



# Getting citizens to peer over your shoulder

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The National Development Plan identified the need to strengthen routine accountability at the point where citizens encounter the state, **writes Bernadette Leon and Jonathan Timm.**

**F**or some time now, there has been an acknowledgement that the participation of citizens in monitoring government service delivery is ad hoc, and in many sectors not present – most importantly it is often not valued by senior managers as a way to enhance the efficiency and quality of service delivery. As senior managers, we know that we need to involve citizen-users more often in planning and monitoring, but we don't really know the answers to the when, what and how of doing it effectively. The result is that in the fast-paced work environment of senior managers, we sometimes forget to deliberately plan for this in our projects and programmes.

The Framework for Strengthening Citizen-Government Partnerships for Monitoring Service Delivery identifies the current emphasis of government's monitoring as "being on internal government processes with the voice of the citizen largely absent. This presents a risk, as the picture is not complete. It is therefore necessary to support the uptake of systematic ways to bring the experiences of citizens into the monitoring of services. This will provide a measure of the gap between the perceived and the actual experiences of service delivery, for both user and provider." >>

#### The framework in brief:

1. Provides a common understanding of citizen-based monitoring and why this is important for service-delivery improvement
2. Provides guidance to service delivery departments on how and why to strengthen the involvement of citizens in monitoring frontline service delivery
3. Provides a set of principles and essential elements, and sets out high-level roles and responsibilities
4. Presents a three-year action plan for strengthening citizen-government monitoring partnerships at service-delivery facilities.

- Approved by Cabinet in August 2013, the Framework for Strengthening Citizen-Government Partnerships for Monitoring Service Delivery asserts that the “experiences of citizens – the intended beneficiaries of government services – are a critical component in measuring the performance of government and for the delivery of appropriate and quality services.” More specifically, the framework identifies the need to build facility-level partnerships between citizens and government to monitor services from a citizen perspective.
- Let's be clear: for the purpose of this framework the following definition of Citizen based monitoring (CBM) is provided: “CBM is an approach to monitoring government performance that focuses on the experiences of ordinary citizens in order to strengthen public accountability and drive service-delivery improvements. It requires citizens to be active participants in shaping what is monitored, how the monitoring is done and what interpretations and actions are derived from the data.”
- With the approval of the framework, a Cabinet resolution requires that government departments update their Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks to incorporate CBM.

### What this means for government monitoring systems

Taking a regulatory or compliance-oriented approach to CBM would likely result in an over-emphasis on data collection mechanisms and weak use of the information to drive improvements. To manage this risk, the framework promotes the mainstreaming of CBM in the business processes of government – with equal emphasis on (i) monitoring service delivery (ii) analysing the monitoring findings (iii) taking action based on this analysis and (iv) then feeding back communicating the findings.

### The learning-by-doing process

As part of its mandate to support improved M&E practice in

government, the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) is championing CBM through a pilot that will run until March 2015, and a programme of learning events to support all of government to implement the principles and requirements of the framework.

The pilot will focus on testing approaches to implementing the four-stage CBM model. DPME will partner with three key service-delivery departments in the pilot: the South African Police Service and the departments of health and social development (including the South African Social Security Agency).

The pilot will follow an action research approach to test various CBM tools and interventions at police stations, health facilities, social grant and welfare service sites in 10 pilot sites. This testing is aimed at developing simple, affordable and scalable approaches that can be rolled out to other facilities following piloting.

The aim is to move the pilot to scale in 2015. At a pilot site level, the design and implementation of interventions will be shaped by engagement with citizens and frontline officials, to enable local solutions to emerge. DPME has assembled a technical support team comprising experienced community development, training, research and community-based M&E specialists.

### The journey ahead

With approval of the framework, the Government has, at the highest level, committed itself to measuring its performance through the experiences of citizens. This commitment is informed by the understanding that strengthening CBM is not an event, but a continuous, iterative process – one that will require willingness to experiment and a commitment to seek solutions within the reality of constraints.

You can download the framework from [www.thepresidency-dpme.gov.za](http://www.thepresidency-dpme.gov.za) 

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