

CITIZENS' KNOWLEDGE AND PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY INFORMATION ACCESS AND DISTRIBUTION IN GRAHAMSTOWN REPORT



In Loving Memory of Siyasanga Bentele

Siyasanga passed away during the compilation of this report. She played a significant role in leading the process of establishing the partnership between the PSAM and the Unemployed People's Movement (UPM), setting up guidelines and terms of engagement. Her deep knowledge and activist expertise provided much insight into the dynamics of the social accountability ecosystem. This project owes a great deal to her efforts and dedication.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With high levels of poverty, unemployment, corruption and maladministration in South Africa, social accountability has become a valuable instrument to promote two-way communication between citizens and duty-bearers, namely the government. Social accountability pertains to citizen-led monitoring of public resource management, demanding explanations and justifications from the government about public processes, the use of public resources and service delivery matters. Citizens, however, need information about public systems and processes to effectively engage the government. Two very different organizations working in the social accountability sector formed a partnership to understand better how to distribute this information.

The Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM) is a university-based organization involved in social accountability monitoring. The Unemployed People's Movement (UPM) is a community based social movement that assists the public deal with various issues, ranging from lack of services, to abuse of resources at the municipal and provincial levels. The purpose of this report is to assess a group of Grahamstown community member's perspectives on social accountability in relation to knowledge distribution and information accessibility.

The study found that the informants had limited knowledge regarding the roles of certain state officials. There seems to be a general understanding of the government's role in relation to service delivery and policy implementation, however, the majority of informants had misconceptions regarding the role of parliament and councillors. This was supported by their request to receive information related to the different roles and responsibilities of public officials. Although the Grahamstown informants currently receive their public resources management related information from word of mouth, they would prefer to receive this type of information from radio.

In conclusion, the study indicated an apparent need to create conducive spaces for agents of change to share and make available social accountability related information. Furthermore, the structure of these platforms need to ensure that diversity is catered for and that every member knows and feels like their inputs are respected and appreciated. The desired change needs to create amicable environments where civil society, citizens and the government can share expertise in a respectful and mutually beneficial manner.

INTRODUCTION

Grahamstown is located at the heart of the Makana Municipality. Makana Municipality is found in the Eastern Cape Province, located at the southeastern coast of South Africa, and falls within the Sarah Baartman District Municipality (Makana Municipality, 2017). Grahamstown, with an estimated population of 82 060, is well known for being the home of Rhodes University and the famous National Arts Festival (Stats SA, 2016).

Regardless of the many successes the town enjoys with the Arts Festival and education institutions, the municipality has been struggling with serious administrative challenges. Makana Municipality was placed under administration¹ in 2015, following its inability to pay staff salaries, due to huge debts accrued (MacLennan, 2017). However, the 9-month intervention did not yield the expected outcomes. The town still suffers, amongst other issues, from debt, high rates of unemployment, and poor service delivery, especially water and infrastructure. Water outages are consistent and almost every road in town has potholes due to lack of maintenance and mismanagement of public resources (MacLennan, 2017). A local coalition of civil society organisations and interested individuals, calling themselves the Makana Unity League, have been calling for the municipality to be placed under administration again since the beginning of 2017. However, others are concerned that getting outside intervention is futile, as proven by the previous experience (Penxa, 2017). Financial issues are merely one element of the crisis in the Makana Municipality. Penxa (2017) argues “for an urgent provincial government intervention from COGTA and the Premier that will ensure that there is a permanent Municipal Manager which is qualified and competent to lead and manage the administrative staff of Makana Municipality. Currently, there is a dissatisfaction from the public and the Municipal Council on the conduct of the municipal staff which affects the few dedicated staff”.

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Grahamstown citizens have become accustomed to protests and marches, heading to the municipal offices to make their concerns known and demand answers for the poor state of the municipality (Majali, 2014). An increasing number of citizens are realizing that it is in the best interests of society to ensure that duty bearers manage public resources in an efficient, transparent, and socially accountable manner (Haith, n.d). Social accountability pertains to the citizens’ ability to hold the government accountable for its actions, through demanding explanations and justifications for their actions. It includes the willingness and ability of the government to provide those justifications and explanations to civil society and take corrective measures (Halloran, 2015). The right to social accountability, therefore, promotes citizen’s engagement, and transparency regarding the use and management of public resources (Ackerman, 2005). With the rise of democracy, a need for the state to become accountable to citizens has accelerated and the citizen’s role in decision-making processes have further increased (Przeworski et al., 1999). Transparency, public monitoring, and government-citizen relationships are all fundamental factors crucial in the effective exercise of humans’ rights to social accountability. In order to efficiently exercise ones right to social accountability,

¹ Municipalities are placed under Section 139 1(b) provincial administration if they have been deemed unable to fulfil their administrative duties to receive a clean audit for a number of consecutive years. An administrator is deployed to a municipality to assess and clean their records to ensure future progressive operations. For more information on Makana under administration, visit, <http://www.dispatchlive.co.za/news/2014/10/02/tough-job-to-fix-the-chaos-in-makana/>

transparency and information on the use and management of public resources is essential. Citizens need to be informed about the operations of the public resources management system and the various channels to follow when interrogating the use of public resources (Hongs 2015). Social accountability information refers to information that can be used by citizens to monitor and demand justifications for the use and management of public resources.

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY INFORMATION CIRCULATION

Various studies have been conducted on information accessibility and citizen engagement. Galstons (2007) conducted a study on civic knowledge, education and engagement, emphasizing the interconnectedness of the three. Hong's (2015) study on citizen participation in budgeting in Seoul indicates that citizens' knowledgeability is positively associated with the efficiency of monitoring the public resources management process. Therefore, lack of knowledge often results in ineffective processes and interventions. Informed groups tend to be more creative and perform better at monitoring the use of public resources, especially if they know who holds what knowledge and responsible for what (Van Ginkel and Knippenberg, 2009). Reay (2010)'s study implied that safe spaces can assist in creating environments where knowledge and awareness can be explored to mitigate misperception, ignorance and misinterpretations. Information accessibility has been identified as the most crucial aspects of citizen empowerment and engagement (Cash et al., 2003).

There are other dynamics surrounding information accessibility and citizen engagement. It is a complex process, reflective of the complex ecosystem, which makes up the social accountability sector (Lodenstein et al., 2013). Other studies showed that accessibility to information is not divorced from other social and ethical dynamics. Boyd's (2010) work focusing on information flow in social media argues that due to the overflow streaming of information, the public is spending less and less time on deep interrogation of the circulating information as it tends to become difficult to pay undivided attention to the massive amount of information that is always circulating. This information overload and limited attention could be one of the reasons why even though the information is available, social accountability interventions still fall short. In addition, practitioners do not often spend much time reflecting on their work, they are activity oriented, and often pushing to produce their outputs to an extent that their interventions end up lacking real significant impact (Ayas and Zeniuk, 2001).

Other studies conducted focus on the role and impacts of information technology on civic engagement (Bimber, 2000; Delli Carpini, 2000; Gino et al., 2008), and the dynamics around being a citizen accessing information online (Scheufele and Nisbet, 2002). Information in the sector tends to circulate amongst individuals who are already informed, as argued by Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg (2015). It is important here to touch a bit of the difference between knowledge and information, as these terms tend to be confused with each other. Information generally refers to facts learnt about something, whilst knowledge refers to the skills and information acquired through education and experience (Karpov, 2017). Another article talks to

both knowledge and information distribution, and knowledge-sharing platforms are perceived as integral to information distribution processes in the social accountability sector (Brinkerhoff and Wetterberg, 2015). There are various platforms available to the social accountability community to distribute knowledge; however, most of these platforms are exclusive to practitioners, academics, government officials, political and social activists. They are designed, by default, to accommodate people with access to financial resources and the time to engage in them, which automatically excludes the majority of citizens, especially those in developing countries with limited access to the internet (Christen, 2009). These platforms include conferences, summits, seminars, webinars, and online knowledge hubs, amongst other means that an average community member in developing countries cannot access.

Other research explored the dynamics surrounding access to information, such as challenges around coordinating the distribution of information for diverse groups of stakeholders (Thomas et al., 2015). We cannot tackle the subject of information distribution without including the knowledge sharing platforms where information is often distributed. Even though the global community has access to historical and cultural systems of knowledge sharing, such as inter-generational storytelling, these systems are not mentioned when debating or dealing with ethical and practical implications of information accessibility (Christen, 2009). Limited capacity by the government to inform citizens and deliver services, coupled with the citizens' lack of knowledge regarding the public resources management system, pose serious threats to the progressive realization of a socially accountable state (Ackerman, 2005). Especially since social accountability initiatives are supposed to bring about change in the behaviour of government officials and citizens alike.

The effects of knowledge on behaviour change were investigated by Akturan and Gunduz Cekmecelioglu (2016), who stated that knowledge sharing has a positive influence on creative behaviour, where both the government and civil society can come up with creative and innovative approaches that aim to strengthen the management of public resources. In addition, Eberhagen (2000) indicated that knowledge sharing occurs in an interdependent context and should not be approached as an isolated event. The IGI Global Disseminator of Knowledge² defines knowledge distribution as:

*“The transfer of **knowledge** within and across settings, with the expectation that the **knowledge** will be “used” conceptually (as learning, enlightenment, or the acquisition of new perspectives or attitudes) or instrumentally (in the form of modified or new practices.). There are those who see **distribution** as having other legitimate outcomes. Some of these outcomes include: (1) increased awareness; (2) the ability to make informed choices among alternatives, and (3) the exchange of information, materials or perspectives” (Gupta, Sharma and Rashid, 2009).*

² This definition was provided by IGI Global; Disseminator of Knowledge. Retrieved from <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/knowledge-distribution/16323> on the 7th of September 2017

Another study on the effects of knowledge distribution on awareness indicated that the benefits of awareness are closely linked to the knowledge available in learning contexts (Kozlov and Grobe, 2016). Although there is adequate material focusing on citizen engagement and public participation, there is limited literature on the dynamics surrounding accessibility and distribution of information in the Grahamstown social accountability context. Even though the social accountability sector is highly active in Grahamstown, there is limited literature on information accessibility and the public perspective on government officials' roles. Although it was challenging to find material focusing on the citizens perspective on government roles, there was a study that explored the stakeholder's perspectives on open government data (Gonzalez-Zapata and Heeks, 2015), indicating that knowledge sharing platforms tend to be one way, with the government informing the public. Furthermore, they emphasized that diverse stakeholders experience the knowledge sharing platforms differently, and their engagement with the public resources system is highly influenced by that.

It is for this reason that the study was designed to understand how selected informants in Grahamstown prefer to receive information and the kind of information they would like to receive, as well as getting a sense of their perspectives regarding the role of the government and various state entities. This report is therefore focusing on the information accessibility by community members and activists within the social accountability sector in Grahamstown.

UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT (UPM)

UPM was established in 2009 in Grahamstown in response to the growing crisis of unemployment and the lack of service delivery. A group of 'ordinary' citizens residing in the Grahamstown townships initiated the movement aiming to address these issues through engagement with the various stakeholders, the government and citizens (Matthews, n.d). The UPM is a social movement dedicated to addressing issues of unemployment, service delivery, human rights, women's rights and welfare. They do this through organizing and participating in public meetings, protests, research projects, and community engagement. The movement consists of casual members who volunteer their time, with a handful of them on stipends, to take on the various cases and projects they are involved in. The cases vary from community members needing assistance with rape cases, to fighting for fair distribution of houses. They also conduct research and write about the issues and projects they partake in, which they disseminate via their newsletter.

The profile of the UPM members consisted mostly of unemployed individuals, who work in collaboration with other social development entities. They garnered technical and financial support from various entities in Grahamstown including CBOs, veteran activists, leftist political parties, CSOs, and Rhodes University. However, due to limited resources and other factors, the UPM has been struggling to have the impact it intended. The same can be said for the majority of organisations in the social accountability sector (Fox, 2016). The social accountability ecosystem is volatile and stability is a luxury most organisations have not been able to afford

(Halloran, 2015). The UPM has also been experiencing difficulties in trying to implement its interventions, moving further away from their goal of improving people's livelihoods (Matthews, n.d). They started indicating to PSAM that they needed to be more informed about how governance and social accountability actually work. It became necessary for UPM, just like all the other CSO's in this sector, to gain access to information that will inform their interventions, but also guide and direct the activists on the best practices in engaging government officials or mobilizing the community, for improved results. It was this reason that drove them to collaborate with PSAM.

PUBLIC SERVICE ACCOUNTABILITY MONITOR (PSAM)

PSAM is an institute within the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, Grahamstown. PSAM's main aim is to ensure accountable service delivery by improving the interaction between citizens and the state. It has a particular focus on strengthening public resource management systems; whereby human rights are being progressively realized as a result of accountable service delivery supported by enhanced interaction between citizens and the state (Sipondo, 2013). PSAM has been working on strengthening the methods undertaken by civil society actors to monitor social accountability in Sub-Saharan Africa. Creating and sharing social accountability knowledge is an important element of supporting citizens in being able to effectively demand justifications and explanations from state actors regarding the management and use of public resources.

PSAM specializes in social accountability monitoring using a systematic approach that allows PSAM to collate and publish information related to public resource management. PSAM seeks to achieve this goal through four main outputs: applied research, advocacy and direct engagement; training and mentoring; and learning and knowledge creation. PSAM's key objectives are improved transparency and accountability in governance and public resource management, including:

- Improved public participation in service delivery and policy change processes,
- Improved management of public resources,
- Improved public service delivery, especially at local level³.

Some of PSAM's research and advocacy initiatives produce large volumes of information that interrogate government-produced documents, such as strategic plans and annual reports. The information produced also focuses on best practices when engaging citizens, the government, and the public resources management system. The knowledge produced encourages

³ A report on PSAM's advocacy strategy can be found here

<https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/psam/documents/Case%20study%20A%20review%20of%20MAP%20advocacy%20efforts%20between%202012%20and%202013.pdf>

transformative thinking in approaching social accountability related matters that anyone in the sector can use. It is for this reason that it became a strategy for PSAM to establish relationships with CBOs as a means of sharing their findings and distributing the collected knowledge to foster an informed and engaged citizenry (Sipondo, 2013).

PARTNERSHIP ESTABLISHMENT

UPM works directly with community members, but it struggles to create structured systems through which to receive information from other CSOs in the sector, and platforms to share the information they collect through their research with the public. On the other hand, PSAM produces evidence-based public service monitoring information, which could possibly empower the UPM, along with the Grahamstown community, when engaging the government. One of PSAM's strategies entails "To ensure that social accountability practitioners and stakeholders enhance their understanding of social accountability practice through increased social accountability knowledge and information in sub-Saharan Africa" (PSAM Strategic Plan 2016-2019). To achieve this goal, PSAM needs to create networks of communication where knowledge can be transferred. The partnership between PSAM and UPM was the result of such a vision, to work together to share knowledge with the Grahamstown community, as each organisation progresses towards its objectives. The UPM would gain access to and learn the skills to apply the social accountability information in their interventions, and PSAM would distribute its information to a wider community, further promoting social accountability.

These two organisations had an informal relationship emanating from past collaborations. It is by these means that the UPM came to be intrigued by the information circulating within PSAM, and expressed a desire to better understand the way in which the information produced by PSAM could be made accessible to the local Grahamstown community. When the PSAM Advocacy Impact Programme officer heard about this aspiration, she thought it would make a worthwhile project for their next case study.

ACTIVISM RESEARCH THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Activist research is a theoretical framework that uses research to address social challenges. This framework aims to empower communities through addressing inequalities, segregation, ignorance and other social ills (Campbell, 2002). Activist research can also be used to determine the direction the researcher and the participants need to take to reach their goals (Choudry, 2014). In the case of this study, activist research was used as a lens to guide the process of developing a partnership between the UPM and PSAM, so that they could better reach their mutual objectives to empower the greater community through information. The researchers used the framework to structure their research, to direct their thinking to focus on benefiting the Grahamstown community, and contribute towards improved social accountability.

The theory assisted the current study in identifying and understanding the dynamics that enable or hinder partnership building and knowledge sharing in this context.

As indicated, this research theory was applied to further identify the best approaches to reach the Grahamstown community and understand how they receive their social accountability information. This includes information related to the management of public resources, public officials' performance, and different perspectives on effective methods of combating social injustice and improving quality of life. Activist research has the potential to produce relevant information to the context it is applied in, as it requires the participation of community members from the inception of the research project right to dissemination of the research findings (Hale, 2001). Activist research was used as means of building a partnership, and determining the direction and relevant strategies to implement the project for the successful execution of the knowledge distribution project. It provided the researchers involved with a framework to interrogate their understanding of social accountability to improve their interventions. To ensure that this framework was implemented effectively, it was necessary to apply a research methodology that would allow for the involvement of the community from the beginning, and be able to achieve progressive tangible results that aim to address a challenge or bridge a gap. The study chose to use Participatory Action Research to implement the knowledge distribution study undertaken through the activist research theory lens.

STUDY PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to understand the perspectives of the Grahamstown community on public resources management in relation to access to information.

Objectives of the study are:

- To understand the Grahamstown community's perspective on public resources management related matters;
- To assess how the Grahamstown community receives information related to social accountability matters;
- To identify best-preferred approaches to distribute social accountability related information.

METHODOLOGY

Freire (1972), who is also known as the father of the participatory action research (PAR) methodology, emphasizes that it should aim for social change and comprise of a series of aspects without which the study will not qualify for PAR. Hale (2001: 15) provides a concise explanation of these aspects of PAR, as explained below:

1. The researcher should work together with the affected societies to identify research questions and objectives. The objectives are often aligned with challenges that the community members are interested in understanding and addressing.
2. Although the data collection methods used rely on the range of endeavors offered by conventional social science, activist research requires participation from the community, affording them opportunities to learn research skills, contribute to data collection, and taking an active role in knowledge creation.
3. It is imperative for participants to learn how to analyze and interpret the data they collect so they can use it for their cause. Furthermore, it will enrich the analysis of the study.
4. Once the valuable knowledge has been extracted and analyzed, the community should be most active in disseminating the results. Knowing how people like to receive their information and the kind of information they require makes the knowledge produced relevant, informative and useful.
5. This leads us to the validation of the results. The best validation for activist research is through the impact and the changes it brings to that community (Hale, 2001; 15).

PAR, as a research methodology, offers a unique position for the researcher to invest cognitive energy, time, and resources into the development of a partnership and the implementation of developmental initiatives, whilst also collecting evidence to support and inform their initiatives (Baum, MacDougall and Smith, 2006). The PAR method allows for the participants to not only be the creators of information, but also the directors of the study, placing them in a position of decision-making regarding the roles they want to play and the direction of the project (de Finney and Ball, n.d). As a research methodology, PAR positions the activist research theoretical framework within the community context and aims to produce relevant and empowering outcomes. The current study's focus was on aspect one to four of the PAR, as it aimed to understand information accessibility within the Grahamstown context in the social accountability sector. However, the current report contains mainly findings from the forth aspect of PAR.

The current study was an initiative to strengthen collaboration between community based organisations and civil society organisations to ensure the most effective dissemination of social accountability information to the wider Grahamstown community. This report focuses on the Grahamstown community members' views of the public resources management system and the mediums of communication that currently distribute social accountability information to them.

STUDY DESIGN

The current study, which started around April 2016 and is scheduled to run until October 2017, was divided into two phases. There are five steps of the study.

1. The strengthening of collaborations and the development of the knowledge distribution project;
2. Training of four UPM team members on social accountability fundamentals and research methodology;
3. Assessment of how the Grahamstown community receives and prefers to receive information related to social accountability and their perspectives regarding social accountability subjects;
4. Summarizing social accountability research produced by PSAM and UPM and disseminating it in an appropriate, engaging and accessible manner to the Grahamstown community;
5. Monitor and evaluate the potential and influence of the knowledge distribution study at the individual, organisational and community levels.

The first three points speak to the first phase of the study, whilst the last two points will be implemented during the second phase of the study. The first phase that started in April 2016 and ended in December 2016 was focusing on strengthening collaborations and partnerships whilst collecting baseline information regarding people's perspectives of the public resources management system in Grahamstown. The second phase of the study, which started at the beginning of 2017, aims to disseminate the knowledge collected and create platforms to distribute social accountability related information within Grahamstown. This report contains findings of the first phase of the study, which explored the Grahamstown community's perspectives of the public resources management system and their access to such information.

In terms of the participatory nature of the study, the study was designed through consultation between the UPM and PSAM. PSAM provided research expertise and UPM provided community knowledge. UPM activists received basic training on research methodology and ethical considerations when engaging community members for data collection. The training involved role playing activities, as well as theoretical knowledge of the research study. The UPM activists undertook a pilot study, where they interviewed two people each. The pilot session was to prepare them for the field, and to identify discrepancies and challenges with the questionnaire and/or the questions. The UPM activists were also given an opportunity to attend workshops and courses to expose them to other academics and community members that were involved in community development and information sharing. This exercise was also important as it provided them with a clearer vision of what the study was aiming to do and exposed them to other community activists who were part of similar collaborations.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD

This study utilized a questionnaire that comprised of open-ended and closed questions, which required both qualitative and quantitative responses. These questionnaires were administered

through face-to-face interviews conducted by the UPM activists. The questionnaires were administered using both English and Xhosa, as the majority of the Grahamstown residents are Xhosa speaking. Informants were visited at their homes or work places for interviews.

Due to limited timeframes and resources, purposeful selection was applied when selecting informants. Thirty informants from the Grahamstown townships were selected based on availability, accessibility and involvement in advocacy initiatives. The majority of the informants interviewed were people that have worked with UPM activists directly or indirectly in one or more of their social activism initiatives. The informants comprised of a hybrid of educated and illiterate community members over the age of 18 years, across-gender and race.

The data collected from the Grahamstown community focused on their understanding of social accountability related knowledge and the knowledge circulation practices. The three UPM researchers identified ten individuals each to interview. An equal number of females (15) and males (15) were interviewed, and they were between the ages of 18 and 61 years. The majority of the informants lived in townships including Joza, Vukani, Hlalani, Ethembeni, and Fingo. Other participants were from Grahamstown Central and West. The next section contains their perspectives on various social accountability related information.

The data was captured and transcribed by the UPM researchers. Once the data was captured, coding was carried out to extract reoccurring themes and descriptive quantitative analysis was conducted on the informants' demographical profiles and communication mediums ratings. Ethical considerations were followed throughout the implementation of this study.

STUDY FINDINGS

GOVERNMENT ROLE IN SERVICE DELIVERY

The study showed that everyone who was interviewed had some level of understanding regarding the role of the government in service delivery. They indicated that the government's role is to provide communities with services such as water, sanitation, housing and roads. Two informants emphasized that it is the government's legal obligation to provide the services as indicated below,

"I think their role is to bring services to the people not because they are doing us a favour, but because they are supposed to bring them to us". One informant stated.

"They have a responsibility, we elected them through votes" another informants commented.

Other informants mentioned budgeting and planning as some of government responsibilities. This was supported by another informant's responses stating that the government should monitor the reach of the services and ensure that everyone is taken care of equally.

GOOD CONDUCT FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

When the community members were asked to comment on the expected behavior from government officials responsible for delivering their services, the majority of them expressed a desire to see professionalism amongst government officials. Words mentioned by the community members in relation to the behavior of government officials included honest, trustworthy, dedicated, principles, courtesy, and transparency. A few informants stated that a good government official puts the community first, aims to develop the people, and change their lives for the better.

Other informants stated that government officials need to be able to talk to the people through regular face-to-face meetings. They need to involve the community in country related matters as stated by one informant below:

“To keep the public aware on everything that is going to happen, to open public debates for the people of South Africa to participate in matters involving the running of the country.”

Most informants indicated that corruption was a major problem with public servants. One participant even went as far as saying he did not know how to answer that question about the role of government workers as stated below:

“I wouldn’t be able to answer that question because they are not behaving in a professional manner, nor are they behaving as people who have rules of conduct.”

The informants indicated that corruption happens when the government officials look after their own interests at the expense of the citizens. They stated that government officials need to remember that they are working for the people and that they are placed into these positions to take care of the needs of the people.

POLICY AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Even though two informants did not know the connection between policy and service delivery, the majority stated that policies inform the services that need to be delivered. A few mentioned that policies serve as a guide to direct government officials on how to function and decide on the nature of service required by the community. Another informant worded it differently, stating that:

“Service delivery is a method used to deliver public policy.”

Some informants implied that there was no connection between policies and service delivery. Others indicated that the connection between policies and services is not visible because service providers do not adhere to the policies. Furthermore, the policies seem to serve the already affluent societies, failing to capture the needs of the disadvantaged. One participant

insisted that policies were overshadowed by corruption, making it difficult to translate policy to good service delivery. One informant stated:

“There is no connection, they just do as they please, they make policies that will favour their needs and if they want to change those policies they do.”

This statement implied that even though there ought to be a connection between policies and the services delivered, it is often unclear to the informants because they believe service providers tend to manipulate policy in favour of their own individual interests.

ROLE OF PUBLIC IN SERVICE DELIVERY

Most informants stated that the role of the public is to hold the government accountable for service delivery. They indicated that it is important for the public to get involved in the process of service delivery, to attend public meetings where the service providers present the budget, as well as protest if their services are not delivered appropriately. One informant indicated that the public needs to be informed to understand the service delivery procedures to effectively engage the service providers. It is not enough to protest, they said. The public needs to advise officials on how to manage the world with dignity and integrity. Even though a handful of informants stated that it was important to adhere to the state regulations when dealing with the government officials, others indicated that if the conventional methods do not work, it is the public's responsibility to aggressively and radically demand justifications. The role of the public is not merely to attend meetings, but to unitedly inform the service providers of their needs and monitor that services are implemented. One informant below shows this,

“The role of the public is to unite, stand up and tell them [service providers] that A-B-C must be done, not just hold meetings in vain, we have to also monitor them in their works.”

HUMAN RIGHTS AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Informants had a few things to say about the connection between rights and service delivery. The majority of them stressed that human rights and service delivery are inseparable; they are supposed to go hand in hand. Below are a few statements provided by informants:

“The two are connected and cannot be separated - the provision of services is the upholding of human rights and the human dignity of the people.”

“Human rights are connected with service delivery through the Constitution of South Africa, which states that we have a right to water, housing and education.”

Other informants indicated that the lack of quality service provision violates their rights, as it infringes on them receiving the services they need to realize those rights. As one informant stated:

“Service delivery is all about servicing my human rights, but the way our local government is operating, my human rights are being violated.”

A few did not seem to understand the connection between human rights and service delivery, and merely stated that service delivery was their right.

ROLE OF COUNCILLORS IN SERVICE DELIVERY

When the informants were asked to comment on their understanding of the role of councillors⁴, a few indicated that they thought they are supposed to represent the community. They ought to work hand in hand with communities, ensure that their concerns are heard and needs identified. They are also responsible for ensuring that the local municipality budget is used properly, and conduct quality checks on the work of the service providers in their wards. Other responsibilities mentioned included being a spokesperson, reporting to the municipality the needs of the community, ensuring the needs are budgeted for, and ensuring the budget is spent wisely by the municipality. Informants emphasized the need for councillors to understand that they are public servants accountable to the community they serve, therefore regular communication through meetings is essential to ensure that councillors are well informed of their community issues. They are responsible for improving the lives of people in their communities, especially those disadvantaged, stated one informant below:

“To make sure that everybody gets a better life, especially those who have no place to stay or food and jobless people, to ensure that kids have better schools and better education.”

Even though all informants seem to agree that the official role of councillors is to play a leadership role in ensuring the communities receive adequate services that improve their livelihoods, a few indicated the situation was different in their context. One informant stated:

“They have failed dismally in this regard [ensuring that the community receives quality services], maladministration is the order of the day.”

ROLE OF THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

The study found that informants had varying perspectives regarding the role of parliament in relation to service delivery and policy implementation. Some believe that the role of members of parliament was to ensure that services get to people, whilst others stated that it was to monitor the municipalities. Most interviewed informants stated that it was the parliamentary mandate to enforce the laws and ensure that resources are equally distributed amongst citizens. Others made the connection between the elected officials and members of parliament, indicating that parliament was to ensure that those elected do not abuse power, but put the needs of the citizens first.

⁴ Councillors are local government officials elected by the community to represent the various respective wards (community area groups) in their local municipalities. They work closely with ward committees and tend to be affiliated with political parties.

A few informants expressed concern about the role of parliament in South Africa as stated below:

“It has been a shambles, members of parliament are not free to make their own informed decisions but a collective decision, too many ill informed decisions by parliament has cost the economy billions.”

“I do not think they have a role in managing or have a say in the country’s budget and resources other than debating about it after the budget speech.”

ACCESS TO INFORMATION - PUBLIC BENEFIT

The informants were asked about their thoughts regarding access to information related to service delivery and policymaking. They all agreed that it was beneficial for the community to have access to information because it helps them to make informed interventions. They indicated that it is essential for them to be informed so that they can participate in meetings and know their rights, as this will assist them in understanding the services they are meant to receive and capacitate them to confront service providers when they do not deliver. They also mentioned that being informed would assist them to map out the various offices to visit when in need, and also assist them to monitor service delivery more effectively. Informants emphasized that as South African citizens, it is important to know who is responsible for what so that they can be held accountable when they do not deliver; it is the community’s responsibility to know all this information. They believe that being informed makes it easier for the public to play an active, participatory role in their own development and the monitoring of public officials, as indicated below:

“For transparency, prevention of fraud and corruption, if any official is involved in an unsavoury business regarding tax payer’s money, the public needs to be aware of this and such action brought to a swift end.”

The importance of having access to relevant information was expressed by all the informants and indicated that it was not possible to be involved in public matters without access to information.

MEDIUMS OF COMMUNICATION

The majority of the informants indicated that they did not have access to the information they required, and that called for an investigation into the social accountability-related information currently being circulated in the Grahamstown community. The study aimed to map out the various mediums of communication that broadcast or publish social accountability related news and those that are preferred by the community. The graph below contains the informants rating related to how people currently receive information.

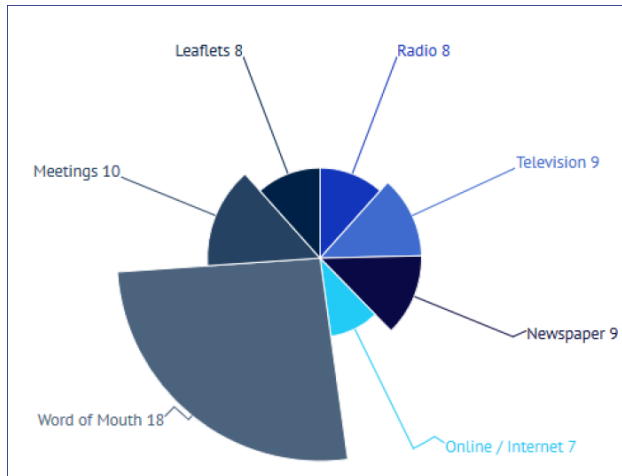


Figure 1: Current modes of communication

The graph above contains communication mediums available to the communities and the how they receive information through those mediums. The study shows that out of the thirty informants interviewed eighteen of them receive social accountability information via word of mouth, ten of them receive it in meetings and nine of them receive it via television and newspapers. Only eight informants received their information from leaflets and radio. The internet or online channels were rated the lowest.

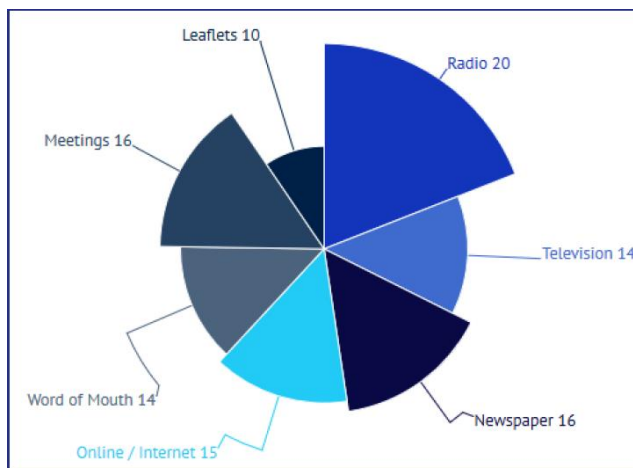


Figure 2: preferred modes of communication

Figure 2 above contains informant's preferred modes of communication. As means of circulating and distributing social accountability information, radio was rated the highest. Twenty informants indicated that they would have preferred to receive their news via radio, sixteen preferred newspapers and meetings. The internet or online services came after at fifteen, as well as word of mouth. Leaflets were rated the lowest, as only ten people wanted to receive their information via leaflets.

PREFERRED INFORMATION TO RECEIVE

The informants were then asked to indicate the kind of information they would like to receive in relation to social accountability. Informants identified what they wanted, as listed below:

- *All sorts of information that concerned them as community members and civil society.*
- *Basic rights and grants information.*
- *Municipalities expenditure records and the mismanagement of resources where applicable.*
- *The Integrated Development Plans (IDP), their budget allocation and how they are spent, as well as having access to the [municipal] 5-year plans and progress reports.*
- *How the government advertises their posts and recruits officials?*
- *Tenders and the criteria to accessing them.*
- *Who gets the services and the various steps an individual needs to take to access adequate services and employment?*
- *Water and sanitation issues, especially when they affect the community, like water shortages, etc. and be regularly informed about municipality affairs.*
- *Who to approach or where to report when your rights are being violated?*
- *Would like transparency concerning the management of resources.*
- *What resources are there that the municipality can provide for the people?*
- *How government officials ought to behave because I see that they are all corrupt starting from parliament to local and provincial, to me they are the same?*

The informants wanted the resource management process to be transparent enough to allow the community to monitor and assess the use of funds and ensure that proper regulations were followed when spending. There seemed to be a clear understanding that the resources the government was working with were limited. Some members wanted to understand:

- *The process of editing [financial management within the municipality] and the nature of services being delivered.*
- *The basis under which the needs [of the citizens] are identified and the strategies that inform service delivery.*
- *What happens when the resources are not being managed adequately?*

There were informants who explained that they did not want to depend on the government, but needed the government to assist them to start their own enterprise, as stated in the sentence below that they would like to know:

“Where we can go to get resources to start our own business and what help can we get from the government to have those businesses?”

Some informants indicated a lack of transparency exhibited by their government officials regarding the state of affairs in their local areas. They indicated that there were important positions in Makana Municipality that have been vacant for years, such as the municipal manager. This makes it difficult for some citizens to engage the municipality, as they are not able to hold vacant posts accountable for the lack of service delivery. These informants posited that it was the public’s responsibility to ensure that the government officials change their behavior and become more engaging and transparent. However, they are not able to do that, if the posts are left vacant. They emphasized that every citizen should benefit from the resources of the country, especially since the new democratic regime prides itself on being for the people. There were informants who expressed a distrust for the system indicating that all this social accountability was just rhetoric, nothing was changing in reality. This statement was supported by another who stated:

“We thought from 1994 we would be free from poverty, but instead it has become black [the democratic government] on black oppression.”

Some participants indicated that they often get news on radio about what is happening or ought to happen, but there are rarely any visible results on the ground. A few wanted to know what civil society organisations are doing to assist the community to voice out their concerns. Lastly, they indicated that it would be beneficial for the communities if the government could support social movements.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to assess the accessibility of social accountability information on a sample of the Grahamstown community and the informants’ perspectives on the roles of various public officials as, well as their level of understanding & the public resources management system. To effectively distribute information on the public resources management system (phase two of this project), it was necessary to first assess the informants current level of understanding of the public resources management system and accessibility of related information. Instead of depending on assumptions about what people know and need to know, the study findings ought to assist in developing an evidence based information distribution approach customized for the Grahamstown community.

The study found that most informants had limited understanding regarding the roles and responsibilities of the various state officials, and the connection between policies and service

delivery, which could be negatively affecting their social accountability initiatives. Informants emphasized the need to have access to relevant information they can use to monitor the public resources system. The informants further indicated that they currently receive information via word of mouth, meetings, newspaper, and television, amongst others. They mentioned radio, meetings and newspapers as preferred forms of receiving information. Information on Makana Municipality's budget processes and service delivery should be made accessible to the public. The informants stated that they needed access to the municipality's management reports, and an organogram detailing designated personnel who attend to the concerns of the public.

It was apparent from the study that, although the majority of the informants were working within the social accountability sector, they still expressed a need to be better informed about the government processes, systems and personnel responsible for attending to the public's concerns. There was a general sense that informants were unclear about the various roles of the government officials in Makana. Some indicated that there were significant high-profile posts that are necessary for the effective operation of the municipality that have been vacant for years, much like the municipal manager. This lack of skilled and qualified personnel to attend to the management of the municipality is a major hindrance to the creation of a socially accountable government (Reuben, 2003). The informants indicated a need for local organisations and the government to distribute information related to their work so that the public can know who is responsible for what and whom they should approach when facing challenges. They posit that having access to information and platforms that will enable them to engage the government will greatly improve their interventions and create a socially accountable state. This kind of government-civil society state does not only facilitate possible solutions to issues brought forth by the public; because it enables the government and civil society to work together, the government also becomes better informed about social needs and is able to direct public resources to meet the public's expectations. An informed public can assist in ensuring the delivery of quality services by assuming an oversight role (Galston, 2007). Furthermore, they will have a better understanding of the constraints within the public resources management system. This understanding could translate to citizens being more conscious of their demands and the feasibility of their realization. It could also motivate individuals and social movements to start thinking of innovative ways of elevating their conditions, when they know without a doubt that the government is unable to attend to all the needs simultaneously. Which could include the presentation of strategies that will progressively realize their goals over a certain period of time, for example, provide a 5-year strategic plan for fixing all the roads in their area. Transparency and collaboration will bridge the gap and create vertical communication between the serviced and the server (Reuben, 2003).

Informants indicated that they receive information from various traditional sources, including word of mouth (N=18), meetings (N=10), newspaper (N=9), television (N=9), and radio (N=8) amongst others. It appears, however, that those platforms were not adequate to ensure effective citizen engagement. The study found that even though the informants had access to information, they were still not able to engage with it in an effective or productive manner, as they continue to request other means of receiving and interrogating the information circulating. The amount of information that circulates within the social accountability sector is massive,

which could be unbeneficial for the masses who do not have proper systems to filter and digest it (Kozlov and Grobe, 2016). The findings of the current study were interesting as they peered into the dynamics surrounding information accessibility and citizen engagement. The current study found that although the majority of respondents receive their information via word of mouth, they prefer to receive it via radio. This was unexpected, especially since most informants expressed a need to engage the government officials instead of just listening in. It is possible that they merely prefer to receive information in certain formats. One might argue, that they need to receive information first to then feel empowered enough to engage, assuming that the information they receive empowers them. The current study did not explore whether the informants felt empowered or not by the information they receive, however studies have shown that not all information is empowering (Main, 2001). Radio is one of those communication modes that do not allow for a deeper interrogation of the information provided and the engagement with the service provider responsible. In fact, it does the opposite as it allows for the presenter to choose the information they want to report on, they have full control of the news (Lorenz, 2016).

Although remote, Lorenz (2016) argues that the majority of people think of radio personalities as friends and trust their perceptions in a variety of things, meaning that they would believe something heard on radio more than they would believe something that came to them through word of mouth. At the same time, word of mouth is able to reach people without access to radio or other technological devices, and it is known to serve the developing communities better than the conventional modes of communication (Barreda et al., 2015). The challenges associated with citizen-government engagement seem to extend beyond the accessibility of information, to engagement with the information and the producers of the information. The trend is showing that even though they were able to receive the information across a range of mediums, they preferred to receive the information from only some of the platforms because the medium of communication made it difficult for them to engage with the issues in an active manner. They end up being receivers of information but not participators in the making of the news and decisions.

The informants most preferred medium of communication might also have some indication of the kind and level of engagement possible between the citizens and government of Makana. Information sharing ought to facilitate the process of engagement between the citizens and the government (Galston, 2007). Therefore, it is concerning to learn that the most preferred methods promote remote access to information that do not actually promote engagement. This concern is further motivated by the fact that the majority of the informants' expressed indignation towards government officials stating that they were not committed to the principles outlined in the Constitution, such as equality for all, transparency, accountability and advocating for improved quality of life for all. This clearly indicates a need to have engaging platforms, rather than just information distribution. Informants did not seem to believe that change was possible, which was concerning, as it meant that some of them have given up on positive change or possess weakened resolve that they have no will for resiliency. The idea that the citizens and the government can work together still seems foreign. This could also be the reason why the informants seem to lack significant understanding of the roles of government officials. Some

informants indicated that they are not sure what the government officials are supposed to be doing and/ or how they should be behaving, others expressed their lack of understanding when it came to the whole public resources management system.

It is for this reason that Reuben (2003) emphasizes the need to create knowledge sharing spaces, where the government and citizens can transfer knowledge as one people working together to strengthen their country's public resources systems to improve people's quality of life. In shifting the perspective from informing the public or monitoring the government, knowledge-sharing spaces create a platform of equality and mutual understanding. The public will feel like their input is needed and appreciated, instead of feeling like a nuisance. At the same time, the government officials will grow to depend on the public's expertise, instead of feeling threatened by them (Reuben, 2003).

As indicated in the literature, information distribution is not divorced from knowledge sharing platforms, since most information is distributed in these platforms. There is a massive number of knowledge sharing platforms globally. Some informants indicated that the information they receive does not often assist them in strengthening their interventions or organisational structures. Although knowledge-sharing platforms are designed to facilitate skills transfer in organisations and institutions (Riege, 2005) it is not surprising to learn that there are informants who feel like the spaces currently operating do not seem to cater to their knowledge needs. This could be credited to the fact that most knowledge sharing spaces are designed to facilitate discussions between certain groups or members of society, this automatically excludes those who are not part of those groups. This system creates silos that keep the information circulating amongst the same circles of individuals. Although knowledge-sharing systems are designed to transcend structural barriers, they are still prone to restricted in practice. Riege's (2005) study on knowledge sharing barriers indicated that there is a number of reasons why knowledge sharing platforms do not often guarantee the desired participation, because often times they are not aligned with the organisational strategic objectives. On the grassroots level, it is possible that the knowledge sharing platforms are often ill equipped to accommodate the community, leading to, if not perpetuating, certain challenges. Knowledge sharing barriers in communities are often related to factors such as economic, resource and time constraints, accessibility to informal and formal meeting spaces, difference in national or community culture, over-emphasis of position statutes, lack of communication skills and social network (Lindsey, 2006). Some individuals experience barriers when trying to apply, integrate or modify the technical knowledge they receive. Especially if it does not align with their deliverables or if they perceive it as having unrealistic expectations (Riege, 2005).

The findings indicate that it is important to think beyond the dissemination of information if the purpose is to empower community members to be active citizens. Practitioners and government officials who wish to distribute information to the public need to clearly define the objectives of knowledge dissemination and design strategic approaches that will reach the targeted groups. The findings imply a crucial need for civil society organisations who are monitoring the government to start thinking about knowledge sharing platforms between the government and civil society to bridge the gap caused by the breakdown in information flow.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

The sample for this study was too limited to provide a generalized account of the findings, therefore cannot be used as an overall reflection of what the wider Grahamstown community think. Furthermore, the study was not able to assess how the various modes of communication affects their citizen engagement. An exploration to the civil society and government interaction or knowledge sharing spaces would make an interesting future research and will assist in understanding the dynamics facing the communities and the communicators on the grass root level.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

The major findings of this study imply that:

1. Most of the informants do not have access to adequate information to inform the social accountability initiatives they engage in, which often creates problems that hinder their progress in advocating for their needs. Their lack of knowledge regarding the roles of the government officials, and the connection between policies and public services indicated that the information they receive, or the way they receive the information, is not adequate to empower them to understand the public resources system and be involved in decision-making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is necessary to create a bridge of information flow between the various stakeholders of the social accountability sector. The availability of an organogram of the government officials and qualified personnel in every public institution will assist the public to direct their concerns to the right people.
 - Social accountability practitioners should consider creating more knowledge sharing platforms where they can engage the general public. The majority of people do not have access to information and knowledge sharing platforms that will empower them to be active citizens.
2. The majority of informants indicated that they are able to receive information via word of mouth, meetings, television, radio and other means. However, the findings also show that often times information recipients are not equipped to translate the information they receive to inform their interventions in a systematic manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Social accountability practitioners and knowledge distributors should consider a multiple media approach when distributing information. No one method is able to reach everyone.

- Because the majority of study participants seem to prefer to be receivers of news and not become makers of news, it is important for knowledge distributors to understand their target's information needs and expectations when disseminating information.
 - Capacity building for grassroots civil actors might assist them to interpret the information in a productive manner and increase their awareness of the issues and the need to get involved. The knowledge gained might also assist them to translate the information to improve their interventions.
3. The availability of knowledge sharing platforms in the social accountability sector is undeniable, however, their value and impact is often influenced by other social dynamics that affect the sharing of knowledge and information. Dynamics that include overflow of information, and restricted knowledge sharing platforms amongst others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Information distributors need to be cognizant of the characteristics of their target audience when designing knowledge sharing platforms. Paying careful attention to economic, resource and time constraints, accessibility to informal and formal meeting spaces, and difference in national or community culture amongst other things.
- It might be helpful to create platforms where diverse groups or individuals can congregate to share their expertise and/or experiences. This will ensure that information does not remain restricted to certain groups or individuals.
- To merely be informed without action is not enough. Therefore, it is important for both the government and the civil society sector to establish mutually beneficial relationships to share skills and expertise, and build solidarity.
- Civil society practitioners need to consider establishing systems that will allow for a consistent flow of information between government officials and the citizens, especially at the grassroots level, where people are most affected by lack of service delivery. This will ensure that citizens take ownership of the state of affairs and work in collaboration with the government to improve conditions.

CONCLUSION

The study found that although the informants were very active in social accountability initiatives, their level of knowledge regarding the roles of certain state officials is limited. Even though they indicated having access to information related to the management of public resources, it seems the information is not adequate for them to engage the government in an informed manner, hence the request for improved means of receiving information. It is no longer enough to make

the information available, the community needs to be engaged and be allowed to interrogate the information presented to build an aware and active citizenship. An active citizenship can assist in strengthening the government processes and improving the country's living standards.

Receiving information via traditional modes of communication such as radio and newspaper were preferred to leaflets. This could mean that they find traditional media trustworthy and credible, or they prefer to receive information in certain format, or an indication of waning interest to engage with the government officials. There was a sense that most participants were apprehensive about the conduct of certain government officials. Therefore, it is important to understand the contextual dynamics when designing information distribution or knowledge sharing platforms. The objectives need to be aligned with the strategies taken to produce the required results, whether it be capacitating the community to engage the government or to understand the processes of the public resources management systems. The take home messages from the study indicates that the current information does not provide adequate knowledge, leaving the citizens misinformed or with inadequate information. Furthermore, the findings might be an indication of citizens requiring information from selected sources that will allow them to better engage the government. There is an apparent need to create conducive spaces for the citizens to interact with their government. Furthermore, the structure of these platforms need to ensure that diversity is catered for and that every member knows and feels like their inputs are respected and appreciated. The desired change needs to create amicable environments where civil society, citizens and the government can share expertise in a respectful and mutually beneficial manner. The government can learn from the citizens as much as citizens can learn from the government.

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Appendix 1

Social Accountability Knowledge Distribution Project Questionnaire

Participants Demographic Profile

1. Respondents Name:	2. Gender:	3. Age:
4. Date:	5. Contact details (Optional):	6. Area:

Social Accountability Awareness

7. What do you think is the role of the government in service delivery?

8. What do you think is good conduct for a government official responsible for delivering your services?

9. What do you think is the connection between policies and service delivery?

10. What do you think is the role of the public in service delivery?

11. What do you think is the connection between your human rights and service delivery?

12. What do you think is the role of councillors in the managing of local budgets and resources for service delivery?

13. What do you think is the role of the members of parliament in managing the country's budget and resources?

14. Why do you think the public needs access to information that –tells them about service delivery and the roles different actors play?

Communication Modes

This section aims to assess how the Grahamstown community receives and prefer to receive their information related to the management of service delivery

15. How do you receive information related to the service delivery? E.g. Information about water issues. (Please tick the correct answer, you may tick more than one)

No.	Communication Mode	Tick
15.1	Radio	
15.2	Television	
15.3	Newspaper	
15.4	Online/ Internet	
15.5	Word of Mouth	
15.6	Meetings	
15.7	Leaflets	
15.8	Other, specify _____	
15.9	None of the above	

16. How do you prefer to receive information related to the service delivery? E.g. Information about water issues. (Please tick the correct answer, you may tick more than one)

No.	Communication Mode	Tick
16.1	Radio	

16.2	Television	
16.3	Newspaper	
16.4	Online/ Internet	
16.5	Word of Mouth	
16.6	Meetings	
16.7	Leaflets	
16.8	Other, specify _____	
16.9	None of the above	

17. What kind of information would you like to receive related to service delivery?

18. What kind of information would you like to receive related to resources management process?

19. Any further comments

Thank you for your cooperation!