



# **Strengthening the Capacity of Civil Society to enhance Social Accountability**

**POLICY BRIEF**

**APRIL 2015**

# **A Policy Brief Produced by the Human Science Research Council in Partnership with the National Development Agency**

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## **Acronyms**

CSO's	Civil Society Organisations
DCoGTA	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
DPME	Department of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
NDA	National Development Agency
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
NPC	National Planning Commission
SJC	Social Justice Coalition

## **Acknowledgements**

This policy brief is based on a research study undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council on behalf of the National Development Agency (NDA). The report is entitled “Enhancing Active Citizenry Engagement in South Africa”.

The authors acknowledge the financial support of the NDA in respect of the study on which this policy brief draws. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of any other party.

## Introduction

The government of South Africa acknowledges that active citizen participation is a prerequisite for democracy and transformation. A core component of South Africa's Constitution is the commitment to ensure public participation in governance, aimed at giving effect to the principle of a representative and participatory democratic state.

The Fifteen Year Review commissioned by the Presidency in 2008 (The Presidency, 2008) noted that despite a progressive framework espoused by government for public participation, there was still an urgent need for strengthening innovative approaches to fostering participatory democracy.

Social auditing has been identified as one of a number of innovative approaches which provide citizens with an opportunity to work collectively towards addressing social problems through providing the evidence base for citizens to highlight concerns and to seek redress for the problems faced.

This policy brief firstly outlines the importance of enhancing active citizenry and elaborates on the urgency for South Africa to seek innovative approaches to enhancing citizen engagement. It then provides a brief synopsis of what social auditing entails and substantiates this through a case study of an effective social auditing intervention implemented in South Africa identified through recent research conducted by HSRC. It concludes with recommendations for the NDA in respect of how it can contribute to enhancing active citizenry through its mandate to enhance the capacity of civil society organisations (CSO's) in South Africa.

### Why is active citizen engagement important for South Africa's development trajectory?

Significant evidence exists to suggest that there are substantial development gains to be achieved through enhancing active citizenship, foremost of which is its contribution to deepening democracy (Putnam, 2000; Sheedy, 2008).

South Africa has established a number of channels aimed at giving effect to enhancing citizen engagement in governance. These include legislated, statutory mechanisms such as ward committees, school governing bodies, and formalised avenues such as rural road transport forums and police forums, among others. While these platforms can enable government to inform, they also enable citizens to give feedback to government and to monitor performance. In addition, these channels allow all development actors (the individual, communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government and even the private sector) to use this information flow to develop strategies together that enable citizens to best claim their rights and exercise their responsibilities as envisaged by the Constitution. Citizen participation therefore has an important role to play in bringing about transformation.

The National Development Plan 2030 (NPC, 2012) suggests that the state should focus on engaging with people in their own forums rather than expecting citizens to engage with forums created by the state (NPC, 2012a). It notes that:

“In many respects, South Africa has an active and vocal citizenry, but an unintended outcome of government actions has been to reduce the incentive for citizens to be direct participants in their own development. To prevent this practice from being entrenched, the state must actively support and incentivise citizen engagement and citizens should:

- Actively seek opportunities for advancement, learning, experience and opportunity.
- Work together with others in the community to advance development, resolve problems and raise the concerns of the voiceless and marginalised.

- Hold government, business and all leaders in society accountable for their actions.
- ... The state cannot merely act on behalf of the people – it has to act with the people, working together with other institutions to provide opportunities for the advancement of all communities”. (NPC, 2012b: 27)

The urgency in addressing this democratic deficit is underlined by the increasing number of service delivery protests countrywide, both in intensity as well as in level of violence exhibited in South Africa (DCoGTA, 2014) over the last decade. Unfortunately, public protests over service delivery, labour strikes and unrest have been one of the most visible indicators of active citizenship 20 years after attainment of democracy in South Africa (Lefko-Everett, 2011).

The main drivers of protest action within South Africa have included poverty, high unemployment and socioeconomic exclusion, relative deprivation, inequality in informal urban areas and dissatisfaction about the provision of services such as electricity, water, sanitation, refuse removal, roads and housing (DCoGTA, 2014; Gould, 2012; Ngwane, 2011). Importantly Ngwane (2011) found that the decision to protest was often preceded by repeated attempts to engage the authorities without success. Hence, the issue of governance failure is important when considering the protests and appropriate civic engagement mechanisms aimed at mitigating such violent protests. These public protests, regardless of their repercussions, have been seen as being a more effective space to communicate with government than ward committee structures (Andani, 2012).

Although the reasons for protest action are complex they demonstrate a demand for accountability and responsiveness from government, which appears to be largely unmet within the confines and quality of existing participatory democratic systems (NPC, 2012a; Powell, 2012).

A deeper analysis of available evidence on service delivery protests reveals some interesting patterns (DCoGTA, 2014):

- The communities where protests took place are significantly poorer,
- Have higher rates of unemployment and have lower levels of access to services than the rest of the country;
- Unemployed, uneducated males participate more than females in protest actions;

#### How citizens exercise social accountability?

There are two distinct ways through which citizens seek accountability from the state. The first is traditionally noted as the “long route of accountability” between state and the client. Here citizen’s voices are largely mediated through the ballot box by citizens exercising their power to political office bearers, who in turn hold policy makers and departmental operational staff accountable for service delivery. This form of accountability is represented through elections (at all levels), as well as through a range of other mechanisms indicated above e.g. referendums, imbizos and the highly regulated ward committee structures.

However there has been increasing recognition globally that the “long route” has been failing citizens in their ability to hold government accountable (Joshi, 2010) and there has been a crescendo of voices actively encouraging the exercise of the short route of accountability, where the client directly engages with front line service providers. Examples of these include peaceful and non-peaceful protest actions against state parties, raising public awareness of state failures (drug stock outs at clinics), community based monitoring initiatives including social audits, litigation against a state party for failure to deliver (school book delivery) and community engagement in planning and development prioritization at a local level (budget forums or community based planning processes for water or roads etc).

Social accountability measures (where citizens pressurize government) are increasingly recognised as significant for improving development outcomes and importantly the focus is both on the *process* as well as on the *outcomes* of the social auditing process.

### What are social audits?

A social audit is defined as “a monitoring process through which organizational or project information is collected, analysed and shared publicly, and investigative findings are shared and discussed publicly”(DPME, 2013).

Social Audits are an opportunity for communities to participate and monitor how a government service or programme is working on the ground compared to how it should or is reported to be working according to government budgets, documentation, policies and report. Social Audits can audit actual expenditure against budgets and reported expenditure, or they can audit the quality and experience of a service.

The social audit process allows communities to understand, measure, verify, report and ultimately contribute to improving government performance. The important difference about what is a research process is that the community are not passive recipients of evidence but importantly are the generators of this evidence and the advocates attempting to address the problem. The process of conducting a social audit typically involves a number of key steps:

Firstly it is important to define what question the audit is expected to respond to and hence the type of information that is expected to be collected. The next step is to facilitate training of the ‘research team’ – (community data collectors) on understanding the context within which the audit is being conducted. This will include:

- understanding relevant government policy in respect of the issue;
- learning to collect and understand information during the audit;
- participation in interpreting information;
- Learning how to communicate evidence.

This is then followed by data collection processes. Evidence maybe captured in a range of ways including photograph evidence and completion of a questionnaire. After data is collected the team gathers to analyse the data. This is where support is generally needed to help the community interpret what the data is saying to them.

The final phase of an auditing process is the documenting and making public the findings of an audit. This can take various forms including media exposure of results, hosting a public hearing as well presenting of the research findings to specific platforms targeting government stakeholders.

Dissemination of the findings through various platforms is critical as it provides participants an opportunity to present their information to relevant government stakeholder and to the larger community and to talk about their experiences of the particular issue. The public dissemination of findings is important as it provides a space for participants to be self-advocates for the issue being addressed. This type of citizen engagement is crucial to make democracy and participation tangible.

The value of a social audit lies in its contribution to enhancing participatory democracy through:

- Encourages citizens to be actively involved in public affairs;

- Enables communities to systematically and meaningfully ensure that leaders are held accountable for government expenditure and service provision;
- Brings together citizens and governments to evaluate the extent to which the commitments contained in legislation, policy and budgets are being honoured in practice.

### Case Study: Social Justice Coalition Social Audit of Sanitation in Khayelitsha

The case study of the social audit undertaken by the Social Justice Coalition in Khayelitsha, Cape Town presented below emerges from findings of a qualitative survey undertaken by the HSRC in partnership with the National Development Agency during 2015 and is profiled here as an example of what can be achieved through social auditing processes.

#### *Historical background*

The Social Justice Coalition (SJC) was established in 2008 in Khayelitsha by a number of organisations including the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and Equal Education in response to the xenophobic attacks that were widespread across the country at that time. While the initial focus was on responding to these attacks the coalition broadened its focus to wider issues of the failure of government to deliver services, the lack of accountability and the related attacks on the constitution and judiciary. The coalition consists of 12 branches across Khayelitsha. Each branch consists of an undesignated number of members and community advocates, who are SJC staff members that adopt a particular branch. The advocates are responsible for providing information to branches and each branch is then responsible for disseminating the information to the community. Branches meet weekly and through the branch structure the SJC engages with community leaders to encourage public participation.

The SJC has implemented two major campaigns in Khayelitsha, Cape Town namely the “Clean and Safe Sanitation Campaign” and the “Justice and Safety for All Campaign”. The Clean and Safe Sanitation Campaign focuses on ensuring clean and safe sanitation for the community through holding government accountable for the delivery of these services. The Justice and Safety for All Campaign is motivated by townships being unsafe and that these communities are inadequately served by under-resourced police and court systems. The SJC works with partners and government to ensure that the community receives protection by police and access to justice through the courts. The two campaigns were identified through community dialogues and consultative processes via branch structures.

Sanitation has remained a pivotal issue on the political landscape of the Western Cape and in 2012 SJC advocated for a janitorial service in Khayelitsha for the communal flush toilets as they were very dirty and many were broken. This service was implemented in 2012 by the City of Cape Town. Janitors are responsible for cleaning toilets and surrounding areas and undertaking minor repairs. They are also responsible for monitor whether the toilets are in working order and reporting all toilets that are not working properly and could not be fixed to the City of Cape Town. Despite this development Khayelitsha residents continued to have problems with sanitation, although there has been big improvement through extra toilets as well as the provision of improved lighting.

#### *Undertaking the Social Audit*

To address this issue the SJC undertook a social audit of sanitation as a way of providing the evidence base to support their advocacy demands. Social audits are used to measure, verify, identify, report on, and ultimately improve an institution’s social and ethical performance and in India are widely used for increasing accountability and transparency of local government (Srivastava,

2003). To gain experience in how to conduct social audits advice and training was sought from an expert on social audits who was visiting from India.

To perform the social audit SJC needed records from the City of Cape Town on the ratio of toilets to janitors in Khayelitsha. As these records were unavailable SJC devised a questionnaire in order to generate data. Data collection was undertaken over a week in July 2014, with approximately 90 people participating as data collectors, with five teams formed each consisting of SJC staff and branch members, residents from the four informal settlements being audited, independent observers, and representatives from partner institutions across the country. The social audit was conducted in four informal settlements in Khayelitsha, namely BM Section, PJS, Nkanini, and BT section and involved interviews with janitors and residents as well as inspections of the toilets. More than 800 questionnaires were completed during this period. Following the data collection and analysis findings of the audit were documented in a Social Audit Report to be presented at a public hearing set up by SJC.

The public hearing held in July 2014 was attended by over 400 residents and a range of government stakeholders including local government representatives, the Premier of the Western Cape, Ms Helen Zille and a representative from the Presidency and the media.

Key findings presented included the following:

- A third of residents reported that janitors cleaned the toilets only once a week and with only 7% reporting that toilets were cleaned daily;
- While more than three quarter of janitors reported working over weekends, the residents reported that only a third worked weekends;
- The audit found only 36% of the toilets were clean at the time of the inspection;
- 75% of residents reported that the toilets were usually locked and that they had access to the keys;
- 26% of the toilets were not in working condition; the common reasons being no water, couldn't flush, was blocked or had no sewage pipe.
- 52%, just over half, of the janitors had the requisite tools and equipment to undertake cleaning effectively. This included brooms, bin bags, chemicals, brushes and buckets.
- Only 13% of janitors had received health and safety training despite this being a basic requirement of the job.

A key outcome of the public hearing was that local government acknowledged that a problem existed and in communication with the SJC in July 2014 undertook to develop an implementation plan for addressing the poor quality of janitorial services.

#### Lessons from the social auditing experience

The case study brings to the fore a number of lessons in respect of enhancing active citizen engagement. These include the following:

- That with appropriate awareness raising, training and support civil society organisations are able to engage in activities which contribute to making government accountable to communities;
- Community members are engaged as enablers and facilitators of citizen engagement processes reinforcing the notion of community based and community driven development and abandoning the historical parachute approach to community development;
- The need to recognise that well-designed learning programmes and approaches can empower community members. This is because communities need a certain level of capacity

to enable them to identify, articulate and actively participate in the planning and design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the right initiatives to address community needs;

- Interventions must be designed taking into account the specific context. Hence decisions about which mechanisms and what approaches to utilise must be firmly grounded in the reality of the current context. This includes taking account of who must be involved and how?

### Capacity Development Role for the NDA in Enhancing Active Citizenry Engagement in South Africa

A key objective of the Active Citizenry Engagement study was to design a framework through which the National Development Agency (NDA) in collaboration with other institutions of state such as South Africa Local Government Association and Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (DCoGTA), could enhance public participation in governance and development in South Africa. The expectation is that this framework would facilitate a shift by Government from a “reactive” to a “proactive” governance posture and in the process mitigate the violent protests that have become the dominant means by which the citizenry communicates with Government or is able to draw government’s attention to issues of concern to the citizenry.

The Capacity Development framework developed by HSRC is aligned with guidelines on enhancing active citizenry (Sheedy, 2008) who postulated a five step guideline namely inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower. Interestingly it can be seen from the case study above that all these steps were pursued.

Central to this framework is the vital role that capacity building plays in development. There is recognition that the role, contribution and impact of community members in the decision-making process and in programmes that affect their lives and wellbeing can be better enhanced through learning, practice, training and education (Robert Chambers in Warburton, 1998). Ray (1996) argues that when the skill set of local community members are developed, they are enabled to participate fully in the local economy and improve their socio-cultural lives.

The social audit case study highlights a functional role for the NDA in developing the capacity of civil society organisations to engage in social accounting processes as a means of enabling active citizenry engagement in South Africa. This role is aligned to the mandate of the NDA. The NDA provides support to civil society organisations through two main channels namely grant funding and capacity development, although the capacity building is targeted to those institutions who have received grant funding.

The NDA’s concept of capacity building *“focuses on understanding the obstacles that inhibit people, governments, international organisations and NGOs from realising their developmental goals whilst enhancing the abilities that will allow them to achieve measurable and sustainable results”* (NDA, 2013)

The NDA has outlined a comprehensive model for capacity development with civil society stakeholders which focuses on building awareness, knowledge, skills and instincts. Importantly although training dominates the capacity building initiatives of the NDA, the NDA recognises that capacity building goes beyond training to include mentorship and incubation.

The NDA’s framework and package for capacity building is highly consistent with international standards and can easily be leveraged to build capacity for enhanced citizen engagement by civil society organisations in South Africa.

## **Key Recommendations to the NDA for enhancing the capacity of civil society to engage in social accounting interventions.**

The following recommendations are submitted for the NDA to consider implementing with its partner organisations in civil society in South Africa.

1. Integrate into the Capacity Development Framework which the NDA implements a module which focuses broadly on creating awareness of the value of active citizen engagement;
2. Partner with institutions in civil society which have actively embraced social accounting interventions to design appropriate training and support mechanisms for encouraging social auditing to be more widely implemented;
3. The NDA consider providing specific funding to civil society organisations to enable these institutions to facilitate social auditing interventions where appropriate.

## **CONCLUSION**

This policy brief outlines a functional role for the NDA in enhancing active citizenry in South Africa. The NDA's scale of outreach to civil society organisations across South Africa, its capacity development mandate and its funding base provides the vehicle for enhancing active citizenry engagement for playing such a role.

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