ICLD Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy

Learning Case

Mobilizing Assets to Improve Participatory Planning in Emfuleni, South Africa

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1. Learning Objectives

This learning case aims to guide the reader to:

- Reflect on the rights, responsibilities, and relationships of local communities (citizens) and municipalities in a context governed by strong policies for public participation yet ineffective practices to engage communities in planning and service delivery;
- Identify gaps and potential solutions to improve the quality of participation in public planning through the Integrated Development Planning process;
- Consider the value of asset-based and community-driven development (ABCD) from the perspective of local governance and public participation; and,
- Propose avenues for strengthening mutual accountability (and the social contract) between local municipalities and communities through the ABCD-informed Community Scorecard (CSC).

2. Case Description

By 2018, South Africa had a progressive policy framework for participatory local democracy, which included provisions for citizens to participate in governance and the creation of local Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). However, while having great policies on paper, the practice of local democracy had been characterised by protests, polarisation, and disengagement, mainly associated with lack of active participation and unmet service delivery promises.

In Emfuleni, a local municipality in the southern part of the Gauteng Province, residents suffered insufficient provision of water, electricity, and waste disposal services, largely because of the mismanagement, corruption and irresponsible governance that had prevailed over several years. As the municipality was deemed unable to cope with its challenges, Emfuleni was in 2018 placed under administration of the Provincial government. This was a last resort effort to turn the municipality around and prevent a complete collapse in the delivery of basic services.

Leading up this difficult situation, Emfuleni had used a so-called needs-based approach to reach out to its residents. Officials would enter communities and ask for a "laundry list" of problems and issues which were then packaged as community needs and concerns to be addressed through various delivery

programmes. Such an approach discouraged residents from taking an active part in local governance and created a culture of passiveness. Residents were encouraged to wait for their local government to "bring development on them" – an act that pacified any sparks of activism (Personal communication, 2019).

Figure 1: Community-driven initiatives in Emfuleni to self-manage waste disposal.

Now, with the municipality under administration, it was time to do things differently. Through the Office of the Speaker, Emfuleni tried to address their challenge by experimenting with a new **asset-based and citizen-led development (ABCD)** approach. The ABCD approach meant to mobilise diverse residents who could constructively engage in co-producing services. The approach focuses on identifying the assets of the community, such as skills, associations, physical-, financial-, and natural resources, as well as the initiatives that residents had started with their own resources. These initiatives were used as an entry point for discussions about what communities themselves can take a lead on, where opportunities for co-delivery of basic services may be, and where government investments are most needed. Following the maladministration of previous elected representatives, it was clear that Emfuleni's residents needed to take on a more active role in the governance of their municipality.

Emfuleni started using the ABCD approach as a novel entry point to put public participation in practice in new ways. As a starting point, this work took a two-pronged approach:

1. **Work with Emfuleni officials, Community Development Workers, Ward Committees and Councilors to strengthen their understanding public participation and the new ABCD approach.** These actors had a key responsibility in ensuring community consultation at the Ward level and bridging their citizens' concerns and priorities with the annual process of creating a local Integrated Development Plan.

2. **Build the capacity of community members to use so-called asset mapping and action planning (two principles and tools of the ABCD approach) to lead initiatives and take an active part in the provision of basic services.** The hope being that these initiatives will attract the attention and the investment of local government at best, and/or fill much needed gaps in services as worst.

Early on, the results of the new approach were positive. It lead to increased frequency and depth of dialogue between citizens and local government for some basic services, continued citizen dialogue and action in support of service delivery, and improved "confidence" and appreciation for citizens to voice concerns at government fora (Personal communication, 2019).

It was notable how a rhetoric about "ABCD" was beginning to take hold both among Emfuleni residents and at different levels of government. Those who took part in ABCD workshop recalled how they organised *en masse* around their strengths during the apartheid era (before 1994) to provide for one another, a practice locally known as *Ubuntu* (I am because we are), and how this solidarity in the community reflected both the rights and the responsibilities that come with being a citizen. One ward official explained how the ABCD language "was unavoidable in government offices" and how they had seen changes among

the constituents in how they organised themselves to attend community outreach meetings and voice their concerns to their political representatives. It was important to build on this momentum and further systematise active citizen participation in the upcoming Integrated Development Plan process.

In 2020, Emfuleni and the Provincial government got together with the Department of Social Work and Community Development at the University of Johannesburg to take part in a research project that aimed to more systematically incorporate the new approach in the process to create local Integrated Development Plans. Once restrictions from the Covid-19 pandemic started easing in August 2021, the research team hosted a series of dialogue session, bringing together residents, community development workers, and local government staff. The purpose of the sessions was to discuss the stakeholders' views on the Integrated Development Plan process and the effectiveness of Ward committees.

While the conversations between Emfuleni Local Municipality and the residents remained constructive, it was clear that community members had done their part as best they could. They continued to organise around basic service provision and some participants played a more active role in government platforms to vocalise the asset-based narrative, which demonstrated a shift from the traditional needs-driven one of demanding development rather than thinking about what they can do as citizens. However, community participants stated during the dialogue sessions that communication between Emfuleni and the community was still not satisfactory as decisions are still made for them. They said:

> "The municipality [still] does not communicate with [the] community, and they are making their own decisions…They call us only when they need something, but when we need them, they are not available."

Meanwhile, the local officials stated that they were aware about the concerns raised by the residents and that they are working hard to address them.

In this case of Emfuleni, the ABCD approach seemed to address problems of ineffectiveness and find some solutions for issues of service delivery, but there exists a dilemma of legitimacy. The citizens have low trust and they feel unsupported by a local municipality that does not fulfil its responsibilities. How can the municipality utilise the assets and capacities that exist in the community without shifting all responsibility of local development onto the citizens?

3. Discussion

- Although the ABCD approach aimed to enhance community participation in development planning, its impact on the local government has been limited. Officials continue to make decisions independently, despite community commitment and enthusiasm. What can be done to shift the **attitude and mindset** of government officials from the need-based to asset-based policy and practice?

- What are the implications when communities take governance functions and service delivery into their own hands? What then is the **role of local government**? Who is **accountable** to whom when the roles and responsibilities (social contract) shift?

- ABCD enhanced the participation and mobilization of communities in Emfuleni (from the bottom up). What do you see as the **risks and benefits** of promoting an asset-based and community-driven development approach from within local government (i.e., from the top down)?

- What tools for meaningful participation of citizen exist, in your knowledge, to address the dilemma Emfuleni faces?

4. The Real Case Ending: Meaning of the Right to Health

The ABCD approach appeared to catch government attention in rhetoric, but not leading to an active response or tangible investment. Officials and citizens from three wards in Emfuleni agreed that a more direct engagement strategy was required.

They decided to adapt the **Community Scorecard-method**, a structured, participatory, and dialogue-based social accountability tool, which they infused with the ABCD principles. This process was chosen in part because it had proven effective in fostering critical engagement and constructive dialogue among citizens and public officials, the users and providers of specific services. While the main goal of the Community Scorecard typically is to influence the quality, efficiency, and accountability of public services it was adapted in Emfuleni to create a space for constructive dialogue, engagement, and accountability between residents and local government officials around the quality of participation in the Integrated Development Plan.

The Community Scorecard process was further adapted according to ABCD principles to create an environment where the community held the local municipality and itself accountable for service delivery and responsible utilisation of services, as well as for co-production of solutions and joint action plans for service delivery improvement. Embedding the ABCD principles in the Scorecard process meant recognizing that alongside rights and entitlements, citizens had responsibilities and assets to contribute to public services and public planning.

How the ABCD-informed Community Scorecard was introduced

In March 2022, the research team from University of Johannesburg collaborated with the local municipality to introduce the ABCD-informed Community Scorecard. The purpose was to provide an opportunity for community members and Emfuleni staff to:

1) Assess the quality of participation in the development planning from their own perspective and according to their own criteria;

2) Engage in direct dialogue with each other to explain their assessments;

3) Co-produce a joint action plan for improved public participation and accountability in the Integrated Development Plan process in Emfuleni.

Figure 2: Community Scorecard being implemented.

In the end, communities and officials taking part in the process identified eight criteria for an ideal Integrated Development Plan in Emfuleni, out of which each group prioritised four of them and identified priority actions for joint action planning.

To ensure implementation of the plan, an Action Committee was established to support and monitor the implementation of the agreed action plan, set up regular meetings to evaluate progress and overcome implementation obstacles, and to report on progress in implementing the action plan.
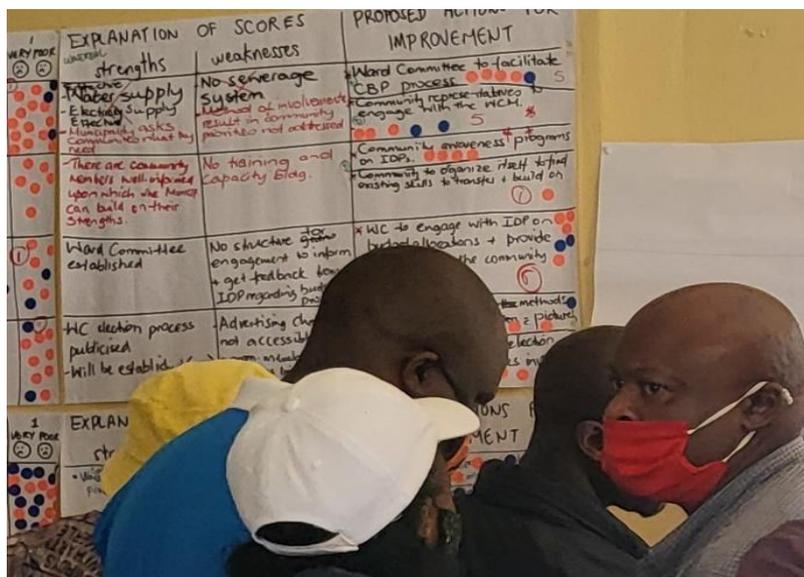

Figure 3: Community members taking an active part in the planning process.

Reflection questions

- What do think are the advantages and disadvantages of the Community Scorecard method? What are its merits in terms of the potential to promote inclusive governance and social accountability?
- If applicable, what could be done to encourage its support and uptake by local government officials?

Applying to your own context

- Which type of approach – needs-based or asset-based – would you say have influenced the behavior of the community in your own locality and why?
- Would an ABCD approach work in your context? If so, how and why? If not, why not?
- What do you think will be the attitude of officials in your local context towards using ABCD-Informed Community Scorecard as a citizen-driven tool?

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