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Factors affecting effective citizen-based monitoring of frontline service delivery in South Africa

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Background: In South African local government, citizen-based monitoring (CBM) for frontline service delivery is pivotal for enhancing governance. Understanding the factors shaping effective CBM in this context is crucial for improving public service delivery. This study examines the complex dynamics involving government departments, community-based organisations (CBOs) and local media communities in CBM to uncover challenges and opportunities within frontline service delivery.

Aim: This research identifies and analyses the factors impacting the effective CBM of frontline service delivery in South African local government. Despite existing research, gaps persist in understanding collaboration among government departments, CBOs and local media in frontline service delivery.

Setting: The study conducted within South African local government focuses on frontline services like healthcare and education across urban and rural areas, ensuring comprehensive insights into CBM challenges.

Methods: A mixed-methods approach was used, including qualitative interviews, surveys and document analysis. Interviews with government officials, CBO representatives and media members provided qualitative data, while surveys collected quantitative insights from citizens. Secondary sources supplemented the findings.

Results: The study reveals multifaceted factors influencing CBM in frontline service delivery, including communication dynamics, resource availability, political influences and diverse stakeholder perceptions.

Conclusion: Addressing these factors requires stakeholder collaboration to foster trust, allocate resources and mitigate political influences. Policymakers must optimise CBM to enhance frontline service delivery.

Contribution: This study contributes to improving public service access and quality in South African local government by identifying challenges and opportunities. It offers insights for policymakers and stakeholders to enhance transparency, accountability and citizen engagement.

Keywords: citizen-based monitoring; frontline service delivery; South African local government; governance mechanism; stakeholder collaboration.

Introduction

Background

In the multifaceted landscape of South African local government, the effective implementation of citizen-based monitoring (CBM) for enhancing frontline service delivery emerges as a pivotal yet intricate challenge (Cropley & Phibbs, 2020; Sebola, 2021). This challenge necessitates a meticulous examination of the myriad factors that exert influence over the successful execution of CBM initiatives within the unique context of South African local government (Cropley & Phibbs, 2020; Barbu & Isaic-Maniu, 2011; Maarek, 2014; Giemza, 2020). Understanding these intricate dynamics and nuances is essential to charting a course towards the optimal practice of CBM, particularly within the arena of frontline service delivery. Here, the impacts of CBM resonate most profoundly, where the accessibility and quality of public services directly affect the lives of South African citizens. Therefore, this research aspires to unravel the multifaceted intricacies underlying the CBM of frontline service delivery and, in doing so, contribute to the broader discourse on improving public service access and quality within South African local government.

A robust body of empirical research, including studies conducted by Cropley and Phibbs (2020) and Sebola (2017), along with the contributions of various scholars (Cropley and Phibbs, 2020;

Barbu and Isaic-Maniu, 2011; Maarek, 2014; Giemza, 2020), consistently underscores the intricate and multifaceted challenges that are intrinsically interwoven within the realm of CBM. These challenges form an intricate tapestry of complexities that span the entire CBM landscape. They encompass the delicate dynamics of stakeholder collaboration, where government departments, community-based organisations (CBOs) and local media communities must find common ground and a harmonious working rhythm (The Presidency, 2014). Simultaneously, resource constraints often cast a looming shadow over CBM initiatives, requiring judicious allocation of limited resources to maximise impact (DPME, 2013). Moreover, the pervasive influence of political forces can introduce a layer of unpredictability and uncertainty into the CBM equation, sometimes hindering rather than fostering the process (PSC, 2008). Finally, the intricate web of community engagement intricacies, deeply rooted in South Africa's historical context, adds a layer of nuance, as building trust and cooperation within communities becomes a pivotal challenge (Mbele 2018a). Recognising and comprehending these nuanced dimensions is paramount, serving as the compass guiding the path towards the effective practice of CBM and the subsequent enhancement of frontline service delivery within the context of South African local government. Within this complex tapestry, this research seeks to contribute its findings and insights, addressing these multifaceted challenges to empower more effective CBM and, ultimately, better public service delivery.

This research holds profound significance in advancing governance, improving service delivery and fostering citizen engagement within the South African public sector (The Presidency, 2014; Republic of South Africa 2019). The successful CBM of frontline service delivery depends on harmonious synergy among government departments, CBOs and local media communities (The Presidency 2014). However, this dimension remains underexplored within the South African context. Understanding the intricacies and challenges inherent in the collaborative process among these pivotal stakeholders in frontline service delivery is essential to contribute to the national agenda of building a more transparent and responsive public sector in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 2019).

While a growing body of literature highlights the positive impacts of CBM in South Africa, particularly as exemplified by Mbele 2018b, Plangemann (2013) and Fölscher and Kruger (2013), a pronounced research gap persists. This gap is characterised by a conspicuous absence of in-depth investigations into the intricate web of challenges that stem from the collaboration among government departments, CBOs and local media communities, specifically within the domain of CBM for frontline service delivery (Mbele 2018b; Cropley & Phibbs 2020). It is essential to recognise and address this gap, as it represents an untapped source of knowledge that could significantly contribute to improving the practice of CBM and, in turn, enhancing the quality and accessibility of public services in South African local government. By providing a holistic, empirically grounded perspective on these challenges, this research seeks to bridge this gap and provide a valuable foundation for advancing CBM in the context of frontline service delivery.

The research article is structured as follows: after this introduction, which clarifies the research problem and its significance, subsequent sections provide an overview of frontline service delivery in South African local government, along with the statutory and legislative framework. The methodology section details the research design and data collection methods. The empirical findings are presented, followed by an analysis of these findings in the discussion section within the context of the research problem. Finally, the conclusion summarises the pivotal findings and their implications. It advocates for the research's contribution to the broader discourse on addressing the challenges affecting CBM of frontline service delivery in South African local government.

Overview of frontline monitoring systems in the local government

Frontline service delivery monitoring (FSDM) systems in South Africa are vital mechanisms that aim to ensure the effectiveness and responsiveness of government services provided to citizens, particularly at the local government level where many service delivery challenges are most acutely felt. These systems, led by the Department of Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation (DPME), encompass the Presidential Hotline, CBM and FSDM. They play a unique and critical role in addressing the challenges and opportunities associated with frontline service delivery in local government, serving as essential bridges between government entities and the citizens they serve (DPME 2015).

The Presidential Hotline, introduced in 2009, stands as a direct communication channel for citizens to voice their service delivery concerns, make inquiries, offer suggestions and provide compliments. This system enhances citizen engagement and active participation in the monitoring of public services, an imperative especially pronounced at the local government level. The rationale behind the Presidential Hotline is to create a platform where citizens can directly communicate with the government, thus fostering improved service delivery within their local communities (DPME 2017). This initiative aligns with the South African government's commitment to transparency, accountability and responsiveness, allowing local government departments to be held accountable for the quality and accessibility of services. At the local level, the Presidential Hotline can be a powerful tool for citizens to address their immediate concerns and promote improvements in service delivery (The Presidency 2014).

The CBM programme, also led by DPME, assumes a central role in the local government context. It focuses on incorporating the views and experiences of communities

when monitoring government plans and programmes, a vital step in enhancing local service delivery. The rationale for CBM is deeply rooted in the unique challenges and opportunities that exist at the local government level (DPME 2017). By addressing specific challenges in monitoring service delivery, such as overreliance on government self-monitoring, weak citizen-government monitoring mechanisms at the service delivery site level and low levels of trust between organised civil society and the government, CBM becomes a local catalyst for positive change. At the local government level, CBM is pivotal in fostering citizen-government partnerships, making service delivery responsive to the needs of the local communities it serves. CBM also empowers local citizens to take ownership of public services, thereby contributing to enhanced service quality and accessibility, a dire need in many local communities (DPME 2013).

Frontline service delivery monitoring, as a broader framework encompassing various methods and tools, plays an essential role in local government. The rationale for FSDM at the local government level lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the accessibility, quality and effectiveness of services delivered to local citizens. By addressing local disparities and challenges, FSDM can be instrumental in promoting transparency and accountability. These are critical at the local level, where the impact of service delivery on the lives of citizens is most profoundly experienced. Through FSDM, local government authorities can identify areas that require improvement, thereby fostering more effective service delivery that meets the unique demands of local communities. In many local areas, FSDM acts as a guiding tool to bridge disparities and make service delivery more equitable, ensuring that no community is left behind (DPME 2013).

The integration of these monitoring systems is fundamental in addressing the research problem, as highlighted in earlier sections. These systems are explicitly designed to enhance the transparency, accountability and citizen engagement needed at the local government level to tackle challenges associated with frontline service delivery. By directly involving local citizens in the monitoring process, these mechanisms aim to bridge the gaps and disparities that persist in local service delivery. Their rationale is rooted in the pursuit of effective, citizen-centric service delivery, aligning seamlessly with the objectives of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the broader governance agenda. The integration of these mechanisms within local government is pivotal in addressing local disparities, resource limitations and the pressing need for a more responsive public sector. Through these mechanisms, local governments across South Africa are poised to deliver more equitable, effective and transparent service delivery, addressing the unique challenges faced at the local level (NDP 2012; The Presidency 2014).

The statutory and legislative framework

A formidable statutory and legislative framework underpins South Africa's approach to monitoring frontline service delivery within the local government context. This framework not only articulates the foundational principles of transparency, accountability and active citizen engagement but also explicitly assigns roles and responsibilities to government departments and various stakeholders engaged in the complex public service delivery process (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 2019).

Within this rich legislative landscape are various acts, and for this discussion, we will refer to a few key pieces of legislation. Articles on these few acts also refer to the NDP (2012). The statutory and legislative framework serves as the foundational cornerstone within local government, and it proclaims that 'the Constitution imposes on the state a duty to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights', underscoring the local government's commitment to safeguarding the rights and interests of its citizens (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 2019). Within the local government context, Article 195 of the Constitution further emphasises financial and performance management principles, fostering a governance environment that places a premium on citizen participation (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 2019). These constitutional provisions set the tone for the study and provide a constitutional mandate for robust monitoring and active citizen engagement in public service delivery at the local government level.

The *Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 (MFMA)* is one of the critical pieces of legislation governing financial management and accountability within South African municipalities. In the local government context, the MFMA's financial management guidelines are paramount for ensuring fiscal responsibility and transparent financial practices, thereby directly impacting the delivery of essential services to local communities. This act explicitly dictates the financial management principles municipalities must adhere to and underscores the importance of transparent financial reporting (Municipal Finance Management Act 2003).

The *National Development Plan (NDP)*, referenced as NDP (2012) in related articles and legislation, stands as a blueprint for South Africa's developmental trajectory, encapsulating a vision for inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic growth at the local government level. As part of its provisions, the NDP underscores the significance of strengthening accountability, enhancing citizen engagement and improving public service delivery at the local government level. It explicitly states that 'Service delivery protests stem from citizens' frustration that the state is not responsive to their grievances. This is unfortunate, as citizens are often best placed to advise on the standard of public services in their communities and to suggest possible interventions' (Republic of South Africa 2019). This passage from the NDP not only underscores the relevance of active citizen engagement, a fundamental tenet

of CBM, but also aligns with the broader goals of the study within the context of local government. The NDP's emphasis on active citizenship and accountability complements the objectives of CBM within local government and underscores the study's alignment with South Africa's national developmental priorities.

Despite the existing legislative and policy frameworks mandating citizen involvement in the public service delivery cycle, there is a noticeable disparity between policy intentions, government practices and citizens' actual experiences (Pieterse 2013; CoGTA 2016). The government's response to protests and opposition from social movements and CBOs often involves increased condemnation, repression and violence, further diminishing trust between the state and its citizens (Fontana-Giusti 2019; Smith 2018). Emphasising CBM as more than a legal and policy requirement, it should be prioritised because of its pivotal role in fostering government accountability and enhancing service delivery effectiveness (Bovens 2007; Fox 2015). Active community involvement in the planning and budgeting phases is crucial, as is aligning plans with actual community needs, especially for vulnerable groups, as mandated by the Constitution and human rights norms (Drew 2017; Gaventa 2004). CBM, when integrated throughout the service delivery cycle, contributes to improved service quality, increased public expenditure efficiency and reduced corruption opportunities (Josserand et al. 2018; Josserand & Teicher 2014). Furthermore, it serves as a means to strengthen the citizen-government relationship by demonstrating a commitment to taking citizen expectations and experiences seriously, resulting in responsive governance (Bovens 2007; Cornwall & Gaventa 2001).

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework guiding this investigation delves into the New Public Management (NPM) paradigm, a transformative approach implemented in South Africa to address challenges in local municipal service delivery (Naidoo 2015). Emerging from the restructuring of traditional bureaucratic public administration in the early 1990s, the NPM model introduces a novel governance structure characterised by strategic orientation, administrative framework management, a result-centric focus, improved financial management and heightened engagement with politicians (Naidoo 2015; Sarker 2006). This paradigm underscores the belief that public officials should be directly accountable to citizens, a concept reinforced by the outcome-based model (OBM) model. Outcome-based model advocates for establishing a comprehensive, strategic planning and management framework grounded in learning and accountability, particularly within a decentralised environment – an idea congruent with organisational learning theory, positing that an organisation is constantly evolving to meet the demands of citizens (Sarker 2006).

While the NPM model places a heightened emphasis on efficiency, it has been criticised for sidelining the fundamental principles of traditional public administration, such as

equality, fairness and equity (Christensen & Laegrei 2014). This departure from traditional values raises questions about whether NPM, with its narrow focus, can truly address the existing gap in state accountability to communities. Moreover, the NPM model, by prioritising an enlightened citizen capable of demanding accountability, tends to disregard notions of solidarity. This focus on individuals rather than collective engagement prompts scholars to question the model's efficacy in fostering a sense of social inclusiveness and shared community voice (Andrews & Van de Welle 2013).

The NPM model's juxtaposition with social accountability objectives reveals certain contradictions. Social accountability, rooted in the collaborative efforts of citizens and civil society organisations, advocates for joint action to demand accountability from public officials (Hughes 2003). However, the limited social inclusiveness of the NPM model challenges the essence of citizen engagement in social accountability, which fundamentally relies on integrating all concerned communities to speak in unison, a crucial aspect for attracting government attention. Nevertheless, the NPM model allows citizen participation through mechanisms of social accountability, facilitating engagement between the public and officials on service delivery matters (Hughes, 2003). Emphasising this point, South Africa's White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery emphasises the indispensability of the active participation of the wider community, including citizens themselves, in fostering a genuinely service-oriented culture in the public service (RSA:1997).

In the context of this research, the NPM framework is pivotal for understanding the intricacies of CBM and its effectiveness in the frontline service delivery of South African local government. The study explores how this theoretical lens can be applied to illuminate the multifaceted factors influencing collaboration between government departments, CBOs and local media communities in frontline service delivery. As the NPM paradigm shapes the landscape of public administration, scrutinising its implications for CBM offers valuable insights into the dynamics of accountability and citizen engagement within the intricate web of local governance structures.

Research methods and design

The methodology employed for investigating the challenges associated with the effective CBM of public service delivery in South African local government is a crucial element of this research. It encompasses a mixed-methods approach, integrating various research techniques and strategies to deliver robust and dependable results. The formal definition of mixed-methods research, according to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:17), is 'the type of research in which the researcher blends quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methodologies, approaches, ideas, or language in a single study'.

Data collection methods

The target sample size of 6912 was meticulously distributed, with 384 participants allocated to each South African

province, carefully considering urban and rural distinctions. This comprehensive sampling strategy aimed to capture diverse perspectives and experiences across different regions of the country. Surpassing the initial target, the survey received 7282 responses from all nine South African provinces, ensuring extensive representation in the study. The research, conducted following approval from the internal review board at the University of Johannesburg, utilised structured surveys to collect quantitative data on citizens' perspectives concerning CBM and public service delivery (Dillman et al. 2014). Engaging a diverse participant pool from various provinces, including urban and rural areas, the surveys aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of CBM across diverse contexts in South Africa (Babbie 2016). Using closed-ended survey questions maintained consistency and facilitated statistical analysis of responses (Dillman et al. 2014). This survey assessed citizens' awareness of and involvement in CBM, perceptions of public service delivery and preferences for enhancing the process. Grounded in established survey research principles and methodologies, this approach offered robust insights into citizens' views on CBM (Babbie 2016).

To enhance the depth of the survey findings, interviews were conducted to facilitate a more comprehensive analysis. The research was initiated with qualitative, in-depth interviews conducted with key stakeholders. A total of 12 participants were involved in these interviews, comprising government officials (4), CBO representatives (4) and local media community members (4). These interviews allowed for open-ended discussions and provided rich qualitative insights into the challenges and opportunities surrounding CBM in South African local government. The interviews were centred on stakeholders' perceptions of CBM, experiences with existing CBM mechanisms and their views on the challenges and potential solutions for effective CBM. This method draws from established practices in qualitative research (Smith et al. 2021:78; Johnson & Christensen 2017:112). In addition, secondary sources of data were consulted to supplement the research findings. These secondary sources included academic and practical works addressing CBM, public service delivery, citizen engagement and best governance practices (Creswell & Creswell 2017). Data from international and domestic sources were examined to contextualise the research within a global framework. The data from secondary sources were used to support and enrich the research, providing additional insights and context (Booth, Colomb, Williams, Bizup and Fitzgerald 2016:431).

Data analysis and validation

The qualitative and quantitative data collected through interviews, surveys and secondary sources underwent a meticulous analysis process to inform the research findings and recommendations. Thematic analysis was employed for the interview transcripts, which involved coding the data to identify recurring patterns and themes. This approach enabled a deep understanding of the qualitative data, revealing insights into the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees and highlighting key issues related to the CBM of frontline service delivery. Content analysis was

applied to data obtained from secondary sources, which involved systematically categorising and interpreting textual information to identify trends and patterns within the context of South African local government. These qualitative methods provided a comprehensive overview of the stakeholders' viewpoints and the complexities they face, aligning with the objectives of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Booth et al., 2016).

For the quantitative data, statistical analysis was conducted on the survey responses to ensure a robust understanding of the collected data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise and describe the main features of the survey data, providing a clear picture of the respondents' characteristics and their responses. This included measures of central tendency and variability to present an accurate depiction of the data distribution. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the reliability of the survey instruments, ensuring the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. A high Cronbach's alpha coefficient indicated that the survey items were reliably measuring the intended constructs (Laerd Statistics, 2013). These steps were crucial for ensuring the validity and reliability of the quantitative data, which supported the overall integrity of the research findings.

Factor analysis was another significant statistical technique employed to uncover underlying dimensions within the dataset. This method helped reduce the complexity of the data by identifying common patterns and grouping variables into smaller, more manageable factors while retaining as much original variance as possible. Principal component analysis was used for factor extraction, followed by varimax rotation to simplify the factor structure and enhance interpretability. This process allowed for a deeper understanding of the relationships among the observed variables and the identification of latent constructs or dimensions underlying the phenomena of interest (Hair et al., 2019). Correlation analysis was also performed to examine the strength and direction of relationships between pairs of variables within the dataset. Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed to measure the linear relationship between continuous variables, providing valuable insights into the associations among variables related to the challenges of implementing CBM initiatives and the utilisation of social media in public service delivery (Pallant, 2020; Matlala, 2024).

The validation process for the analytical model involved several critical steps, including expert reviews, pilot testing and feedback from relevant stakeholders. These steps ensured the robustness of the model and its alignment with the research objectives. Expert reviews provided critical insights and recommendations that refined the model's design and application. Pilot testing allowed for practical evaluation of the model in real-world scenarios, identifying any potential issues and ensuring its feasibility. Feedback from stakeholders ensured that the model was relevant and applicable to the target audience, addressing their specific needs and concerns. This comprehensive approach to data

analysis and validation adhered to recognised research practices, ensuring the reliability and validity of the research findings and supporting the broader discourse on improving CBM and frontline service delivery in South African local government (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Johannesburg, after conducting a thorough ethical review, granted approval for the study (No.[21PMGPP29]).

Results

The findings of this research provide a multifaceted perspective on the challenges affecting the effective CBM of frontline service delivery in South African local government. These findings underscore the intricate dynamics that hinder the successful implementation of CBM initiatives, including challenges related to organisational aspects, data collection tools, capacity and training requirements for monitors and the absence of consistent, long-term funding.

Organisational hurdles in implementing citizen-based monitoring initiatives

Organisational challenges that affect the effective CBM of frontline service delivery in South African local government are multifaceted. These challenges encompass various dimensions, starting with the lack of volunteer enthusiasm, which mirrors findings from previous research by Conrad and Daoust (2008). The study emphasises that motivating volunteers to engage actively in CBM initiatives is a formidable task that necessitates targeted strategies. In conjunction with volunteer enthusiasm, limitations in networking opportunities emerge as another significant challenge (Milne, Ateljevic and Hamilton, 2006). The interviews and survey results validate this concern, echoing the sentiments expressed in prior studies. Networking possibilities are essential for creating effective partnerships among stakeholders involved in CBM efforts, such as government departments, local organisations and citizens. Moreover, financial constraints were recurrently highlighted in the survey and interview research findings. Financial challenges represent a substantial hurdle, particularly in disadvantaged regions, where the lack of resources limits the ability to cover the out-of-pocket expenses incurred by monitors (Whitelaw, Smith, and Johnson, 2013). These resource limitations affect the sustainability and effectiveness of CBM initiatives in local government contexts.

Furthermore, the study draws insights from the notable example of the Black Sash organisation's CBM initiative in South Africa, offering a compelling illustration of the intricate relationship between formal authorities and monitoring efficacy (Friedman, 2018; Nichols and Fredericks, 2014). In the Black Sash initiative, primary healthcare institutions, Home Affairs offices and municipal services were subjects of vigilant monitoring, highlighting the breadth of CBM efforts.

However, a critical constraint was evident – formal authority was not bestowed upon the monitors, hindering their engagement with government officials beyond the interactions with the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). This lack of formal authority significantly diminished the impact of monitoring efforts, particularly in influencing outcomes beyond the SASSA domain (Friedman, 2018). The case highlights the pivotal role of formal authority in fostering effective collaboration with various government agencies, emphasising the need for a nuanced approach to organisational dynamics within CBM initiatives (Nichols and Fredericks, 2014).

The Black Sash example further underlines the potential constraints of CBM efforts when government agencies are reluctant to participate actively (Friedman, 2018). In instances where formal collaboration is not established, the ability to monitor and influence service delivery outcomes may be restricted, raising fundamental questions about the inclusivity and cooperation required for successful CBM (Whitelaw, Smith, and Johnson, 2013). Furthermore, the research delves into the issue of citizen engagement, where interviewees and survey respondents underscore the complexities surrounding citizen participation in CBM initiatives. Factors such as apathy, disinterest, mistrust of the government and fear of potential retaliation or persecution deter citizens from active involvement. These concerns are consistent with existing research findings by Friedman (2018), Nichols and Fredericks (2014) and Fotis (2013), emphasising the importance of developing comprehensive strategies to encourage and sustain citizen participation in CBM programmes.

Moreover, when examining the survey data in Figure 1, a demographic breakdown reveals that only 28% (2038) of the respondents identified themselves as community developers and/or workers, while the majority 72% (5244) did not belong to this category. Community developers and/or workers are pivotal in facilitating community engagement and participation in policymaking, implementation and
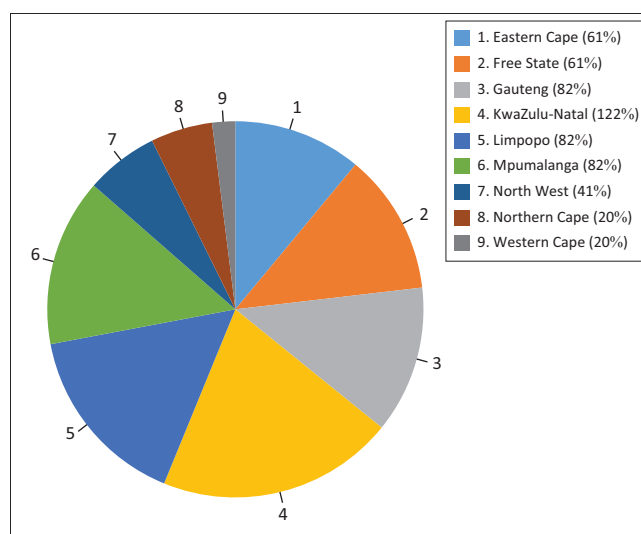

FIGURE 1: Geographical distribution of community developers and/or workers per province (N = 7282).

Legend:
1. Eastern Cape (61%)
2. Free State (61%)
3. Gauteng (82%)
4. KwaZulu-Natal (122%)
5. Limpopo (82%)
6. Mpumalanga (82%)
7. North West (41%)
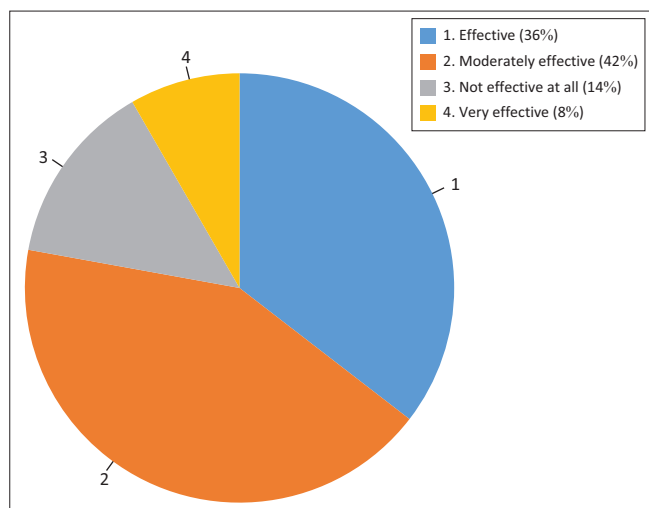8. Northern Cape (20%)
9. Western Cape (20%)

FIGURE 2: Level of satisfaction with the effectiveness of use of citizen-based monitoring tools (N = 7282).

service delivery. They act as intermediaries between the government and local communities, fostering a connection essential for effective CBM.

Issues with citizen-based monitoring data collection tools

The investigation highlighted various intricacies surrounding CBM data collection tools, unveiling challenges impacting their effectiveness (Goodnow, 2019). One noteworthy concern is the issue of representativeness, questioning whether the data collected truly reflect the diverse perspectives and experiences within a given community in South Africa or if certain groups are unintentionally omitted (Hall & Howard, 2008). Resource constraints emerged as a recurrent challenge, shedding light on the financial and logistical limitations that impede the optimal functioning of CBM tools. Moreover, the study highlighted concerns about data quality, emphasising the necessity of robust mechanisms to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information collected. Accountability in the context of CBM instruments was a prominent theme, with implications for the responsible and ethical use of the gathered data (Mansuri and Rao 2013; Bamberger et al., 2006; Pietrobelli et al. 2017). Another critical aspect is the potential for political manipulation, raising questions about the impartiality and integrity of CBM processes. These multifaceted challenges collectively underscore the intricate landscape of CBM instruments and their limitations in achieving the desired outcomes in enhancing government transparency and accountability.

The survey findings, as presented in Figure 2, indicate the ratings and perceptions of respondents regarding the effectiveness and accessibility of existing CBM tools. Participants were asked to rate the use of CBM tools in their community and the accessibility of these tools. Regarding effectiveness, 42% of respondents rated the CBM tools moderately effective, while 36% considered them effective. However, 14% of respondents indicated that the tools were ineffective, and only 8% rated them highly effective. These
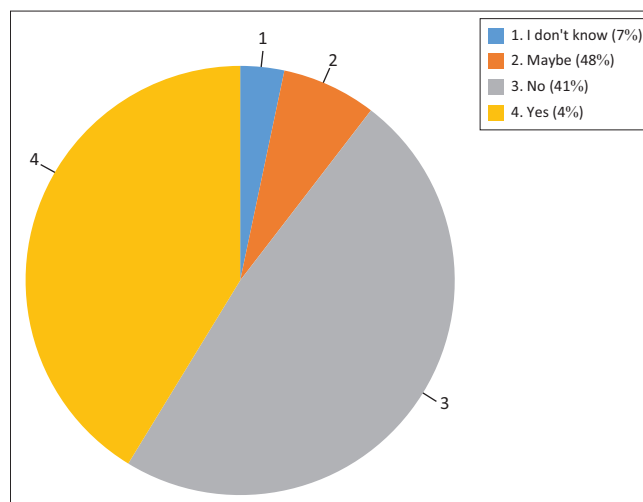

FIGURE 3: Percentage of participants who can monitor service delivery (N = 7282).

findings suggest room for improvement in enhancing the effectiveness of CBM tools, as a significant portion of respondents found them to be only moderately effective. This aligns with the challenges identified in the qualitative findings, highlighting the need for addressing issues such as resource constraints and data quality.

Regarding accessibility, 32% of respondents rated the tools as moderately accessible, indicating the need for improving their availability. Another 30% of respondents considered the CBM tools accessible, reflecting some level of availability. In contrast, 16% of respondents reported that the tools were inaccessible, while 22% rated the CBM tools as highly accessible. These results point to variations in the accessibility of CBM tools, with a considerable percentage of respondents finding them moderately accessible or inaccessible. This underscores the importance of addressing resource constraints and the need for a more inclusive approach to making CBM tools widely accessible.

Challenges related to monitors' capacity, skills and knowledge

The practical implementation of CBM in South African local government encounters a significant challenge related to the capacity and proficiency of monitors. This multifaceted challenge encompasses technical competencies, analytical acumen and communication skills. Notably, technical prowess is pivotal for CBM, as evident in Pereira, Gomes, Oliveira and Marques' (2018) findings from Brazil, where lacking technical capabilities hindered CBM adoption. Similarly, a comprehensive understanding of public sector operations and legislation is indispensable, as emphasised in research conducted by Shrestha and Ghimire (2019) in Nepal. A South African study by Masiya, David and Mangai (2019:20) echoes these challenges, underscoring difficulties faced by South African monitors in acquiring the necessary technical skills, thereby impeding data collection and analysis.

Quantitative findings reveal a substantial knowledge and awareness deficit among the surveyed population regarding

monitoring public service delivery and government performance. As shown in Figure 3, approximately 48% of respondents acknowledged their lack of knowledge in this realm, signifying a significant challenge. Conversely, 41% of respondents displayed familiarity with the intricacies of monitoring, indicating their potential to contribute to CBM initiatives by holding government institutions accountable. About 7% of respondents expressed uncertainty about their monitoring capabilities, revealing challenges linked to limited awareness and resource access. Furthermore, 4% of participants were unsure of their knowledge level, suggesting a need to bolster awareness and knowledge related to CBM in the South African local government context.

Lack of consistency and sustainability of funding for citizen-based monitoring initiatives

The sustainability of CBM initiatives is a critical concern, and it is closely tied to the consistency and sustainability of funding for such endeavours. Initial support for CBM initiatives often comes from governmental or international donor agencies. Establishing CBM systems and local entities incurs significant expenditures and the operational phase, expected to function independently, must demonstrate clear advantages that outweigh the costs. Unfortunately, case studies from various nations and settings rarely assure this sustainability (Danielsen, Burgess, & Balmford, 2005b; Hartanto et al. 2002a, Stuart-Hill, Campbell, & Dearden, 2005). Table 1 demonstrates the endurance of CBM following the departure of its creator. These case studies are drawn from diverse nations and administrative and social settings.

In the South African context, this funding challenge is equally pronounced (DPME 2017). Interviews conducted by

government officials reveal that CBM initiatives often rely on external funding for their establishment and initial operation. However, the long-term sustainability of these initiatives can be precarious. The South African government may provide initial support, but maintaining funding and support becomes a formidable challenge. The departure of founders or advocates of CBM projects, who often establish strong personal relationships with the community, can jeopardise the survival of these initiatives (Pratap & Srivastava, 2015).

Furthermore, research from India demonstrates the significance of integration into formal government monitoring and evaluation processes and capacity building within the community for the sustainability of CBM initiatives. South Africa shares this concern, as the inclusion of CBM in official government monitoring systems and the continued support of local government officials and policymakers are crucial for their survival (Fölscher & Kruger, 2013). Ensuring that CBM projects remain a priority for government authorities, and sustaining community ownership and engagement are essential elements in South Africa as well. To extend the longevity of CBM programmes, a concerted effort is needed, encompassing continued lobbying, capacity building and their integration into official monitoring and evaluation systems. Achieving this will be critical for sustaining CBM initiatives in South African local government (Bhatt & Nair, 2017).

Discussion

The findings of this research reveal a multitude of challenges affecting the effective CBM of frontline service delivery in South African local government. The discussions for the findings are presented in the following sections.

Data access and information: Crucial for informed monitoring of frontline services

The research underscores the critical role of data access and information sharing in the context of CBM of frontline service delivery in South African local government, aligning with the established studies by Johnson and Smith (2017) and Brown and Naidoo (2019). Johnson and Smith (2017) highlight the importance of information accessibility for effective citizen engagement initiatives, emphasising the need for monitors to have timely and accurate information (Johnson and Smith, 2017). Brown and Naidoo's research in South Africa (2019) echoes these sentiments, emphasising that transparent data access facilitates effective participation and accountability mechanisms in local government (Brown and Naidoo, 2019). These studies collectively stress that overcoming data access and information sharing challenges is paramount for strengthening CBM processes, especially in monitoring frontline service delivery.

The research findings seamlessly align with insights from these existing studies (Johnson and Smith, 2017; Brown and Naidoo, 2019), emphasising the critical importance of

TABLE 1: Durability of CBM initiatives after founder departure.

Location	Management type	Funding	Durability
Botswana (Fraser et al. 2006:436)	CBFM	UNDP	Not tested on the field
Cameroon (Tiani and Bonis-Charanele 2007:840)	CBFM	US NGO	Stop
China (van Rijsoort and Jinfeng 2005:48)	PA participatory management	Dutch cooperation	Significant decrease
India (Garcia et al. 2004)	JFM	French cooperation	Not tested on the field
Laos (Poulsen and Luanglath 2005)	PA participatory management	Danish cooperation	Stop
Madagascar (Andrianandrasana et al. 2005:758)	JFM	International sponsors	Durable but NGO-funded
Namibia (Stuart-Hill et al. 2005)	JFM	State and international NGO	Extended through (moderate) international support
Philippines (Danielsen et al. 2005b:420)	PA participatory management	Danish cooperation	Durable but state-funded
Nepal (Ojha et al. 2003)	CBFM	English cooperation	No answer
Phillippines (Hartanto et al. 2002b)	CBFM	State	Stop
Tanzania (Topp-Jorgense et al. 2005)	JFM	District and Danish cooperation	Significant decrease

CBFM, community-based forestry monitoring; US, United State; NGO, Non-governmental organization; PA, Protected Area; JFM, joint forest management; UNDP, United Nations Development Programme.

addressing data access and information sharing challenges within the South African CBM landscape. Improving transparency and accessibility of information becomes a pivotal endeavour for South African local government. By tackling these challenges proactively, local authorities can significantly enhance the effectiveness and accountability of CBM initiatives, aligning with the overarching goal of achieving transparent and accountable frontline service delivery. This cohesive alignment between research findings and previous studies emphasises the necessity for proactive steps in optimising information management in CBM.

Moreover, the emphasis on improved data access and information sharing is not merely theoretical but bears real-world relevance for South African local government. Initiatives like the South African National Health Information Initiative (SANHII) provide tangible examples of harnessing data access to enhance healthcare service delivery (Dlamini et al., 2021). This research adds to the growing body of evidence underscoring the pragmatic value of addressing data-related challenges in CBM (Dlamini et al., 2021; Johnson and Smith, 2017; Brown and Naidoo, 2019). By drawing lessons from successful initiatives such as SANHII and rigorously addressing these challenges, South African local government can elevate the efficacy of CBM in monitoring and enhancing frontline service delivery, further reinforcing its commitment to transparent and accountable governance.

Formal authority: A critical component in frontline service delivery monitoring

The critical role of formal authority in the monitoring of frontline service delivery, as demonstrated by the case study involving the Black Sash organisation in South Africa, is well supported by previous studies conducted in the South African context. For instance, Govender et al. (2018) explored the impact of formalised roles and authority for monitors in community-driven development initiatives in South Africa, revealing that formalised roles and authority significantly enhance the effectiveness of monitors in engaging with government officials and driving change at the grassroots level. This aligns with the current study's emphasis on formal authority as a critical component in CBM, especially in FSDM (Govender et al., 2018).

Nkosi and Dlamini (2020) conducted a comprehensive study that specifically focused on the role of formal authority in the context of education service delivery monitoring within South African local government. Their findings reinforced the importance of formal authority structures to empower monitors in their interactions with educational authorities and school administrators, further underlining the criticality of formal authority in line with the findings of the current study (Nkosi & Dlamini, 2020). In essence, the case study findings are well aligned with the existing South African research, further emphasising the integral role of formal authority in the context of CBM for frontline service delivery. The evidence from multiple studies collectively underscores

the necessity for South African local government to establish and reinforce clear roles, responsibilities and formal authority structures for monitors engaged in CBM. By doing so, the local government can significantly enhance the effectiveness of service delivery monitoring at the frontline, aligning with the primary research aim (Govender et al. 2018; Nkosi & Dlamini, 2020).

This robust alignment between the current study and prior South African research demonstrates the compelling evidence for the significance of formal authority in CBM, particularly in the context of monitoring frontline service delivery. The case study exemplifies the practical implications of a lack of formal authority, and the insights from previous research emphasise the importance of establishing clear roles and responsibilities for monitors. South African local government can leverage these findings to enhance the role of monitors, improve their interactions with government officials and maximise the impact on frontline service delivery, thus advancing the overarching research goal of achieving transparent and accountable governance.

Citizen engagement: Complex barriers for citizen-based monitoring of frontline service delivery

Apathy and disinterest among citizens are recurring themes that pose substantial hurdles to effective CBM in South Africa. The historical legacy of apartheid in the country, marked by systemic disenfranchisement and social inequalities, has had a profound and lasting impact. This historical context has bred a sense of disillusionment among citizens, leading to disengagement from formal government processes (Peterson & Godby 2020). In this light, the research findings affirm that overcoming this historical apathy is a complex task that requires careful strategies and sensitivity to address the deep-seated issues of disinterest.

Mistrust of the government, a common sentiment among South African citizens, further complicates the engagement landscape (Kalonda & Govender 2021). This mistrust stems from a history of corruption, mismanagement and a lack of transparency in government institutions. Consequently, citizens are hesitant to actively participate in CBM efforts, fearing that their involvement might be in vain or that the information they provide could be mishandled. These findings align with the broader literature that emphasises the need to rebuild trust in government institutions, foster transparency and address corruption as foundational steps to promote citizen engagement (Bonney 2021; Thomas & Singh 2021).

The fear of potential retaliation or persecution adds another layer of complexity. South Africa's political landscape is characterised by patronage networks and the pervasiveness of corruption, contributing to these concerns. Citizens who might otherwise be willing to engage fear negative

consequences for exposing wrongdoings (Dlamini & Govender, 2019). This highlights the necessity of safeguarding the rights of participants, ensuring their anonymity and protecting them from retaliation.

The research underscores that South Africa's history has contributed to profound apathy and mistrust among its citizens, thereby diminishing their willingness to engage in CBM initiatives actively. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that acknowledges the historical context, rebuilds trust in government institutions and protects participants from potential repercussions. Such an approach is essential for revitalising citizen engagement and advancing the objectives of CBM in South African local government.

Recommendations

Effective CBM of frontline service delivery in South African local government necessitates the establishment of robust partnerships among government departments, CBOs and local media. Building trust is vital to foster an environment conducive to information sharing and data access. Encouraging transparent communication and mutual respect among stakeholders will promote a collaborative atmosphere. This emphasis on trust-building forms a pivotal recommendation, as it highlights the necessity of overcoming challenges related to citizen engagement and the historical apathy, disinterest and mistrust among citizens. The study's findings underscore the importance of addressing these challenges to ensure successful CBM initiatives. By prioritising trust and cooperation, stakeholders can present a unified front, essential for the success of CBM and the enhancement of frontline service delivery.

Another critical recommendation pertains to the strategic allocation of resources to support CBM programmes effectively. Adequate financial and technical resources are essential for providing monitors with the tools and capabilities necessary for successful monitoring. Policymakers and local government authorities should prioritise and strategically plan resource allocation to ensure monitors are adequately trained and equipped with the technological infrastructure required for data collection, analysis and reporting. The research highlights financial constraints as a recurring issue, emphasising the need for targeted resource allocation to address regional disparities and ensure equity and effectiveness. By directing resources where they are most needed, local governments can enhance the capacity and impact of CBM initiatives, thus improving the overall quality of frontline service delivery.

To enhance the effectiveness of CBM programmes, it is imperative to minimise the influence of politics on monitoring processes. Given the historical context and existing mistrust of the government among citizens, reducing political influences is crucial. Policymakers and government departments should establish safeguards, clear guidelines and mechanisms to protect the independence and objectivity of CBM. By doing so, the credibility of CBM can be strengthened, leading to more accurate and unbiased assessments of frontline service delivery. This recommendation directly addresses findings that highlight the influence of political networks and corruption, which create concerns about retaliation among potential citizen participants in CBM efforts. Reducing political interference will foster a more supportive environment for CBM initiatives, thereby enhancing their overall effectiveness and impact.

Finally, active engagement from policymakers is essential for the successful implementation of CBM. Policymakers should provide leadership, guidance and oversight in defining the objectives and priorities of CBM initiatives. Their involvement ensures that CBM aligns with broader policy goals and strategic objectives, maintaining a focus on enhancing frontline service delivery. This recommendation directly addresses the study's findings, which highlight the influence of political networks and the need for policymaker commitment to uphold the integrity of CBM. By demonstrating leadership and commitment, policymakers can mitigate concerns about retaliation and corruption, fostering a more supportive environment for CBM initiatives. Active policymaker engagement will help integrate CBM into the larger governance framework, ensuring its success and contributing to the broader goal of improving public service delivery in South African local government.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has shed light on the intricate landscape of CBM of frontline service delivery in the context of South African local government. By unearthing and comprehensively examining the myriad factors and challenges inherent in the practice of CBM, this research not only adds to the existing knowledge but also offers valuable recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of frontline service delivery. The study underscores the pivotal role of stakeholder collaboration, resource allocation and minimising political influences in optimising CBM initiatives. It also emphasises fostering trust and cooperation within communities, acknowledging historical complexities. As South African local government strives to build a more transparent and responsive public sector, addressing these multifaceted challenges becomes imperative. While the path forward may be intricate, the commitment to collaborative strategies and the recognition of the intricate dynamics within the South African context will lead to more transparent and accountable frontline service delivery, contributing to an improved public sector responsive to the needs of its citizens.

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Author's contributions

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, L.S.M., upon reasonable request.

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