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Community Scorecard: Promoting Participation and Accountability in Local Government using the ABCD approach

Mfalatsane Sadi Motsuenyane, Julien Landry, Brianne Peters, Johannah Keikelame, Hanna Nel, Conrad Jardine, Tembinkosi Pulu



Community Scorecards Preparations in Bophelong

Abstract

This policy brief explores how an Asset-Based and Citizen-Led Development (ABCD) approach can address low levels of public participation in Integrated Development Planning in Emfuleni, South Africa. While earlier findings show that the ABCD approach appears to activate a sense of responsibility and civic duty among citizens, there continued to be low levels of responsiveness among local government officials. To address this gap, the Community Scorecard was introduced and adopted in accordance with ABCD principles as a tool for direct dialogue and social accountability. Results from using this tool have informed recommendations for targeted capacity building, policy and legislative reviews, and a technical and financial support model to incentivize citizen-led solutions.

About ICLD

The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is part of the Swedish development cooperation. The mandate of the organization is to contribute to poverty alleviation by strengthening local governments.

Introduction

South Africa faces a dilemma when it comes to citizen participation in local governance. On the one hand, the country has a robust legal framework for local democratic and accountable governance as well as institutionalized public participation mechanisms such as Ward Committees[1] and the Integrated Development Planning (IDP)[2] process (Republic of South Africa, 2000; 1998). However, the practice of local democracy has been characterised by protests, polarization, and disengagement due to poor service delivery, tokenistic engagement in planning processes, and a lack of accountability.

Local governance in Emfuleni Local Municipality (ELM), a mainly urban area in Gauteng Province comprised of six black townships and more than 700,000 people, is no exception: corruption, misuse of funds, and poor service coordination and delivery have contributed to ineffective public participation mechanisms and a lack of citizen capacity to hold government accountable (Meyer & Meyer, 2016;

1 Ward Committees are legislated citizen engagement mechanisms to ensure that citizens give input to the decisions that local councils make. They are made up of representatives of citizens of a specific ward to represent their interests at the municipal level through the ward councillor (Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000).

2 The IDP process is a legislated local government mechanism aimed at improving community participation, promoting delivery of services that are responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people and a participatory and integrated approach to planning in which all concerned stakeholders are consulted (Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000).

Msenge & Nzewi, 2021; Shava & Mubangizi, 2019). Underlying these challenges are various factors including poor communication between citizens and local government, failing Ward Committee system, poor community participation in the IDP process, non-responsiveness of leaders and lack of service delivery monitoring and evaluation (Ngamlana & Poswayo, 2009; Kanyane, 2014; Mbandlwa & Mishi, 2020; Malemane & Nel-Sanders, 2019, Mukwevho & Mtapuri, 2014). As a result, the ELM was declared "cash-strapped" and placed under administration in 2018 (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2018).

To address these concerns, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) introduced an Asset-Based, Citizen-Led Development (ABCD) approach in ELM in 2017 as a participatory planning process that mobilizes communities to self-organize and use their assets to address local problems. Recognizing initial successes in fostering active citizenship and community-driven service delivery, a team of researchers, practitioners, community member and local government officials launched an action-research process in 2019 to explore how ABCD might strengthen government responsiveness, social accountability, and public participation in the IDP process in Emfuleni. Initial findings point to the promise of combining ABCD principles and practice with proven social accountability practices, leading to constructive engagement, relationship building, and joint planning between citizens and local officials towards improved IDP mechanisms.

Methodology

The team used various qualitative methods (Singer et al., 2020) as part of a participatory action-research methodology (Sendall et al., 2018). These methods drew on ABCD principles, which value the capacity, skills, knowledge, and active participation of communities in interventions – such as asset mapping (Lightfoot, McCleary & Lum, 2014) – aimed at generating data for action planning (Fourie, 2020). As the research goal explicitly links ABCD with social accountability, the design was also informed by a rights-based approach and the deliberate use of accountability tools. These methods included gathering community and ELM officials' experiences, concerns, and priorities, through:

- WhatsApp discussions during the Covid-19 lockdown period (21 participants from three wards, namely Wards 6, 7 and 23 in Bophelong)
- Facilitating three multi-stakeholder dialogues (39 participants, including community members, community development workers (CDWs), ELM officials, and Vaal University of Technology (VUT) staff and students)
- Facilitating nine ABCD orientation workshops with 43 ELM officials and 49 community members from Bophelong and Waterdal
- Training a team of 10 community and ELM officials in the Community Scorecard (CSC)[3] methodology, adapted for the assessment of the IDP process; and,
- Facilitating the CSC process with Bophelong (30 participants), Waterdal (20), and ELM officials (6).



Community Preparations

Following each session, the research team analyzed data (transcripts, notes) jointly with project stakeholders including community members, ELM, and COGTA officials.

3 The Community Score Card (CSC) is a participatory, community-based monitoring and evaluation tool that allows citizens and public service providers to engage in facilitated dialogue to assess the quality of a public service (e.g., health centre, school, public transport, water, waste disposal system). Through a structured 6-step process, it informs community members about available services, rights, and entitlements, as well as to solicit their opinions about the accessibility, quality, and accountability of these services.

Findings

Application of an ABCD approach

In contrast to traditional needs-based planning methods, ABCD represents a markedly different development and engagement strategy in Emfuleni. Research findings suggest that the shifts in mindset, and collective action that ABCD generates in communities, contribute to a posture of open, constructive, and critical engagement.

1. Introducing an ABCD approach to enhance public participation appears to have activated a localized sense of responsibility and civic duty among citizens in ELM. Asset-based thinking provided residents who were already involved in community-driven initiatives with a deliberate tool to mobilize, organize and connect other members of the community to join their efforts in providing solutions to address their challenges using their own assets. Importantly, an ABCD approach helped community members to frame positive messages when talking to government and local businesses for the provision of technical and financial support where needed in the implementation of their initiatives.

2. The Office of the Speaker in ELM is now using an ABCD approach to design its public participation programmes. Asset-based thinking has also informed the design of the content for the induction of Ward Committees which includes over 400 Ward Committee members. Through this induction, the usual "complaints sessions" have turned into solution-finding ones, with people willing to share responsibility. The office is also using ABCD language in ongoing conversations to influence and motivate other units of the municipality to use an ABCD frame of thinking for engagement with communities.

After three years of testing and expanding the use of an ABCD approach, there was further work to be done to strengthen the responsiveness of municipal officials and bridge the accountability gap through the introduction of a social accountability practice called the Community Scorecard (Pekkonen, n.d.).

An ABCD-informed Community Scorecard (CSC)

One critique of ABCD is that its focus on self-reliance means that governments can do less (MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014), raising questions around accountability and the roles and responsibilities of citizens and the state. To address this, a well-tested social accountability tool – the Community Scorecard (see e.g., Gullo, Galavotti & Altman, 2016) – was adapted according to ABCD principles to explicitly recognize the responsibilities (alongside the rights and entitlements) of citizens in the IDP process. Through the application of the ABCD-CSC, both citizens and ELM officials were able to identify challenges and solutions and developed a Joint Action Plan aimed at improving public participation in the IDP process.

The CSC was also proposed to bridge the different understandings of the IDP by participating community members which emerged during the CSC facilitated dialogue and to build on the potential for enhanced communication and joint efforts by citizens and ELM officials. While only a small number of ELM staff engaged in the CSC process, the asset-based adaptation provided an opportunity for enhanced communication and joint efforts between citizens and ELM officials which led to the production of a joint action plan (see **Appendix 1**). This collaborative effort shows how the asset-based CSC can improve public participation in the IDP and promote delivery of relevant and responsive services envisioned by citizens. The joint action plan is a significant step reflecting the potential of the asset-based CSC to break the entrenched institutional cultures and systemic barriers to effective community engagement. It further shows how the combined application of the ABCD principles and CSC can promote public participation and strengthen social accountability – while the ABCD approach empowers communities to mobilize their assets and participate actively

in local governance, the CSC process provides a mechanism through which they can hold municipal officials and themselves accountable for the joint planning, delivery, and responsible use of public services.

While the ABCD-CSC facilitated dialogue revealed the gap between the willingness of community members to participate meaningfully in the IDP process and the reluctance of municipal officials to change some of their practices, building on this initial collaboration is certainly key to a longer-term and committed partnership for service delivery improvement in Emfuleni through a more participatory IDP process. At a local level, it also makes a contribution towards making South Africa's strong policy framework for public participation a reality in practice.

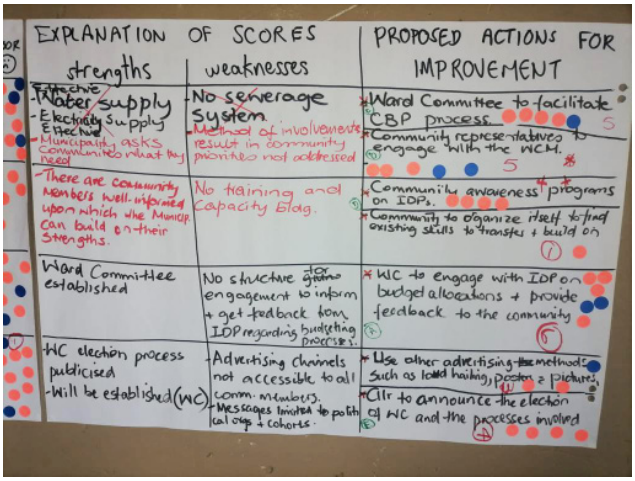
Community involvement in the IDP Process

On paper, the IDP is a participatory and integrated approach to planning, through which all concerned stakeholders are consulted. However, community representatives described the process in Emfuleni as one of "informing" or "telling" residents about the projects planned and the budget allocated. ELM officials candidly stated that they solicit "wish lists" of problems and challenges from community members attending IDP meetings, confirming that the IDP process is not properly, efficiently and effectively applied to encourage citizen participation and ensure provision of services envisioned by the community (Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022). Furthermore, community members in Emfuleni participating in the CSC activity, confirmed failure of these legislated mechanisms for public participation by scoring their involvement in, and responsiveness of the IDP process, as "very poor." As a result, most community members disengage from participating in the IDP process and explore alternative spaces and/or mechanisms for engagement with local government (Poswayo, 2012) and which often lead to service delivery protests.

Growing traction of ABCD in local government

An ABCD approach is gaining momentum in other local municipalities, government departments, and non-governmental organizations because of the gains made through the experiences described above in ELM. The early results from the initial testing in Emfuleni in 2017 informed a broader strategy to build practice and knowledge capacity that motivated other municipalities to incorporate an ABCD approach in their work:

- The City of Johannesburg has incorporated an ABCD approach to design an active outreach and engagement programme to solicit the views and priorities of the city's residents at a community level through the development of Community Based Plans as mechanisms to promote the development of relevant and responsive IDPs.
- Mogale City Local Municipality has also incorporated ABCD principles into the job descriptions of officials and are working on creating a policy to mainstream ABCD in the city delivery mandates.
- The Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality is incorporating the ABCD as a method to work actively with Ward Committees.



Analysis and proposed actions from Waterdal community's assessment meeting

Policy Recommendations

Specific recommendations for Emfuleni Local Municipality

Continue to support and nurture leadership in both the community and with the champions within local government by:

1. Working with champions at the Ward, Local, and Provincial levels to continue sharing successes and good practices in terms of applying ABCD and fostering dialogue through social accountability tools such as the CSC.
2. Supporting the Joint Action Group (formed at the conclusion of the CSC process) to ensure implementation of the recommendation for improvement of the IDP in ELM, contained in the joint action plan (see **Appendix 1**).

Review the curriculum of inductions of Ward Councillor and IDP staff orientations to explicitly link ABCD principles with social accountability practice such as the Community Scorecard.

Pilot an ABCD approach to Integrated Development Planning with community champions in one Ward and document the results for learning and broader uptake. Since IDPs are high-level, five-year plans reviewed annually by local councillors, there is an opportunity to identify an operational or policy priority where ABCD can be used to tangibly negotiate investment allocations.

Work with local champions, including residents, to showcase citizen-led initiatives with government audiences responsible for service delivery. These exchanges should highlight practical actions, investment opportunities, and areas of overlap with government obligations around public participation and service delivery.

Work with CoGTA, local municipalities, and civil society actors to **advocate for a review and strengthening of the current legislation** that emphasizes community participation in planning (e.g., Municipal Systems Act of 2000) to include Community Based Planning informed by ABCD planning principles.

Broader recommendations for local governments:

Build political and administrative leadership about the potential of an ABCD approach to inform public planning processes. These potentials should:

a. Mirror language included in national policy documents (e.g., promoting inclusive governance and strengthening accountability-based relationships between local governments and citizens);
b. Be framed as practical, and operational strategies to put this language into practice;
c. Include experiential hands-on exchanges with citizens in areas where they have mobilized assets;
d. Consider a technical and financial support model to incentivise and encourage citizen-driven and innovative solutions that addresses local challenges and priorities.

Identify where citizen-led initiatives and innovation are taking place, and:

a. Connect community champions with local government officials capable of responsively supporting these initiatives;
b. Learn from citizen-driven initiative to inform service delivery priorities and effectiveness;
c. Facilitate mutual understanding between local government and citizens of their respective rights and responsibilities in governance (e.g., mutual expectations around public policy making, planning, budgeting, service delivery, etc.).

Build facilitation skills among local staff tasked with public participation and community engagement. As a key skill in ABCD and social accountability practices, invest in capacity building on facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues, conflict resolution, asset mapping, and action planning. Consider legal, political, cultural context in designing and developing these supports for local officials and communities.

Consider using digital technologies as a way to create new spaces for public participation in planning and local governance.

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Permissions:

We confirm that permission for pictures/photos of research participants and the research team included in this brief has been granted.

Appendix 1 – Producing a Joint Action Plan as part of the ABCD-informed CSC process in Emfuleni

This table outlines the priority actions for improvements to the IDP, as suggested by community members (Waterdal and Bophelong) and by ELM staff.

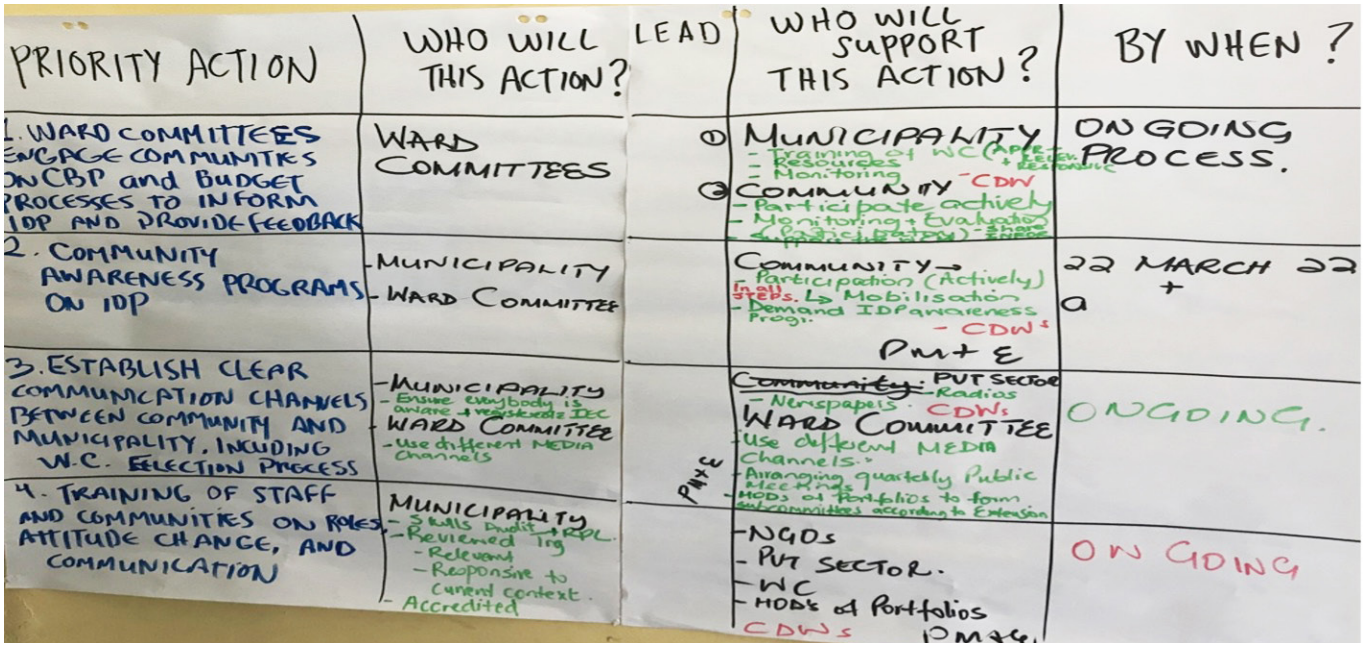
BOPHELONG	WATERDAL	ELM OFFICIALS
Establish clear communication channel between community and municipality	Ward committees to engage with IDP on budget allocations and provide feedback to the community	Staff properly trained for their roles/jobs
Attitude change on both community and municipality sides	Community representatives to engage with ward committee members	Improve internal communication (at municipality)
Communities trained so they can access opportunities/employment with inclusion criteria	Ward committees to facilitate CBP process	Ensure staff commitment to IDP meetings
Training on customer service/ communication skills for front-line staff	Community awareness programs on IDP	Encourage communication directly with staff involved
Facilitate community members access to municipality	Council to announce the election of Ward Committees and the process involved	Leadership that offers opportunities for staff recognition and support
De-politicize participation opportunities		

Community members and ELM officials voting on top priority actions:



This table (and photo below) outlines the consolidated Joint Action Plan.

Priority action	Who will lead this action?	Types of actions to be taken and Who will support the actions	By when?
Ward Committees engage communities on CBP and budget processes to inform IDP and provide feedback	Ward Committees	(i)ELM to support Training of Ward Committees; Resources; Monitoring (ii) Citizens to share information - Support Ward committee members	On-going process
Community Awareness Programs on IDP	Municipality Ward Committee	Community and CDWs to promote active participation of in all steps and to mobilize community and promote awareness about IDP process.	22 March 2022
Establish clear communication channels between community and municipality, including Ward councillor election process	ELM to ensure everybody is aware and registered with IEC, Ward Committees and to use different media channels to communicate information	Include Private Sector and use private sector Radios, newspapers existing different media channels CDWs and Ward Committee arrange and communicate quarterly public meetings Heads of Departments Portfolios to form subcommittees according to extension (ELM)	Ongoing
Training of staff and communities on roles, attitude change, and communication	Municipality to ensure skills audit and RPL that are reviewed and are relevant and responsive to current context Accreditation of skills	NGOS Private sector Ward Committees Heads of portfolio departments CDWs	Ongoing



Consolidated Action Plan done by Bophelong and Waterdal Communities with ELM

Appendix 2 – Questions for discussions with local civil servants and politicians:

- How adequate are existing planning and service delivery mechanisms in promoting inclusive governance and strengthening social accountability in your local government?
- What is your opinion about the potential of ABCD in (re)building relationships between local government and communities in your context?
- Would embedding the ABCD approach in local governance mechanisms be relevant for enhancing public participation and social accountability in your context? Why or why not?
- If the experience of ELM happened in your municipality, would you continue to invest in an ABCD strategy? Why or why not? How would you build the capacity of government officials to support citizens?

Contact details

Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy

Visiting address Södervägg 1D, 621 58 Visby
E-mail info@icld.se
Web www.icld.se