



THE BLACK SASH COMMUNITY MONITORING AND ADVOCACY PROJECT: AN INNOVATIVE INITIATIVE FOR ACTIVE CITIZENRY

By Eroy Paulus and Gouwah Samuels, Black Sash¹

The Community Monitoring and Advocacy Project (CMAP) was conceptualised by the Black Sash and launched in 2010 in a bid to help improve government service delivery, with a particular focus on poor and vulnerable communities in South Africa. The project is based on principles enshrined in Section 195 of the South African Constitution that 'services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably, and without bias,...[that] people's needs must be responded to and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making,...[and that] public administration must be accountable'.



PHOTO: BLACK SASH/CMAP

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The basic premise of CMAP is that service-delivery norms and standards impact significantly on government credibility. Put differently, effective service delivery is a fundamental part of the relationship between a government and its people. CMAP, which was developed with the financial support of the European Union and the Open Society Foundation of South Africa, aims to establish how poor and marginalised citizens across the country

experience various services delivered by government departments and agencies. This is achieved through short, 15 to 20-minute questionnaires administered by CMAP monitors to 'users' of government services as well as to government officials at various sites.

CMAP is underscored by the belief that people are not (merely) passive users of public services but active holders of fundamental rights. We see this as an innovative strategy for enhancing active citizenry. To this end, hundreds of CMAP monitors have been

nominated by approximately 270 community-based organisations, NGOs and NGO networks including community-based advice offices, HIV and Aids-support groups, women's groups, local- economic-development projects, and welfare and faith-based organisations across South Africa. The monitors have been trained to maintain a regular and disciplined presence while monitoring public service-delivery points in all of the country's nine provinces, and to use the information they generate to engage in local advocacy. A range of rights-education materials produced by the Black Sash, as well as a degree of direct assistance, are available to monitors who engage in local advocacy work. There is also scope for linking a rights-education component to the questionnaires, and there are plans to explore this as the project develops and expands.

CMAP has developed separate questionnaires for the recipients of services and for government employees responsible for providing services. The questionnaires have been standardised and are used to monitor the services delivered by the following government departments and agencies;

- * South African Social Assistance Agency (SASSA) pay- and service points
- * primary health care facilities
- * service points for the Department of Home Affairs
- * and municipal offices for basic services delivered by local government.

Essentially the questionnaires record perspectives on the quality of services with regard to time wasted, the means of transport and distances travelled to access services, venue security, etc., as well as adherence to the government's Batho Pele principles for transforming service delivery. CMAP monitors use the questionnaires in face-to-face interviews with recipients of services and government employees at the offices mentioned. The perspectives of officials

are considered as important as those of citizens because they are able to identify the critical gaps and challenges they face in providing services. At the time of writing, the questionnaires were written in English, but CMAP monitors are trained to ask the questions in the language of respondent's choice.²

By training monitors to administer the surveys and to assess and report on the quality of service delivery in specific government departments across South Africa, CMAP aims to:

- * help to train a large number of citizens to actively monitor, assess and report on the quality of services delivered by specific government departments to their communities in rural, urban and peri-urban areas across South Africa
- * develop a system that enables civil-society organisations and community members to hold government accountable for the quality of service delivery
- * combine monitoring with advocacy to help build a culture of accountability (that is, a culture of rights with responsibilities) among both communities and government officials.

The choice of which public services to monitor was based on the need to help realise the rights granted in Section 27(1) of South Africa's Constitution, namely that: 'Everyone has the right to have access to health care services...sufficient food and water,...and social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance.'

Along with the Social Change Assistance Trust (which was the primary implementing partner in the Western, Northern and Eastern Cape provinces), the Black Sash has attempted to broker formal permission for our monitors to access service-delivery points in various municipalities in all nine provinces. Thus far, we have been successful in

gaining access to some, but not all, government departments and agencies. We have, however, established a good working relationship with SASSA and are working towards developing a similar relationship with the health and home affairs departments.

SASSA's endorsement had a number of additional important benefits, not least of which included fostering a broader interest in the project; it also served as a morale booster for monitors and ensured that constructive feedback was given to officials.

BENEFITS

CMAP gives people living in South Africa an opportunity to hold the government accountable for service-delivery promises it has made. At the same time, it gives government departments and agencies independent, 'real-time' data from the communities they serve.

At the time of writing, 3 081 questionnaires from CMAP monitors had been captured. This data has yielded reports for all provinces, and at least one report for each of the types of services monitored is near completion. Of the questionnaires captured so far, the largest number (68%) come from SASSA pay and service points. This can be attributed to the fact that SASSA's national office granted formal permission for the monitoring of their service sites. This permission, which has not necessarily been granted by all the other government departments and agencies monitored, enabled CMAP monitors to more easily gain access to service sites and to formal interviews with officials. SASSA's endorsement had a number of additional important benefits, not least of which included fostering a broader interest in the project; it also served as a morale booster for

monitors and ensured that constructive feedback was given to officials.

Furthermore, of the returned questionnaires, 26% came from Gauteng, followed by Limpopo (19%), the Western Cape (12.4%) and the North West Province (7.8%). Overall, the more questionnaires that are returned, the greater the validity and impact of the reports that will be generated. This will, in turn, enable the Black Sash to obtain official responses from government departments and agencies, as has been the case with SASSA in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. As yet, the Black Sash is awaiting formal responses from the other provinces and departments to which reports have been provided.

In order to provide a better sense of the benefits that CMAP offers, some of the findings of the CMAP SASSA Report for KwaZulu-Natal are cited below.³

Some of the key findings were:

- * The stipulated opening and closing times of most service points were complied with.
- * 32% of interviewees at pay points arrived before 06h00, compared to 23% at service points.
- * 20% of respondents at pay points and 42% at service points felt that the shelter provided for beneficiaries waiting to be served, was completely inadequate.
- * 70% of the pay-point officials reported that there were not enough clean toilet facilities; 80% also felt that the availability of seating was a problem.
- * Half of the respondents at pay points used public transport to reach these points, 3% used their own or a rented car, and 47% walked; on average, pay-point beneficiaries travelled a distance of 7km and paid R18.75 to access the service.
- * The issue of safety and the presence of well-resourced security personnel or police were of greater concern to beneficiaries and officials at

the pay points than at the service points.

- * An alarming number of beneficiaries had to return to the service points more than once for the same reason; on average they had to do so four times.⁴

A report containing these and other findings was circulated to all of SASSA's districts and units in KwaZulu-Natal for input and comment. Their regional office then responded formally, and made a range of commitments, including to:

- * increase the use of radio advertising to communicate with beneficiaries about the opening hours of service and pay points
- * move non-compliant pay points to better resourced facilities where beneficiaries can sit indoors; to this end they undertook to negotiate with municipalities, NGOs, churches and other stakeholders make sure that suitable buildings would be available (by the time they responded formally, 173 pay points had already been moved)
- * help strengthen 'stakeholder participation [with] community leaderships, pay point committees, [and the] SAPS [South African Police Service]'.

This is but one example of the level of detail included, both in reports to government, and to a lesser degree, in formal responses from government departments. On the whole, local-government responses have been constructive from the Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, but less so from some of the other provinces.

CRITICAL CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS ADDRESSED BY CMAP

Broadly speaking, the CMAP process is beginning to address the lack of constructive dialogue that has characterised discussions around service delivery in

recent years. Prior to this, while communities strongly expressed frustration and anger that spilled over into violence in some places, government responses have been characterised by a denialist or a 'this is not within our mandate' approach. However, the CMAP reports that are sent directly to by government departments and agencies are gradually being acknowledged as offering constructive and supportive criticism of the quality of the services rendered, and as broadening understandings (especially among the poorer, more marginalised and vulnerable members of the public) of the functions, powers and limitations of government departments.

Internal challenges facing CMAP include the literacy and language-proficiency levels (especially in English) among some monitors, especially when required to translate some of the more nuanced terms in the questionnaire. The distances some monitors have to travel — with no stipends or reimbursement — is another constraining factor. CMAP monitors therefore mainly monitor places close to their places of work or residence, and where they are known and respected. The question of stipends for monitors remains a challenge. Payment for monitoring has the potential to undermine one of the aims of the project, which is to cultivate active citizens, who are willing to contribute to improving conditions within their communities without expecting financial rewards. However — genuine out of pocket expenses do need to be reimbursed, and allowance needs to be made for these.

The question of stipends for monitors remains a challenge. Payment for monitoring has the potential to undermine one of the aims of the project, which is to cultivate active citizens, who are willing to contribute to improving conditions within their communities without expecting financial rewards.

IN CONCLUSION

Each of the CMAP reports produces a plethora of recommendations. These include recommendations from local monitors, and can range from making officials more identifiable to policy recommendations to deal with red tape. In many ways, CMAP is a pilot project on a national scale. There is great variation in the challenges, accomplishments and successes

from province to province, and even from district to district. We are encouraged that the Presidency, through the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, has recognised and shared this project with other government departments, thereby providing some formal and significant affirmation of this work.⁵

NOTES

- ¹ Eroy Paulus is the CMAP National Manager and Gouwah Samuels is the former CMAP National Coordinator.
- ² The questionnaires can be viewed at <http://www.blacksash.org.za/index.php/cmap-monitoring-tools>.
- ³ Monitoring in this province focused on the quality of services experienced by service beneficiaries at SASSA service and pay points between December 2010 and March 2011. Monitors visited a total of 32 SASSA service delivery points, of which 19 were pay points (where grants are paid) and 13 were service points (where grants can be applied for and queries addressed) in the districts of Amajuba, eThekweni, Umgungundlovu, Sisonke, Ugu and Umzinyathi.
- ⁴ Respondents were not asked over what time period they had had return to the SASSA points; the questionnaires will be revised in future to include this question.
- ⁵ A comprehensive CMAP report on basic services will be made public by the end of March 2012. For more information, please see www.blacksash.org.za or write to Eroy Paulus at elroy@blacksash.org.za.