



Citizen Report Card Surveys: A tool for effective social accountability

Introduction

The supply of basic social services, or lack thereof, directly impacts on the quality of life for all. To this end the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, various policy instruments and strategy documents emphasise the provision of such services to all citizens of the country. The responsibility and accountability for the provisioning of social services is divided among the national, provincial and local authorities. Public engagement in the planning and prioritising of these services is crucial and a prerequisite for efficient and effective functioning of government. According to Shah (2006) government should be citizen-centred in its planning and in the implementation of policies and programmes. This policy brief identifies three key elements of citizen-centred government, namely: responsive, responsible and accountable governance. This policy brief also reports on two case studies where the Citizen Report Card Survey (CRCS) was implemented – and makes recommendations for the use of these surveys as a tool for addressing service delivery problems.

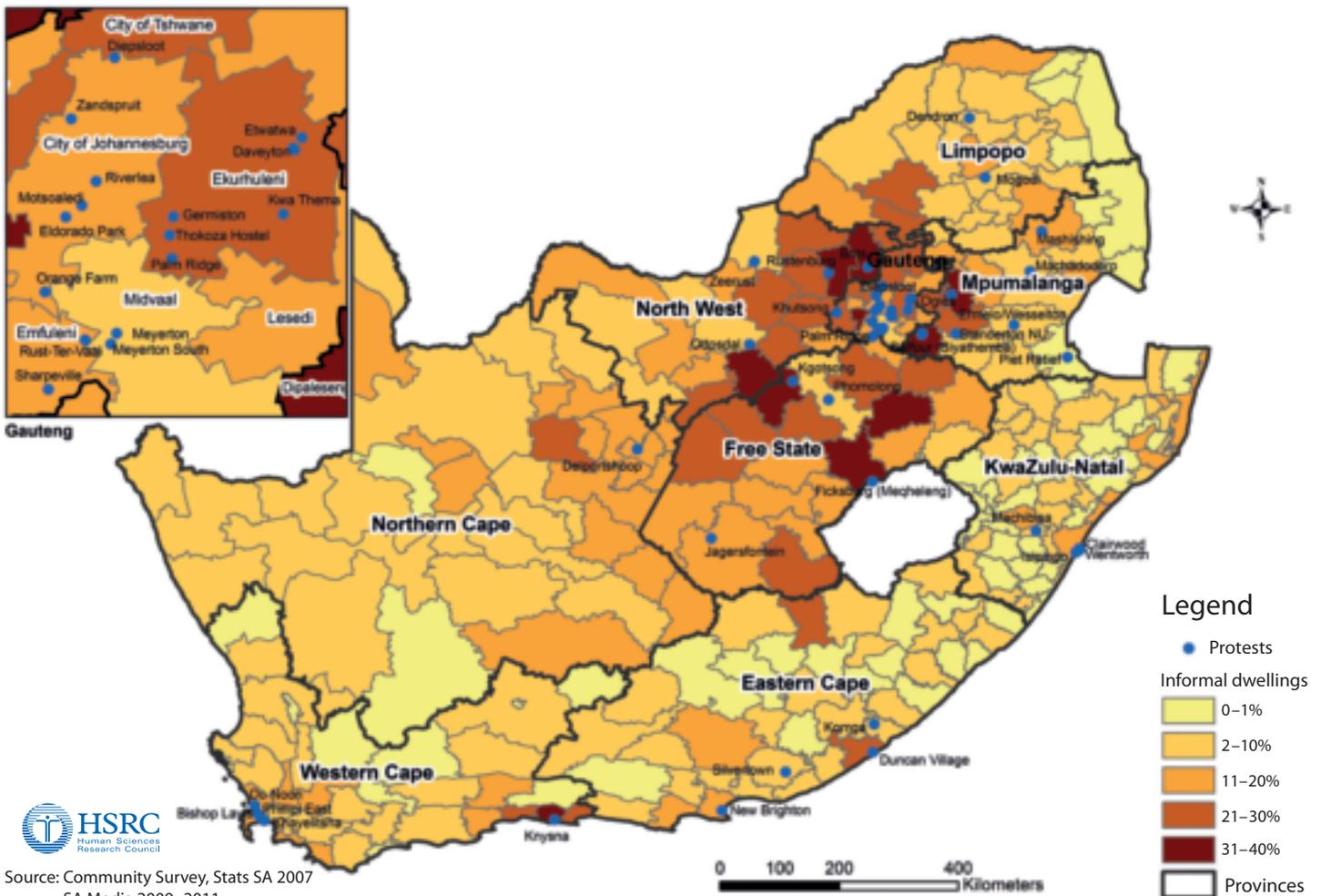
Policy Framework

In South Africa the *Municipal Systems Act*, the *Batho Pele* (People First) principle, and the Turn-around Strategy of 2009 compel municipalities to engage communities in their planning. This is reflected in, for example, the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plans (SDBIPs) and other matters that impact on the service recipients or users. Do all municipalities adhere to and apply these in their planning and budgeting for services?

Research data and findings

From 2007 to 2010 South Africa experienced a series of protests due to dissatisfaction with service delivery. Map 1 reflects the correlation between the areas where protests were reported (blue dots) and inadequate provision of housing.

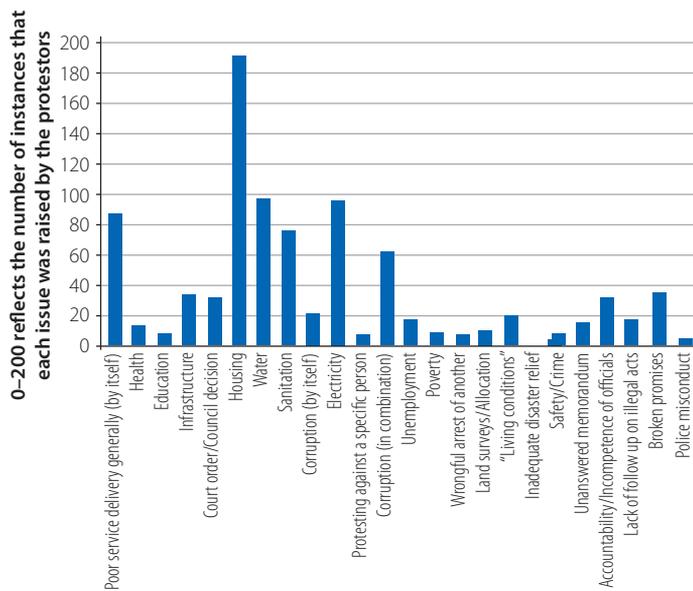
Map 1: Service delivery in relation to areas of protests in South Africa



If the existing public engagement mechanisms and processes (Batho Pele, SDBIPs, etc.) are in place and are entrenched in the Constitution and in policies, why are they not bearing fruit? What and where is the core problem? The results of two Citizen Report Card Surveys show that the problem lies with the ineffective, intermittent and non-transparent communication between the government (service providers) and citizens (recipients of services).

Figure 1 reflects the range of concerns that triggered the protests between 2007 and 2010 (Hirsh 2010: 30). One of the leading triggers for protests was the perceived, or existing, lack of quality services.

Figure 1: Concerns of South African protesters 2007–2010



Source: Local Government Working Paper Series No. 1

Citizen report card surveys: Two case studies

The Citizen Report Card Survey (CRCS) is an instrument that provides important feedback to the service provider on the adequacy, efficiency and quality of services from actual users of public services. One of the primary purposes of the CRCS is to empower citizens and motivate service providers to engage with them on service delivery. In 2006 the World Bank commissioned the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to conduct a pilot CRCS in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. As part of the World Bank's continued investigation into the implementation of CRCSs in South Africa, a second pilot study was undertaken within a rural area. The selected area was the OR Tambo District Municipality in Eastern Cape which includes seven local municipalities. Data was collected using a survey of 1200 respondents in each municipality, and focus group discussions were held with community members, public officials and non-governmental organisations.

Findings: Municipal engagement and participation

Public participation

The findings in both studies showed that social accountability mechanisms are not functioning as intended by the

Municipal Systems Act and other relevant policy documents. The evidence of this is reflected in the records from both the fieldwork survey (Figure 2) and the focus group discussions.

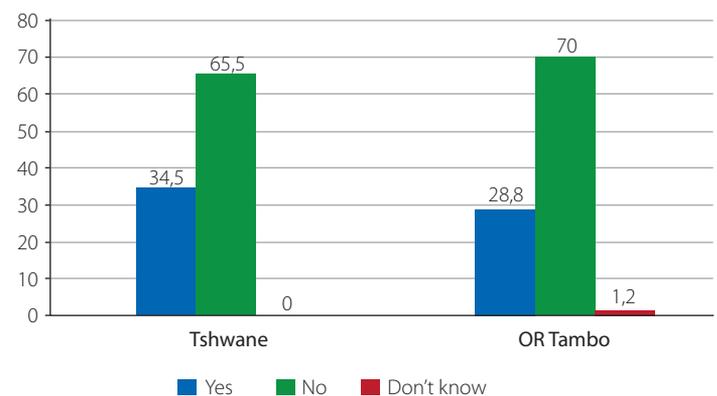
Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality

All the focus groups in Tshwane agreed that there is some public participation happening in their areas. The public participation mechanisms included *imbizos*, ward committee and council meetings and suggestion boxes. Although such fora are in place, the quality of participation reflected in Figure 2 shows that only 34,5% of community members regularly participated and 65,5% did not.

The reasons for poor public participation were varied, and included the following:

- Youth did not attend these meetings
- Invitations to these meetings were not properly distributed. Some houses do not have post boxes so invitations often get wet or blown away by wind
- There is a lack of feedback on grievances that had been raised in previous meetings, and the recurrence of the same problems, which implies that nothing had been done to rectify them
- Officials used these meetings to tell citizens of projects they had not been consulted about
- There were perceptions that the process of electing the ward committees is fraudulent. It was widely felt that committee members represent their own self-interests rather than those of the community
- Complaints collection was not properly channelled.

Figure 2: Participation in municipal/ward meetings. "Have you attended public meetings during the last year where municipal service issues have been discussed?"



OR Tambo District Municipality

The survey findings from OR Tambo similarly showed poor participation in municipal meetings called to discuss crucial issues. It emerged that only 42,3% of community members regularly attend. Even more troubling is the finding that 76% of citizens in this municipality do not attend meetings on budget allocations and past expenditures (see Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage participation in meeting/forum by purpose of meeting

Meeting/Forum	Yes	No	Do not know
Community needs	42,3	56,8	0,8
Budget allocation	22,6	76,0	1,4
Past expenditure	21,6	76,9	1,5

The OR Tambo focus groups discussion revealed that public participation did not improve service delivery even though the imbizos were attended. The participants felt that the imbizos failed to address all the issues at hand as there were constantly new questions to be addressed from people on the floor. Other challenges to effective public participation in OR Tambo included:

- Failure of the councillors to relay the issues to the community leaders, which hindered service delivery
- Non-adherence to the bottom-up approach to development. The participants, for example, found that the District Municipality submitted the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) before consulting the communities
- Illiteracy. Illiterate people were often afraid to confront their leaders in public regarding their dissatisfaction with services
- Most councillors were not equipped with the necessary knowledge regarding the processes that would ensure development. As one focus group participant in OR Tambo stated:

There are a lot of capacity challenges because if you talk of the councillors you will find that in each municipality, 40% of the councillors are the people that have a limited knowledge.

The findings also pointed to other areas in which both municipalities using the CRCSs (Tshwane and OR Tambo) failed to effectively communicate to citizens what they

were doing, what had been accomplished and what still needed to be done; for example in Tshwane only 17% of the people knew anything about the City's IDP.

Citizen engagement

Besides the public meetings, findings also showed citizens themselves were not engaging municipalities regarding service delivery. There were issues that the citizens were not happy with, but no initiatives were taken to get some clarification from the officials (Table 2).

Table 2: Percentage of complaints registered by residents over the past year per service type

Service	OR Tambo			Tshwane		
	Yes	No	Do not Know	Yes	No	Do not Know
Electricity	19,0	80,1	0,9	28,5	70,8	0,7
Housing	11,4	87,5	1,1	6,6	92	1,4
Refuse Removal	2,9	96,3	0,8	5,1	94,3	0,5
Sanitation	24,9	74,0	1,1	11,1	88,4	0,5
Water	36,5	62,0	1,6	18,7	79,7	1,6

These findings indicate that it is a challenge for the municipality to detect progress or address problems if citizens do not come forward. Citizens themselves need to be proactive in matters that concern them. Does this lack of complaining mean they are satisfied? To some extent this is the case, especially in urban areas. However, when one interrogates the data on satisfaction levels, one would expect more complaints to have been reported than were documented in the survey, especially in OR Tambo. This lack of correlation between satisfaction levels and levels of complaint was reported as being a result of the non-responsiveness of the officials to the complaints, whether experienced or perceived. The problem-resolution rate was perceived as low, or non-existent. If one takes water delivery in OR Tambo as an example, the data indicated a 60,2 % overall dissatisfaction with water supply. Although Table 2 shows that only 36,5% of participants had complained about water in the past year, 88,3% of those participants who reported a complaint stated that no action had been taken to address the problem.

In addressing this issue there are different questions that should be asked:

1. Participatory mechanisms: Are such mechanisms properly implemented? Do citizens use the available platforms adequately? Are citizens aware of these mechanisms?
2. Responsiveness on the part of the service provider: Are municipal officials willing to respond to the problems? Do they have enough capacity and resources to address the problem? If so, how long does it take between the lodging of the complaint and the action taken by the municipality?

Recommendations

Use CRCSs to monitor effective policy implementation

On the basis of the data reported in this policy brief, the final findings in both municipalities were that the problems include:

- Non-effective consultation and participation by municipalities on matters that affect citizens
- Ineffective communication channels between municipalities and citizens
- Ineffective community structures (e.g. ward committees) to address communities' grievances
- Councillors and community leaders' lack of capacity to address citizens' grievances
- Lack of awareness of government policies by some citizens.

The institutionalisation of the CRCS could be an important consideration in enhancing public engagement in matters that crucially affect citizens, i.e. the provision of services. This has been shown to be best practice in promoting government-citizen communication in Africa (for example the Tanzania health-focused CRCS) as well as elsewhere in the world (India, Philippines and Canada). The CRCS is additionally regarded as the best tool to monitor government services in terms of efficiency and accountability, and can be used across all levels of government to provide feedback from citizens regarding:

- Availability of services
- Access to services
- Reliability of services
- Quality of services
- Satisfaction with services
- Responsiveness of service provider

- Hidden costs (corruption and support system)
- Willingness to pay
- Quality of life.

The feedback from the CRCS can be disseminated through various media, meetings and dialogues between citizens and departments responsible for services. The end product is a social compact between citizens (recipients of services) and government (service provider). Depending on the agreement between citizens and the municipality concerned, CRCS can be repeated every two to five years. This will enhance the public officials' capacity, performance and accountability which will lead to efficient, effective and quality service delivery.

Emerging social accountability practices (*CRCS being one of those*) enhance the ability of citizens to move beyond mere protest towards engaging with bureaucrats and politicians in a more informed, organised, constructive, and systematic manner, thus increasing the chances of effecting positive change. (Malena et al 2004: 6)

Strengthening participation and creating open engagement require the municipality and citizens to commit themselves to better service delivery. Both positive and negative feedback is the key to achieving this. The CRCS helps with the collection of this feedback and the analysis thereof in order to enable constructive dialogues and participation backed by credible information. The impact of the CRCS can only be realised in democratic and open societies. As one of the highly acclaimed democratic states in Africa, South Africa can do more to ensure effective public participation. The spinoffs of using CRCSs would include improved performance and accountability on the part of capacitated public officials whose methods in carrying out their duties would be transparent and open to scrutiny by the public and whose service levels would be monitored over time.

What is important to note is that the CRCS is not a final prescription to remedy the state of service delivery in South Africa but a starting point that would be improved by inputs from relevant departments particularly Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, the South African Local Government Authority, the National Treasury and the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation in the Presidency.

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PRINCIPAL STUDY AUTHORS

Schwabe CA (HSRC), **Zama SB** (HSRC), **Sedumedi S** (HSRC): OR Tambo Report

Schwabe CA (HSRC), **Roefs M** (HSRC), **du Toit J** (HSRC): Tshwane Report

AUTHOR

SB Zama Geographic Information Systems: Population, Health, Health Systems and Innovation HSRC.

Enquiries to: SB Zama

Email: szama@hsrc.ac.za