Metering for Small-Scale Embedded Generation

Information to help municipalities understand and procure suitable SSEG metering systems.
January 2019

Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>STS</td>
<td>Standard Transfer Specification (secure message protocol between a POS and meter)</td>
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<td>DLMS</td>
<td>Device Language Message System</td>
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<td>DC</td>
<td>Data Concentrator</td>
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<td>AMI</td>
<td>Advanced Metering Infrastructure</td>
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<td>SSEG</td>
<td>Small-Scale Embedded Generation</td>
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<td>PLC</td>
<td>Power Line Communications</td>
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<td>AMR</td>
<td>Automatic meter Reading</td>
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<td>TOU</td>
<td>Time of Use</td>
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Overview

To enable Small-Scale Embedded Generation (SSEG) on municipal grids, electricity meters must support bi-directional metering with separate import and export energy registers\(^1\). Such meters may be prepayment or post-payment (i.e., credit meters). In the case of meters employed in post-payment mode, the billing systems must support reverse-feed tariffs. In the case of smart prepayment meters, they must support the configuration of charges for export energy. In order to accommodate SSEG, municipalities should therefore specify and procure the latest generation meter technologies that support SSEG, or at least prescribe the minimum specification of meters to be installed by a third party.

Smart meter technologies typically include communications infrastructure either via data concentrator devices or point-to-point communications with a smart meter back-office system (described later). This infrastructure is typically referred to as ‘Advanced Metering Infrastructure’ (AMI). The AMI system offers significant benefits to the municipality because it provides two-way communications to enable remote reading of import, export and other important energy registers with respect to SSEG.

Smart meters can have an important role in fraud detection, load management and power quality monitoring, amongst other areas. A key motivation for installing smart meters often revolves around their fraud prevention abilities. While this and other functionalities and benefits are important to consider in smart metering programmes, this guide focuses on their role with respect to SSEG customers mainly.

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\(^1\) Unless reverse-feed is being blocked, which is generally not advisable for technical and financial reasons (there are no standards for such blocking; load-generation matching is more likely with potential anti-islanding complications; and it is financially beneficial to accept export power and on-sell it with a profit margin)
SSEG metering without AMI communications
Where municipalities are procuring SSEG-compatible meters but do not have AMI communications infrastructure in place, nor intend to in the medium-term, suitably configured bi-directional prepayment metering may be appropriate for SSEG customers.

However, because of the potential future benefits of smart meters, municipalities currently without AMI communications infrastructure could consider using smart meter technology that has the option of being operated in an off-line configuration, where the meters are able to support separate import and export registers, and in the case of smart meters in the prepayment mode, to enable the configuration of the charge registers such that they do not deduct the prepayment account for export energy. Once the municipality adds the AMI communication system components, the installed meters can integrate into an AMI environment that enables two-way communications and remote configuration of export register charges, thereby unlocking the significant capability and long-term benefits that smart meters are able to offer.

What is a Smart Meter?  
A smart meter is an electronic device that records electrical energy consumption and reverse feed of electrical energy, amongst other parameters, and communicates the information to the electricity utility for monitoring and billing. Smart meters support the recording of energy in load or billing profiles which are able to be configured with various capture periods, typically every 30 minutes, daily or monthly. Smart metering as a part of an AMI system differs from automatic meter reading (AMR) in that it enables two-way communication between the meter and the municipal systems. Communications from the meter to the network may be wireless, or via fixed wired connections such as power line carrier (PLC). Wireless communication options in common use include cellular communications (e.g. 3G or GPRS using SIM cards), radio, or various forms of Wi-Fi.

While smart metering has been used for commercial customers for several years, latest generation smart meters are available for single and three-phase residential customers, support both prepaid or post-paid modes, and are available at reasonable cost.

Smart meters typically support four quadrant energy measurement - i.e. measuring both active (kVA) and reactive (kVAR) power for both forward (import) and reverse (export) power flow. Even single phase residential smart meters tend to support 4-quadrant measurement, although reactive power values are not currently used for such residential customers.

Other potential benefits of smart meters include supporting the reduction of peak load, for example by sending pricing signals to appliances and generators.

Communication systems for smart meters
The smart metering communication system both feeds consumption information to the utility billing system in an appropriate format and enables the municipality to change the parameters (such as ToU periods) or modes of operation (such as from pre-payment to post-payment) of the meter, amongst other abilities. The communications system for SSEG customer smart meters should be part of broader municipal smart-metering planning, as it will be difficult to justify establishing such a system

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2 Some text taken from Wikipedia
for relatively small numbers of SSEG customers. Smart meters commonly communicate in the following two layouts:

**Power Line Communication (PLC) via data concentrator (DC) at mini-substation:** when there are many smart meters in an area this option is more cost-effective than point-to-point communication (a DC typically may cover about 150 meters, and a minimum number of meters for viability might be around 50). However, in instances where there are only a few such meters (for example if smart meters are only being installed for SSEG customers who are few and far between) this is often a more expensive option on a ‘per customer’ basis because of the cost of the DC. PLC linkages between the meter and DC are not always direct but may be via other communication layouts (mesh, peer-to-peer etc).

**Point-to-point (typically via 3G/GPRS cellular network) – smart meter to utility ‘head end’:** this requires that each meter has a dedicated modem installed for such communication, which adds to the cost of the installation. Such a modem (excluding the meter) may cost between R2000 to R4000[^3], although lower cost options are available and are accommodated by some smart meters – potentially costing only around R500 (though compatibility between the modem and meter needs to be confirmed with the meter supplier).

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**Bi-directional meters (smart and non-smart)**

Some characteristics of a range of bi-directional meter types are given in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meter category</th>
<th>Comms</th>
<th>Cost (indicative)**</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepayment* (STS) meter 1-ph with separate reverse flow measurement (not ‘smart’)</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Lowest cost (~R1400)</td>
<td>Simple, affordable option suitable for small SSEG customers. Charges for export energy may be configured so as not to decrement the prepayment account</td>
<td>Any changes to the charge register or other meter parameters will require on-site configuration (via the meter’s optical interface)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepayment* (STS) /post payment 1-ph smart meter, 4-quadrant measurement</td>
<td>PLC to data concentrator (no modem needed) or wireless point-to-point using e.g. cell network modem. Can optionally be used in an off-line configuration without communication, but this negates the benefits of smart metering.</td>
<td>Medium cost (~R2000), with additional cost if modem needed (~R500 – R2000) or portion of the amortised cost of the DC per transformer</td>
<td>Two-way communications: remote reading of export and import registers and prepayment credit registers for SSEG, remote modification of charge registers, TOU, tariff or other important meter parameters, remote change of</td>
<td>Requires investment in AMI infrastructure and communications (however if used off-line in prepayment mode, the charges for export energy may still be configured to</td>
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[^3]: Indicative prices for October 2018
The meters account between prepayment or post-payment, remote disconnection and reconnection of the meter’s supply control switch, significant reduction of operational costs and improved revenue protection for the municipality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prepayment* (STS) /post payment 3-ph smart meter, 4-quadrant</th>
<th>PLC to data concentrator (no modem needed) or wireless point-to-point using e.g. cell network modem. Can optionally be used in an off-line configuration without communication, but this negates the benefits of smart metering</th>
<th>Higher cost (**R4000)</th>
<th>Prepayment meter options may be used for all high end residential and commercial three phase customers within the maximum per phase current limits of the selected meter types. The above mentioned pros for the 1ph smart meters also apply.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requires investment in AMI infrastructure and communications (however, if used off-line in prepayment mode, the charges for export energy may still be configured to not decrement the prepayment account)</td>
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* - These Prepayment meters are generally available in split configuration as well as integral units.
** - Cost estimates as of October 2018 (NB: varies substantially depending on specific supplier)

**CASE STUDY: Proportional reverse feed energy deductions**: Latest generation smart meters have the capability to set charges for export and import energy registers. These charge registers may then be configured to either deduct, be neutral or add energy back to the meter’s prepayment account. A particular case used by one municipality is to have their smart meters configured to pay a percentage of export energy back to the meter’s prepayment account as compensation for exporting energy (they have initially set the proportion to 30%) - the actual amount of exported energy is not recorded resulting in an administratively simple solution for reverse-feed accounting. In order to ensure future adjustment of the proportional charge deduction per unit of export energy, it is advisable that municipalities select metering technology and AMI systems that are able to support remote tariff adjustment as SSEG tariffs evolve over the years. (Note that this ‘proportional compensation’ method, while administratively simple, will not suit the many situations where the utility wants the reverse feed electricity data).
Procuring meters: standardisation and avoiding vendor lock-in

In procuring meters and AMI infrastructure, standardisation is important in order to avoid potential incompatibilities amongst different components and thus vendor lock-in. The following two documents are of particular relevance in this regard:

The **NRS049 Advanced Metering Infrastructure Requirement for Smart Metering Systems** specification provides standards for smart meters, ‘head-end system’, vending systems, customer interfaces etc to promote interoperability and interchangeability of different vendor products, including compliance with relevant international standards and compatibility with emerging technologies such as the ‘internet of things’. **Importantly, it also includes procurement guidance** for these system elements (in Annex B of NRS049). Municipalities are advised to reference this voluntary standard to avoid vendor lock-in.

The **AFSEC Guide for Application of Standards for Smart Metering Systems in Africa** provides thorough information on applicable standards to consider in procurement, and is directly relevant to South African municipalities.

The above documents both refer to and draw on a range of other standards and protocols important for interchangeability and interoperability, including the DLMS (Device Language Message System) and IEC 61968 series of specifications – which concern standardisation of data interfacing – e.g. head-end system with billing system. When procuring meters, it is important to ensure that data from the ‘head end’ of the smart meter communication system will be compatible with the municipal billing system (or Enterprise Management System). For example, some municipalities may require a flat file as input into their billing system.

**Deciding on data to be collected by the smart meters**

Smart metering data collection capabilities are substantial. However, collection of vast amounts of data may not be sensible unless the municipality has the intent and capacity to apply detailed analytic processes. Smart meters and systems do however offer substantial flexibility in this regard and meter profiles, events and mains quality profiles may be configured to collect only the data required for municipal processes.

**Municipalities should specify the minimum data that they require from the smart meters, thereby enabling essential functions and analytics, but avoiding management of large data storage systems which collect more data than they have the capacity to process.**
While most smart meters support a standard set of data registers, load profiles, billing profiles, meter events and mains quality profiles may be configured to collect, store and communicate only the desired information. This may be part of the manufacturers initial meter configuration and therefore understanding the capability of the selected metering technology, and defining the meter configuration upfront, should be an essential part of the municipality’s procurement process.

**Data registers**

Typical smart meter data registers and capabilities are shown below:

Energy registers, such as:
- Active energy import (+A) and export (-A)
- Active energy combined (net)
- Apparent energy import / export (VA)
- Reactive energy per quadrant
- Reactive energy import, export
- Active energy import per tariff rate offered by smart meter
- Active energy export per tariff rate offered by smart meter

Instantaneous values, such as:
- Phase voltage, Phase current, frequency, Active Power total (P), Active power import (+P), Active power export (-P), Reactive import power (-R), Reactive export power (-R), Reactive power (Q), Apparent power (S) and Power Factor

Mains quality profiles may include:
- Average voltage (per phase), average current (per phase), average power factor, average mains frequency, average active power import (+P), average active power export (-P) and more.

In addition, meters accommodate ToU tables which identify seasonal, weekly, daily and special day tariff differences.

Many municipalities are considering applying ToU tariff both for energy consumed and energy exported into the municipal grid for residential SSEG customers (some municipalities have done this already). The municipalities should ensure that their smart meters procured have the necessary registers to accommodate these requirements.

Power quality data can be useful for monitoring the impact of SSEG on the distribution grid, and some municipalities may want to utilise these features of smart meters.

**Communication failures, estimated readings and data storage**

Smart meters generally have storage facilities which can hold several month’s data (e.g. 240 days’ worth of readings for every 30 min) and have internal clocks to time-tag the data where necessary. Data is therefore not compromised during power or communications system outages. Estimated readings will generally be unnecessary. (However, the use of some more advanced capabilities of smart metering, such as peak load management, will be compromised at such times).

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4 Some municipalities may opt for a simple ToU tariff – e.g. 2-part.
Other resources


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021 702-3622 ● www.sustainable.org.za ● www.cityenergy.org.za ● hlengiwe@sustainable.org.za