no avail. Residents revealed that they tried to sort out the billing issues/problems on an ongoing basis and as far back as 2009 and to date nothing has been resolved;
- Account on account holder name changes to spouse or deceased person;
- Some resident's accounts there were no electricity or rates amounts reflecting on account. With some as far back as five years. This in turn has accumulated over the years and residents are then slapped with a huge account. Residents experienced frustrations on trying to sort out these discrepancies or to make payment arrangements to no avail;
- Dealing with numerous staff to sort out billing issues/problem;
- Told to pay exorbitant amount first then sort it out afterwards;
- Residents that have installed prepaid electricity meters are still been charged for electricity;
- Some residents who moved to new property as tenant/owner and are given previous owner/tenant debt on their accounts;
- Indigent applicants experienced receiving accounts without rebates for some months that was duly due to them and not reimbursed;
- Applied for 20AMP and approved but charged for 30AMP **(Interview report reference 0309)**;
- Rates not transferred - Purchased property in 2017 and arranged to changed property into his name and to date this hasn't been done and account still remains in the name of the previous owner. Rates not added to account since purchase **(Interview report reference 0309)**. This included some other residents interviewed and email correspondence;
- Residents pay their normal amounts per month and then hit with an increased substantiality amount without any explanation. Some residents reported their account increasing to R50,000 and alarmingly to R750,000. After some inquires the accounts reduced to R20,000 to R50,000 but still not resolved;
- Erratic delivery of accounts and at times no accounts received via post or email;
- Damaged water pipes outside properties and responsible for municipal water department to repair but goes unrepaired for long time thereby affecting residents water account and water account is increased substantially;
- The business was locked down completely from 27 March to 3 May 2020. There was an accumulation of R40,000 over 3 months and includes four charges for sewerage whereas they have only one charge. There were eight charges plus the basic and usually only have four charges. Also the business has been removing the refuse to the dump for the past year **(Interview report reference 0310)**;

- Number of queries on property rates where some have doubled and lodged dispute about rate valuation – unsuccessful. Many residents incurred personal cost for private company to value properties and despite this and proof thereof disputes were unsuccessful;
- Experienced power surge August 2019 which resulted in electronics and appliances destroyed – these included: motor gate, alarm system, PC board, freezer, TV and decoder. Submitted claim to municipality September 2019 – claim number: PL44/19. Since September 2019 made queries every month, phoned, visited Havelock Road to date not resolved and not paid out for claim. Insurance doesn't cover power surge and covered repairs to the value of R61,000 from own pocket (**Interview report reference 0810**);
- Business placed as a risk assessment on account despite paying the account each month (**Interview report reference 1109**); and
- Former Mayor Chris Ndlela made a public statement at the march to write off water and rate debts and R57,7 was available for this write off of debt. Refer to media article of 1 July 2011 (**Interview report reference 1110**)

The above billing issues/problems were derived from a sample of 100 residents. This is merely the tip of the iceberg and it is assumed that many residents are experiencing similar issues/problems throughout Msunduzi.

Recommendations and possible solutions will be provided near the end of the report.

This further highlights the complete and utter dysfunctionality of the current billing system which clearly is in desperate need of a *prompt* major overhaul.

In saying this, we would be remiss to not acknowledge the positive aspect of the billing system in the newly implemented prompt payment notification that one receives after making payment.

The following is a Facebook post by a resident on billing which further provides evidence that the billing system is in shambles and dysfunctional

<https://m.facebook.com/groups/251983985006213?view=permalink&id=1532341866970412&sfnsn=scwspmo>

5. Adverse Effects Experienced by Residents

Throughout the process of this case study, we discovered many negative effects experienced by residents. Initially the case study was to identify all billing issues and problems but we were faced with many negative effects experienced by residents. This impacted negatively on residents' mental health and wellbeing.

It is important to note that some of the cases date back to 2009 and all cases investigated by MARRC are currently unresolved.

Some of the residents more adversely affected have been pensioners and where some are gravely ill and the added challenges of the billing have caused their health to deteriorate.

The following demonstrates different extents of adverse effects on residents:

- Mental health** – here many residents felt stressed, suffered insomnia, frustration, anger due to the poor attitude, disrespect and non-responsiveness by municipal staff. Fear and threats of disconnection by municipal staff and contractors have caused emotional stress, and, anxiety for some;

- ii) **Monetary losses** – It was discovered that many residents/businesses experienced moderate to severe losses in income: For example, the closing of their businesses numerous times to sort out and deal with billing issues/problems, taking time off work and having to take (often unpaid) personal leave, unable to get tenants to rent due to the delays in sorting out billing issues and problems, engaging with law firms, having to pay reconnection fees despite being up to date with accounts, large debt outstanding due to unresolved billing over the years, unable to sell property due to unresolved issues, extra expenses like payment plans not budgeted for, payment for external plumbers to test water leakages and valuator to value property for valuation disputes, rebate losses, petrol costs, public or metered taxi fares, reversal of disputed account not done, large debt outstanding, unnecessary financial burden;
- iii) **Loss of property** – Many interviewees reported damage to electronic equipment and appliances due to power surges;
- iv) **Time wasted** – Most residents reported the endless time wasted in unnecessarily long queues, endless emails which are not responded to, unanswered telephones at municipal offices, regardless of the numbers called and constantly being sent 'from pillar to post'.
- v) **Inconvenienced** – The reports are endless in terms of unlawful electricity disconnections, specifically done on Friday afternoons and on weekends, adding to that the long delays in reconnection. This is a major inconvenience to residents lives, specifically to households with young children, elderly people and ill people, who may require medical equipment in their homes. The ongoing billing issues/problems that remain unresolved cause these inconveniences on a monthly basis; and
- vi) **Safety and security** - AS Chetty Building. Many women and elderly folk reported feeling extremely unsafe in the parking areas and in the lifts. Theft and physical difficulty in accessing the building were highlighted issues.

The above shows that the Msunduzi municipality does not care about the residents they are mandated to serve. What residents have endured and are enduring at the hands of the municipality with regards to the billing system is dissolute.

Residents are completely disillusioned and have nowhere to turn. There appears to be not a single person prepared or able to assist them at a municipal level, with their billing issues/problems. If not even a single person is prepared to assist residents in the accounts department to get closure, this situation begs the question of 'THEN WHO?'.

The municipality must attempt, by all means, to resolve the billing system as a matter of urgency as residents cannot be targeted in an illegal way indefinitely.

It seems that disconnections are planned for times that most inconvenience residents, such as Friday afternoons. The question is: What is the agenda behind this? Is it a bully tactic to get people to pay a re-connection fee quickly, before the weekend?

6. Easy targets bullied again, paying customers milked by the municipality, while defaulters get away scot free

As quoted in the Witness on the 12th of June 2020, the article titled “**City Tariffs Shoot Up**” the mayor Cllr Mzimkhulu Thebolla and the municipal manager, Mr Mododa Khathide conceded that “more than half the households in this municipality who are **not indigent are not paying for services**”.

This proves that the municipality is promoting unfairness and "favouritism" to unlawful acts by some residents who do not pay such as the individual and businesses that are illegally connected and profit from free use, including car wash businesses that use free water.

We have witnessed, first-hand, practices of illegal electricity connections. Examples are in Woodlands, where illegal electricity connections happen on a daily basis, despite the Woodlands Residents and Ratepayers Association reporting this to the municipal officials. Another example is the MK Veterans, who have illegally occupied Aloe Ridge in Bisley and are using free water and electricity.

Again we wish to highlight that every month, hardworking, honest, law abiding citizens are being disconnected due to erroneous bills, whilst thousands of "real culprits" are circumventing their responsibilities and essentially stealing services delivered. It appears that Msunduzi does not have the political or management capabilities to deal with these larcenists. Msunduzi Residents and Ratepayers can and will not allow this to continue.

7. Msunduzi Municipality - Attitude of Staff and Poor Customer Service

The local government mandate is dealt with by the Batho Pele White Paper which provides an ethical approach to building a culture and practice of decent and fair customer service between a municipality and its communities. The 8 Batho Pele Principles are: Consultation, Service Standards, Redress, Access, Courtesy, Information, Transparency, Value for Money.

Also, the Back-to-Basics approach also describes the mandate of local government. Back-to-Basics focuses on municipal councils and administrations on serving the people, not political elites or political party interests. According to the Back-to-Basics concept paper municipalities are expected to:

- Put people and their concerns first and ensure constant contact with communities through effective public participation platforms;
- Create conditions for decent living by constant delivering municipal services to the right quality and standard;
- Be well governed and demonstrate good governance and administration;
- Ensure sound financial management and accounting, and prudently manage resources so as to sustainably deliver services and bring development to communities;
- Build and maintain sound institutional and administrative capabilities administered and managed by dedicated and skilled personnel at all levels²

It is noted that government has a wide spectrum of laws and policies that are excellent on paper and very poor on the implementation of such laws and policies. The Batho Pele White paper and Back-to-Basics concept paper are worthless as the public servants at the Msunduzi municipality do not follow these principles or are not implemented at all by municipal staff.

The case study has revealed resident's frustrations in dealing with municipal staff and poor customer service by them too.

Evidence from email correspondence and residents who were interviewed, revealed horror story after horror story of their encounters at AS Chetty Building, 333 Church Street. The AS Chetty Building is a notorious 'no go area' for the majority of Msunduzi residents. Encounters involve the mistreatment of residents by municipal staff, the rudeness they are met with, the obnoxious way matters are handled and general bullying, disrespect, unfriendly and unhelpful behaviour.

² The Smarter Municipality – Halima Khunoethe

This is extremely concerning and we are especially concerned at how elderly members of the community are treated.

Residents mentioned that municipal staff are unhelpful in resolving billing issues/problems and are told to 'just pay' and 'it will be investigated and dealt with after payment is received'. This makes us question the competence in the municipal employees. It is also alarming that this appears to be the standard directive from management. Residents are shoved from pillar to post and regardless of who they have spoken with or what documents or proof they produce, they still leave the AS Chetty Building with their issues unresolved, time after time.

Residents who have attempted to make payment arrangements or attempt to make payments are *not* assisted correctly and in frustration, they leave, without the arrangements being made. Residents feel as though they are being chased away by apathetic, lazy employees, who are clearly not well versed with the system they are using.

Apart from a billing system that clearly does not operate the way it is intended to, the service design and organisational structure of the AS Chetty Building leaves much to be desired. Residents are unsure of which lines to stand in, which forms to complete, which clerk to deal with. Dealing with multiple clerks becomes frustrating and unproductive. One would assume a networked system would be used, so residents would not need to explain the entire situation to multiple people, over and over again.

Emails sent to the municipality are rarely followed up on, and not even replied to or acknowledged at all. It appears that municipal staff prefer to pass the buck and not actually resolve or attempt to resolve queries.

One needs to simply look at the reams of correspondence between residents and municipal staff to see the blatant ambiguity of the responses and the unashamed disinterest in resolving queries. All residents reported that telephone calls go unanswered and on occasion, when answered, little to no assistance is given or the call is cut.

Urgent attention needs to be given to the bullying tactics of the contractors who perform disconnections, specifically the disconnections of paid up account holders. An urgent suggestion is to investigate who gives jurisdiction to these contractors, who dispatches them and more importantly, who monitors them?

The case study has also revealed many complaints from residents about a Msunduzi municipal employee, **Mr Marlon Hoskins, Manager: Debtors Management at the Budget & Treasury Business Unit, Revenue Management Sub Unit**, who has been abusive, uncooperative and unaccommodating to many residents. This is substantiated by number of emails from residents expressing their complaints about Mr Hoskins and is included in the case study. The municipality HR department needs to urgently investigate these complaints, which are very serious allegations.

It is critically important that the municipality address the poor customer service rendered by the municipal staff, as a matter of extreme urgency. It is absolutely unacceptable that *paying* residents are subjected to the bad manners, rudeness, poor service, bad attitudes, unanswered phones, poor phone etiquette and unresolved queries by municipal staff-*public servants to the people*.

As part of the case study, residents were asked to rate the municipal customer service on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 being 'poor' and 5 being 'excellent'. Astonishingly, 24 of the 25 interviewees rated the municipal customer service as POOR, some even giving a 0 rating.

It would be wise for the municipality to provide proper and ongoing training and support in customer care, customer relations, Batho Pele principals and the Back-to-Basics concept.

Furthermore, management should be appropriately trained to deal with staff accountability and chain of command.

It is also interesting to note that to the general public knowledge, there does not appear to be a mechanism for residents to lodge complaints against municipal staff poor customer services.

The gross and poor treatment and unprofessional behaviour levelled to residents by the Msunduzi municipal staff have violated residents' constitutional rights.

8. Recommendations and Solutions

The following are our recommendations and proposed solutions to this complex situation in order to hopefully address the billing system issues and bring closure to the ongoing shambles and to provide residents with peace of mind and no harassment.

1. Conduct an independent forensic investigation into the SAP system – The information needed would be what investigations went into informing the specifications that were published for the tender and whether the expert opinion of any other spheres of government had been involved in writing these specs? Considering that Msunduzi's buildings are widely spread over a large area, was the system meant to work on Wi-Fi or Fibre optic cable and what capacity was required for successful operation of the system?

It is an extremely expensive "solution" which now appears to be more of a problem. Did any specialists from the Provincial Archives get involved? The information in all these systems is subject to meeting the requirements of the Archives, Auditor General and the National Archives Act.

Unfortunately, it appears that far from resolving the problem of billing (which it was intended to do, partly by integrating the main IT system with all subordinate "programmes" that were running, like Promis") it has resulted in exactly the opposite. A system which can barely deliver correct accounts to its customers.

The opinion of the National Treasury and the National Archives is very important to establish this;

2. To conduct a thorough investigation into the missing R57,7 million to write off debt for residents in the Greater Edendale area, as reported by the Greater Edendale Residents Association;
3. In-depth investigation into the Rates Valuation process, which is completely flawed. Many residents' rates increased substantially, some doubled or tripled;
4. Place a moratorium on disconnections until the systems have been overhauled and stop the targeting of paying residents;
5. Municipality and council need to put in place a plan to address the many residents who are using illegal water and electricity and to fine them;

6. Provide customer service training for all municipal staff and to take them through the Batho Pele principals and the Back-to-Basics. A monitoring and evaluation plan needs to be included to measure and monitor municipal staff compliance;
7. Establish mechanisms for residents to lodge complaints against municipal staff for poor customer services;
8. Institute disciplinary action against Mr Marlon Hoskins.
9. Do away with external disconnection contractors and bring this service in-house. The benefits of doing this are endless. We are happy to elaborate on this further;
10. Implement MARRC's proposed model of having a suitably qualified and experienced team from the accounts department, to visit all suburbs to address the billing queries. This can be facilitated via the Residents and Ratepayers Associations and the ward councillor in each area. Thorough investigations must be undertaken to sort out all queries and must be resolved and closed;
11. Increase indigent intake;
12. Repair all water leakages in close proximity of residential houses;
13. Reversal of all hidden costs on accounts from those that have them;
14. Reimburse residents of costs to replace equipment, appliances etc. due to power surges;
15. Municipality should start a campaign to install prepaid electricity meters;
16. Conduct awareness campaigns with residents and ratepayers on "How to read your municipal bill". This would provide residents and ratepayers with more information on how the billing works.

It is hoped that the municipality would implement these recommendations and solutions in order to address the billing shambles. The case study report would extend discussion in more detail on expanding the responses to the recommendations and solutions. By addressing the illegal water and electricity connections would level the playing fields and provide a fairer system, especially for those who have legitimate queries and who religiously paying their dues for better service delivery.

9. Conclusion

The case study conducted by MARRC illustrates our vision to promote and work towards a Msunduzi Municipal area in which all its people are accorded social justice, respect and dignity by the provision of equitable services.

We hope that the powers that be who are in the position to consider the implementation of these suggested recommendations, do so with urgency.

The gross and poor treatment and unprofessional behaviour levelled to residents by the Msunduzi municipal staff have violated residents' constitutional rights.

We will be monitoring the Msunduzi municipality on this process and if these recommendations and solutions are not implemented then we as MARRC have no option to institute legal action

against the Msunduzi municipality as part of their failure and dereliction of their local government mandate as espoused in the South African Constitution and the Municipal Systems Act, Act 32 of 2000.

On behalf of MARRC we would like to thank and express our appreciation to all 100 residents who came forward to tell us their story/queries that which is exemplary.

10. Annexures

A) Case study interview reports

B) GERA documentation

C) Media articles and letters to the editor from residents