



POLICY BRIEF SERIES

Evidence for policy-making and implementation



Citizen-based monitoring

BACKGROUND

The Citizen-Based Monitoring (CBM) programme of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) aims to strengthen the involvement of citizens in monitoring service delivery. This approach to monitoring government performance focuses on the experiences of ordinary citizens to strengthen public accountability and service delivery, and sees citizens as active participants in shaping what is monitored, how monitoring is done, and what interpretations and actions are derived from monitoring data.

DPME's five-year strategy for CBM has three key strategic areas: (i) creating demand for CBM in government departments; (ii) supply of CBM tools, knowledge and capacity; and (iii) responding to systemic problems identified through CBM activities. In the period October 2013 - September 2015, DPME implemented a pilot aimed at evolving and testing a method for using citizen feedback to drive service delivery improvements. The pilot was carried out in partnership with key government departments, including the South African Police Services (SAPS), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Social Development (DSD) and the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA).

EVALUATION OF THE CBM MODEL

An implementation evaluation of the CBM model was conducted by the Palmer Development Group (PDG) between May and September 2015. The final report was approved in December of that year. The study aimed to assess the implementation of the CBM pilot and programme to inform the development of its five-year strategy moving forward.

The evaluation used a mixed method approach to respond to the key evaluation questions, including a literature review; refinement of the CBM theory of change (ToC) and development of a logframe; case studies of five sites across the four services; and 11 root cause focus groups, which were conducted with 128 individuals. Six surveyor focus groups were also conducted, with a total of 66 surveyors in total.

The main finding was that the CBM pilot was successful in various process elements and that it involved an inclusive and credible approach across four services, namely health, social development, social security and police services.

This policy brief presents the key findings of the evaluation and makes policy recommendations based on these findings.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

Generally, the aims of the CBM pilot have been realised through the following three direct outputs: a policy framework has been approved by Cabinet; a refined CBM approach and methodology has been tested and evolved across four services over nine provincial pilot sites; and there have been a series of knowledge sharing engagements, consultations and products made available online. However, the evaluation found that there are varying degrees of the extent to which results associated with these outputs have been achieved.

Capability of the state to engage citizens

The CBM pilot model has not prescribed a role for formal citizen structures, such as Community Police Forums (CPFs) and clinic/community health committees. Instead, their involvement was allowed to vary based on the degree of their functionality and the commitment of its stakeholders to the initiative. In taking this approach, there is a risk that these core, enduring structures for public participation may remain dysfunctional or unused. Where this is the case, the opportunity to problematise their role in ongoing citizen monitoring is lost, thereby undermining the state's capability for engagement.

On the other hand, if the model does assume a role for these structures where they are in fact 'captured' by certain interests, it can reinforce exclusivity, posing a risk to the aims of CBM. There is evidence that the CBM pilot model has not yet resolved how best to leverage these structures. In the absence of a designated structure or champion to monitor commitments, these structures are a place to start if the state is to prove more capable of engaging citizens and escalating issues for resolution.



Enabling citizens to strengthen the accountability of the state

The evidence from the participants of the pilot provides a strong indication that the CBM pilot model has been effective in giving voice to citizen concerns and creating a space for dialogue and engagement in a relatively short space of time. Both citizens and staff reported a broader awareness and understanding of each other's challenges and recognised the issues of greatest concern. The creation of space for citizens to voice concerns that are considered legitimate and acknowledged by public servants provides a strong indication of how this process has facilitated accountability and, in some instances, the vertical escalation beyond the site level.

Responsiveness of the state to citizen engagement

Across all sites there was great uncertainty as to the monitoring of commitments – especially who and how citizens would be able to monitor these commitments. The absence of a shared understanding for ongoing monitoring and engagement poses a serious risk that citizens will experience CBM as an incomplete intervention that disappoints after high hopes, potentially eroding the relationships and any budding trust that was established. Unless this is addressed, it will result in a failure to reinforce the positive cycle of civic and state action which is posited to improve accountability and responsiveness.

Changes in the capability of the state to engage citizens

National engagements and platforms for CBM have been a key channel through which both state departments across spheres and civil society have had the opportunity to come together and build capability around this process.

KEY POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The implementation evaluation does not recommend a wholesale 'scale-up' of the DPME-administered pilot model, but rather a considered and targeted roll-out of the model's successful process elements customised to selected service departments. The first service departments for roll-out should be those that have shown interest and willingness to participate throughout the process and where there is a demand, such as the SAPS.

For the next five years, the DPME's role should shift from implementer of the CBM pilot model to that of policy leader, custodian of the methodology, knowledge partner, skills developer, and facilitator within the state. The DPME should also act as custodian of the CBM policy's intent and integrity, ensuring that these are not lost in the process of adaptation to service departments. In addition, it should serve as the institutional repository for CBM good practices, approaches and methods (drawing on its experience in Phase 1, 2 and 3 of the pilot and from the lessons emerging from future implementation by other departments). Resource and capacity limitations also warrant an approach that emphasises building institutional capability internally under the guidance of the DPME.

Finally, in order to secure the gains of the pilot processes tested to date, it is recommended that the DPME follow up and conclude the pilot at the nine participating sites. In doing so, the department should pay special attention to clarifying, formalising and communicating arrangements for the ongoing monitoring of the commitments that have been made to ensure improvements are secured and maintained.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation report makes a number of suggestions as to how to strengthen the CBM model.

- In conjunction with partner departments, the DPME should clarify and provide guidance on the selection criteria for future CBM sites, as well as consider existing departmental planning cycles and citizen engagements. This should be a consultative process between district, regional and provincial management forums, and be used to communicate the responsibilities of the identified role players and leaders of the identified structures. This process should be followed by communicating the intended roles of district, regional and provincial management in the current model, as currently their roles are not clear. This should also apply in communicating the intended roles of existing citizen-engaging structures and other representatives in the current model.
- CBM implementers must identify stakeholders who will champion the implementation of the programme through formalised structures. This will bring a sense of responsibility and ensure timeous implementation. The DPME should standardise surveyor selection criteria, making them transparent to ensure fairness in the selection of service sites.
- The DPME and partner departments should ensure regular, timeous and well-attended steering committee meetings to provide updates and feedback on progress. In addition, the DPME should undertake periodic reviews of implementation to identify systemic issues for escalation and resolution at regional, provincial and national level. The DPME should retain a public repository to inform the development of future policy on citizen engagement.
- The DPME should involve more departments in the implementation of the programme as this should be the responsibility of all departments, and can be easily implemented.



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