



# SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY AS A FORM OF ACTIVE CITIZENRY: INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS FROM THE COMMUNITY MONITORING AND ADVOCACY PROGRAMME (CMAP)

By: Elroy Paulus, Monique Warden and Louise Carmody, The Black Sash

The National Development Plan – Vision 2030 (NDP<sup>1</sup>), which was launched in late 2012, places active citizenry – along with strong leadership and effective government – at the centre of the ‘cycle of development’ model proposed (see Figure 1). It sets out six interlinked priorities for development, including ‘promoting active citizenry to strengthen development, democracy and accountability’ (NPC 2012: 26).



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THE BLACK SASH'S Community Monitoring and Advocacy Project (CMAP) offers a model for motivating active citizenship and government accountability. Conceptualised by the Black Sash in 2008, the CMAP<sup>2</sup> was piloted in 2009 and implemented in all nine provinces of South Africa in 2010. The CMAP demonstrates how accountability, monitoring and advocacy can inform and add stakeholder legitimacy to the South African State's framework of active citizenship. The CMAP experience provides a useful guide for future community-led monitoring and advocacy initiatives,

of what needs to be done, what principles need to be upheld, and what power shifts need to occur to ensure that such initiatives are recognised and appreciated significantly and in a sustained manner by all levels of government and state institutions. This paper argues that CMAP has the potential to transform from a project to a wider, multi-contextual, broadly owned practice, supporting nuanced implementation strategies.

After examining the different views of the concept “active citizenry”, the paper looks at the role that CMAP has played in mobilising active community engagement,

examines the objectives of the project and considers some of the underlying assumptions and challenges that were identified. Valuable insights are provided from the CMAP monitors, the Black Sash (in its engagements with provincial and national government officials) and from an independent evaluation report on CMAP, by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE). Finally, the use of the CMAP as a tool to motivate active citizenship in the South African context is discussed, and a way forward proposed.

their motive is political – to rally the public into social responsibility or action, or to encourage greater awareness and interest in the political landscape (Jochum et al. 2005). The UK experience shows how governments of different political persuasions interpret active citizenship differently.

The Conservative government (1979–1997) employed the liberal interpretation of active citizenship, where the political policy emphasised was private freedoms and individual interests. The intention in invoking the term was not to foster political participation but, rather, to promote active citizenship as a way of discouraging reliance on the welfare state (Jochum et al. 2005: 8). However, under the subsequent Labour government (1997–2010), the interpretation of active citizenship followed both the civic-republican and communitarian model: civic-republican, as '[c]itizens are defined by duty: rights of citizens are dependent on the fulfilment of their responsibilities. The emphasis is equally based on active participation' (Jochum et al. 2005: 8); and communitarian because the government sought to promote 'reciprocal relationship between the state and citizens' with 'citizen participation in governance... essentially promoted at the community level' (Jochum et al. 2005: 9). The pendulum of active citizenry has arguably swung back to a liberal interpretation, as the current UK Conservative–Liberal coalition government is again promoting individual responsibility, pursuing cuts to public funding and calling for public volunteering under the banner of "Big Society" (United Kingdom Parliament 2011).<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, active citizenry in the South<sup>4</sup> emphasises citizen leadership as a key element required for deepening democratic accountability: citizen leadership is promoted and consolidated through using and reclaiming participatory spaces and using the right to information (Jha et al. 2011). Thus, active citizenry in the South most closely resembles a

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## THE CONCEPT OF ACTIVE CITIZENRY

Traditional definitions of active citizenry, mostly imported from Western experience, distinguish between liberal, communitarian and civic republican interpretations. The liberal construct focuses on the citizen as an individual with legal rights, such as the right to equality, and within a nation state respecting the rule of law. In contrast, the communitarian theory focuses on group identity and pursuing the common good, while according to civic republican theories, the citizen has an overarching responsibility of civic morality and participation (Jochum et al. 2005).

Western experience suggests that active citizenry will have a broader scope in practice than any one definition and moreover is often a combination of aspects of these theories. Much depends on whom – and for what purpose – the concept is defined or promoted. When governments use active citizenship,

communitarian approach. For Oxfam, active citizenship is practiced at both the individual and collective level, where rights and responsibilities are claimed and fulfilled in a balanced way (Clarke and Missingham 2009):

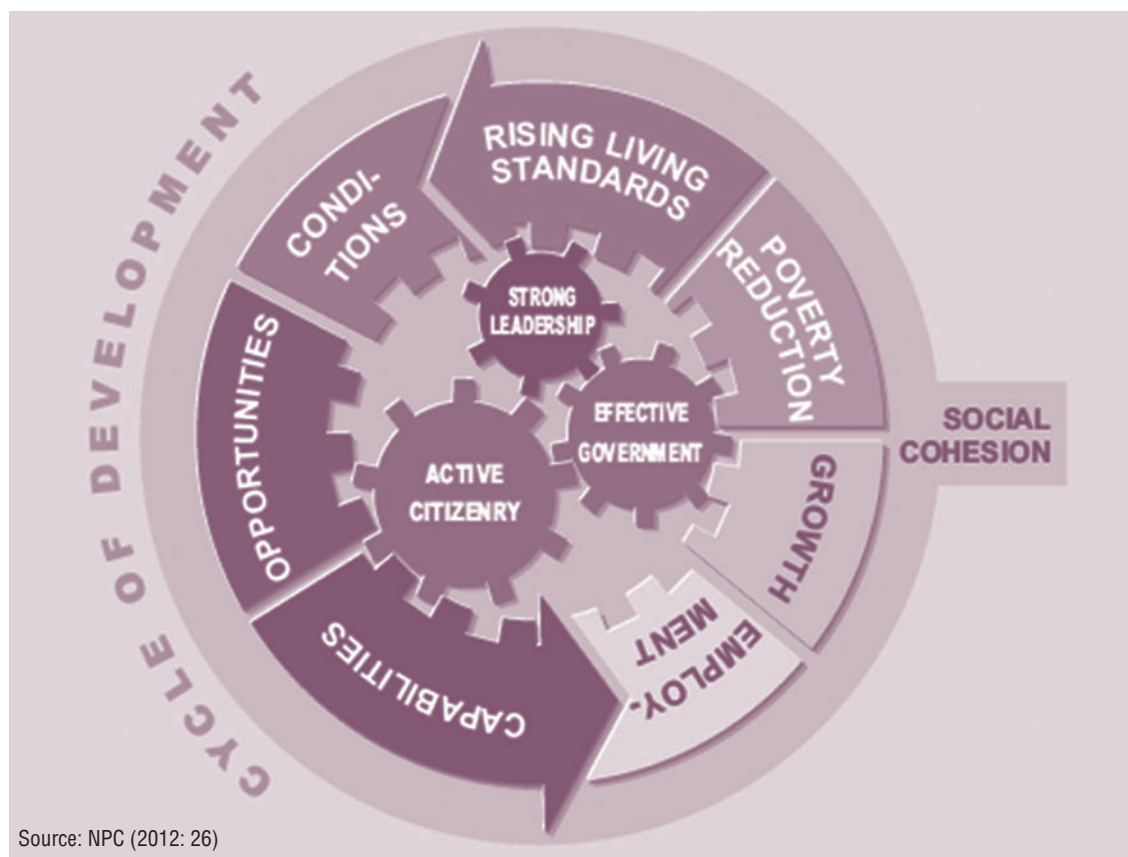
By active citizenship, we [Oxfam] mean a combination of rights and obligations that link individuals to the state, including paying taxes, obeying laws, and exercising the full range of political, civil, and social rights. Active citizens use those rights to improve the quality of political or civic life, through involvement in the formal economy or formal politics, or through the sort of collective action that historically has allowed poor and excluded groups to make their voices heard.

## ACTIVE CITIZENRY AND THE NDP

The recently launched NDP is an ambitious forecast that sets out key goals for the coming decades.

The NDP shares the responsibility for delivering its objectives with the population, stating: 'It is up to all South Africans to fix the future, starting today' (NPC 2012: 24) and uses the term active citizenship in this context of responsibility. The 'cycle of development' illustrated in Figure 1 demonstrates the close link between capabilities, opportunities and employment on social and living conditions. It shows how 'leadership, active citizenry and effective government can help drive development in a socially cohesive environment' (NPC 2012: 26).

**Figure 1: NDP cycle of development model**



This State-defined construct of active citizenry in the NDP, although arguably rooted in both the communitarian and the civic republican theories, greatly expands on these traditional theoretical moulds. In contrast to governmental manipulations of active citizenry, which ‘aims to further Government’s own agendas’ (Jochum et al. 2005: 24) such as policy implementation, when interpreting the concept from the alternative perspective of civil society, the emerging South African version of active citizenry has the potential to become broader, more inclusive and participatory. This version or interpretation may also result in criticism of government and/or seeks to hold government to account to its obligations of service delivery and anti-corruption on a different basis to that intended under the government’s own models. There is inevitably a tension between these competing models, and this can be seen at the fundamental level of the ability of the citizen to participate in government.

The interpretation of active citizenry proposed in the NDP relies on government allowing citizens to participate in government processes. Indeed the government is under a legal duty to do so. Yet, despite the constitutional obligation on local government to establish participatory democratic processes, under Section 152 of the Municipal Structures Act of 1998 (which requires the establishment of ward committees), and the potential for involvement in forums such as school governing committees and community policing, such invented and State-sanctioned spaces for participation are often ineffective (Ramjee and van Donk 2011).

Instead of facilitating inclusion, these formal structures become sites of fierce contests and politicisation, often in order to pander to sectoral interests (Cornwall 2002 quoted in Ramjee and van Donk 2011). Intended to secure community participation through consultation and dialogue – as stated in the many government reports and public engagements and in a plethora of indabas, izimbizos, lekgotlas, and public events arranged by public entities – these forums

have arguably achieved the opposite result. Sadly, in South Africa’s post-democratic experience, these structures serve as platforms for monologues and speeches by elected leaders and officials, rather than a genuine attempt to listen attentively to (and address in a sustained and transparent manner) the concerns raised by local communities.

Broad sections of society are excluded from the invited spaces because of the barriers to participation at local government and ward level. These include (Skenjana and Kimemia 2011; Nyalunga 2006):

- ✧ Local government spaces for participation are vulnerable to political interference;
- ✧ National, provincial and municipal guidelines fail to recognise marginalised members of communities in the formation of ward committees;
- ✧ Ward councillors do not possess the necessary skills or motivation to whole-heartedly fulfil their roles; and
- ✧ Ward councillors lack clear guidelines as to what their roles do and should entail.

In response, civil society advocates of active citizenry have called for more channels of participation to open up at all levels of government (Qwabe and Mdaka 2011: 64). Consequently, the definitions of active citizenry proposed by civil society generally have a more inclusive and active focus, aimed at finding ways to make the voice of the citizen heard by the relevant state institution or department.

## ACTIVE CITIZENRY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Aspects of citizenry in the South African context must also take into account our often violent history associated with past struggles to identify the concept of citizenship. Von Holdt et al. (2011) describe a rebellious ‘civil society of the struggle against apartheid during the 1980s’ that was often associated with, and considered to have, ‘established violent practices as

an integral element of civil society mobilisation and of struggles for citizenship' (Von Holdt et al. 2011: 12). The post-apartheid rapid social change has led to the emergence of a new elite amid continuing unemployment and precarious employment opportunities, leading to 'fierce struggles over inclusion and exclusion both within the elite, between elites and subalterns, and within the subaltern classes themselves. These struggles are in part marked by contestation over the meaning and content of citizenship' (Von Holdt et al. 2011: 11).

These struggles over 'the meaning of citizenship is, at the same time, struggles over rank, status and power' (Von Holdt et al. 2011: 12). "Differentiated citizenship" is a term coined by Von Holdt et al. that describes the consequence of these developments, where the distribution of 'treatment, rights and privileges differentially among formally equal citizens according to differences of education, property, race, gender and occupation' resulted in these subaltern groups responding by mobilising what they term as an 'insurgent citizenship', with its own set of negative consequences, such as 'reproducing patriarchal prejudices, xenophobic exclusion, and the use of violence in political and social disputes and to buttress local power—practices which corrode, undermine and restrict the basis of citizenship' (Von Holdt et al. 2011: 12).

## THE CMAP AND ACTIVE CITIZENRY

The Black Sash, a human rights organisation active for the past 55 years in South Africa, originally conceptualised the CMAP as a social accountability mechanism. The Black Sash works to alleviate poverty and inequality and is committed to building a culture of rights-with-responsibilities in South Africa. It specifically focuses on the socio-economic rights guaranteed by the Constitution to all living in South Africa. The Black Sash is deeply conscious that unaccountable, corrupt and inefficient service delivery ranks high among the many

factors that prevent the full realisation of these rights. Poor service delivery denies millions of people a dignified life, undermines the impact of government spending on other social protection programmes, as well as any advances that have been made to create employment. Therefore, a high standard of service delivery is a fundamental part of the social compact between the government and the population.

The CMAP view is that active citizenry is built on the tenet that citizens are not passive users of public services but active holders of fundamental rights. Therefore, integral to CMAP is the monitoring of service delivery by active, community-based civil society. Only aware, informed and active communities are able to insist that government deliver on the promises made in national, provincial and local elections and account to their constituencies for policies and practices that affect their quality of life.

In 2010, the Black Sash, in partnership with the Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT), launched CMAP, in a bid to help improve government service delivery, with a particular focus on poor and vulnerable communities in South Africa. CMAP used community monitors, nominated by local organisations, to maintain a regular and disciplined presence at service delivery points, such as pension pay points and health facilities.<sup>5</sup> Monitors recorded their observations against standardised monitoring questionnaires (drafted specifically for the purpose) and were encouraged, along with their local organisations and with the support of Black Sash and SCAT, to take up the identified local delivery issues. In turn, the Black Sash analysed the data from the questionnaires in order to advocate for improvements in service delivery at local, provincial and national levels.

The CMAP objectives are to:

- ✳ Assess and report on the quality of service delivery in specified government departments and municipalities across South Africa as experienced by beneficiaries;

- ✧ Develop a system for civil society organisations and community members to hold government accountable for the principles of Batho Pele (People First) as well as specific norms and standards that govern service delivery and promise excellence;
- ✧ Work closely with partners and ensure widespread, visible, standardised and regular monitoring of service delivery points by Community Monitors that are selected by CSO networks;
- ✧ Coordinate the development of the monitoring instruments and databases, collating and analysing the monitoring information, and producing and distributing regular reports to its partners and the public; and
- ✧ Present reports to the appropriate government officials in order to affirm good practice and to work together to make improvements where required.

The project uniquely combined frontline service delivery monitoring and advocacy, involving the services of 499 individual monitors from 375 different local organisations, drawn from all nine of South Africa's provinces. CMAP ran for two years.<sup>6</sup> CMAP monitors who signed a code of conduct with the organisation they represent were each issued with a brightly coloured bib, orientation pack, pamphlets about CMAP, training materials and questionnaires for them to complete and return via a self-addressed envelope. Over the two-year period, the monitors were trained in provincial workshops to use a set of standardised monitoring tools and instruments specifically developed for CMAP.<sup>7</sup> A third of the participating organisations received further mentoring and support from provincially-based CMAP fieldworkers. CMAP monitors participated in a total of 36 workshops, carried out 477 field visits and submitted more than 8 900 questionnaires that were developed into 44 reports.<sup>8</sup>

The service delivery points that were monitored included: SASSA pay points and service points,

Department of Home Affairs, primary healthcare providers (clinics) and basic services. At the beginning of the monitoring process, the Black Sash sought permission from the relevant government department, but the level of engagement and feedback was disappointing, especially from the Department of Home Affairs and the district departments of health. The lack of response from more than 280 municipalities in South Africa was even worse. However, a significant breakthrough came when the CEO of the Social Security Agency (SASSA) gave permission for monitoring at all SASSA pay points and service points. A constructive process ensued, whereby CMAP reported their findings to SASSA, and SASSA provincial offices produced written responses and actions.<sup>9</sup> In all spheres of government, when permission to monitor was refused, the responsible official often made little or no attempt to provide a policy-based rationale for the decision.

The reports, drawn from analysis of the questionnaires, were sent to the relevant government department for response.<sup>10</sup> Each report followed a general format, setting out acknowledgements, background and introduction, project rationale and methodology. The data analysis was limited to scope, limits and assumptions, and key findings (such as measurements that included time, venue, security, personnel, language and communication). Observations and recommendations from monitors were included in a specific section, and where needed, recommendations were made by the Black Sash itself.

Using these evidence-based reports, local, provincial and national advocacy activities were conducted in various forums and public meetings, including Parliament, government departments, submissions to the South Africa Human Rights Commission, The Presidency, an International National Health Insurance conference hosted by the South African national Department of Health, and a civil society-led conference People's Power, People's Parliament, held

in June 2012.<sup>11</sup> A positive development emerging from this conference was that the Office of the Presidency (present at the conference), through the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation committed to engage with CMAP partners on their potential to make a significant contribution to independent, community-driven frontline service delivery monitoring in South Africa, and requested representation on national government structures that will take this forward.

## LESSONS AND INSIGHTS ON ACTIVE CITIZENRY

The Black Sash asked the monitors to give suggestions on how to make the CMAP more effective. A total of 246 completed evaluation forms were received from six out of nine provinces, representing the views of 67% of the CMAP monitors (mainly from the North West, Mpumalanga and Limpopo) from organisations working in community development, human rights and health.

CMAP monitors made the following suggestions to the Black Sash and its implementing partner, SCAT:

- ✧ Provide letters of authority to the relevant government departments, explaining CMAP;
- ✧ Develop a CMAP training manual containing monitoring toolkits for use in group activities;
- ✧ Provide CMAP staff and monitors with T-shirts, in addition to visible bibs provided; and
- ✧ Increase travel stipends, or introduce stipends, to cover out-of-pocket expenses and to extend their reach to monitor.

In order of importance and per category, the training needs requested were: capacity building, advocacy, fundraising (organisational), CMAP and direct community participation, project management, case management (i.e. paralegal work), how to make a business plan and a funding proposal, facilitation skills, personal development, project management, youth leadership, life skills and financial management.

Monitors felt that the project was also a unique opportunity for organisations to meet and discuss this and related work, something that is often denied to cash-strapped and struggling, rural based CBOs and NGOs.

They found the provincial networking opportunities very useful, and in particular those who attended the culminating national conference found it to be even more so. Concerns were expressed about the need to sustain funding for future CMAP activities, while at the same time wanting to invite many other organisations to the project.

CMAP monitors made suggestions for further education, training or information (and possibly local monitoring and advocacy) about:

- ✧ How the family courts work (maintenance and estate);
- ✧ Monitoring the departments of Education, Home Affairs and Justice, especially related to disabled people;
- ✧ How the Grant-in-Aid works;
- ✧ Child abuse and women, maintenance and abuse (men and women), the rights of foster parents, prospective foster parent guides, the Child Act, foster care and disability;
- ✧ The importance of information and good service delivery;
- ✧ Compliance and access to the child maintenance system and the magistrate courts;
- ✧ Laws about drugs and liquor being sold to young children;
- ✧ Local government and how to foster better relations between local government and NGOs;
- ✧ The roles of local municipal councillors and officials in relation to community participation, the departments of Justice, Transport and Police, child maintenance and family support systems, refugee rights, and Home Affairs;
- ✧ How to help people with no income get ID documents so they can access social grants, the Department of Justice and others; and
- ✧ How to monitor the supply chain within government.

At an individual level, some monitors suggested that the experience had ‘revived [their] research and advocacy skills’ and helped them to help ‘community to practise and understand their rights, make work in the field very easy’.<sup>12</sup>

These requests reflect a level of ownership and a degree of support and affirmation of CMAP. This is a project that monitors wish to be associated with in the future, with some internal administrative arrangements to improve on attaining the objectives they were collectively striving to make a reality in their local community.

Suggestions made were very cogent and constructive. All except one of the completed forms indicated that such a project would continue. The exception was from an NGO who chose not to continue due to the lack of access to a stipend.

### CONCLUSION

The paper examined the concept of “active citizenry” contrasting the perspective (and experience) of Western countries and the South with that of South Africa. In the government’s ambitious plan for developing South Africa, the NDP uses the term active citizenship in the context of shared responsibility for achieving the plan’s objectives. The interpretation of active citizenry proposed in the NDP relies on government allowing citizens to participate in government processes. However, despite the legal obligation that government must consult with the people through various forums, barriers are preventing effective public participation.

The concept active citizenry needs to be broader, more inclusive and participatory. The CMAP views active citizenry as built on the tenet that citizens are not passive users of public services but active holders of fundamental rights. The CMAP experience provides the basis of a framework for active citizenry that works, supported by evidence-based feedback and valuable insights from those who were involved in the project.

The project is able, albeit in a small and tenuous way, to transform the quality of service delivery at a local level, using many examples steeped in very different contexts and each with unique challenges. The project and form of active citizenry espoused appears to have broad support.

The CMAP has the potential to make a significant contribution to independent, community-driven frontline service delivery monitoring in South Africa. To this end, it will continue to engage with government and follow up with the commitment received from the Office of the Presidency (through the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation) at the People’s Power, People’s Parliament conference.

There is a saying in Venda that ‘one cannot remove fluff with one finger’. The CMAP has been a collective effort of many role players, at a local, provincial and national level, using the expertise, knowledge and respect commanded by community-based leaders. No single person or organisation could have produced the results of this project. It is fitting to end with the statement issued by the participants of the CMAP September 2012 National Conference<sup>13</sup>, aptly entitled Moving from CMAP as a project to a practice: insights, lessons and future plans for active citizenry, (Black Sash 2012<sup>14</sup>):

We, the participants of this CMAP National Conference [...] recognise that accessible and quality public services are essential if we are to ensure a dignified life for all living in South Africa, and particularly for those in poor and marginalised communities, celebrate the work done by [approx] 480 volunteer monitors from over 300 community based organisations across all nine provinces. [...] We are committed to bring the valuable experience, skills, materials, networks and practices that have been developed by and between CMAP partners over the past two years into the process [...] remain committed and inspired to build a culture of active citizenry in South Africa.



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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The NDP was presented to Parliament on the 15th of August 2012.
- <sup>2</sup> See <http://www.blacksash.org.za/index.php/sash-in-action/community-monitoring-and-advocacy-programme> for more information on CMAP.
- <sup>3</sup> The UK organisation called 'Active Citizen' is an interesting example. Its website states its focus as the interest of the consumer, holding 'major firms, brands, banks' to account, rather than government institutions. Available at <http://www.active-citizen.org.uk>.
- <sup>4</sup> A term commonly used to refer to countries in the Southern Hemisphere, but also including India, South Africa, Brazil and other mid-income and developing countries.
- <sup>5</sup> Most of the organisations that nominated CMAP monitors were from advice offices, paralegal resource centres, health affiliated CBOs and NGOs, Home-based Care centres and Drop-in Centres, faith-based organisations and larger regional NGOs. Each of the provinces had different combinations of these organisations.
- <sup>6</sup> CMAP was funded by the European Union and the Open Society Foundation of South Africa between 2010 and 2012.
- <sup>7</sup> [www.blacksash.org.za/index.php/cmap-monitoring-tools](http://www.blacksash.org.za/index.php/cmap-monitoring-tools)

- <sup>8</sup> Fifty two per cent of all questionnaires were received from SASSA pay and service points, 22% from basic services and 17% primary health. The majority of questionnaires were received from Limpopo, the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape respectively. A complex range of factors affected the number of questionnaires completed in each province, including: access to travel to service points, the composition of monitoring teams and the sectors, responding to the interests of their nominating organisation, the lack of resources and internal dynamics of their organisations.
- <sup>9</sup> See the Black Sash website at [www.blacksash.org.za/index.php/cmap-reports](http://www.blacksash.org.za/index.php/cmap-reports)
- <sup>10</sup> To date, 44 reports have been or are in the process of being sent to government for a formal response. These can be found on the Black Sash website. The intention is to produce a report for each province or department monitored on a six-monthly basis.
- <sup>11</sup> See [www.peopletoparliament.org.za/a-conference-on-people2019s-power-people2019s-parliament-will-be-held-in-june](http://www.peopletoparliament.org.za/a-conference-on-people2019s-power-people2019s-parliament-will-be-held-in-june).
- <sup>12</sup> Authors' analysis of feedback of CMAP evaluation forms (2012).
- <sup>13</sup> Conference held at Birchwood Conference Centre, Johannesburg. In attendance were a representative sample of approximately 45 CMAP monitors selected by fellow monitors in each province, Black Sash and SCAT fieldworkers and project staff, researchers, donors, and other civil society partners.
- <sup>14</sup> [http://www.blacksash.org.za/images/cmap\\_final\\_statement\\_sept12\\_conf.pdf](http://www.blacksash.org.za/images/cmap_final_statement_sept12_conf.pdf)