

Community Monitoring and Advocacy Project (CMAP) Monitoring Report: Limpopo Province

SASSA Pay & Service Points: January - June 2011



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South Africa

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- **Bathabine Foundation**
- **United people against Crime (UNPAC)**
- **Lusaka Haphunaneni Shipingwana**
- **Kabosadi Disabled Centre**
- **Lotavha Advice Organisation**
- **Kopermyn Advice Office**

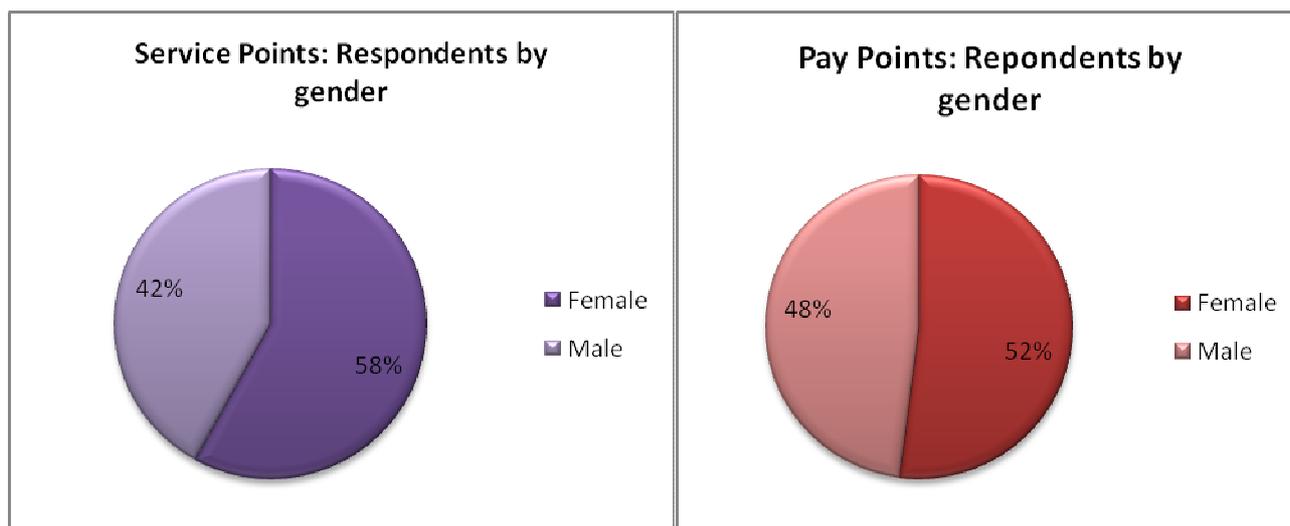
Introduction

As part of the Community Monitoring and Advocacy Project (CMAP), seven volunteer monitors from the organisations listed below, visited 14 SASSA pay points and 14 SASSA service points (in the Capricorn, Vhembe and Mopani districts of the Limpopo Province during the period January to June 2011.

The objective of these visits was to assess the quality of the service experienced by those who use SASSA services in the province. Below are the findings and monitors observations from the respective visits:

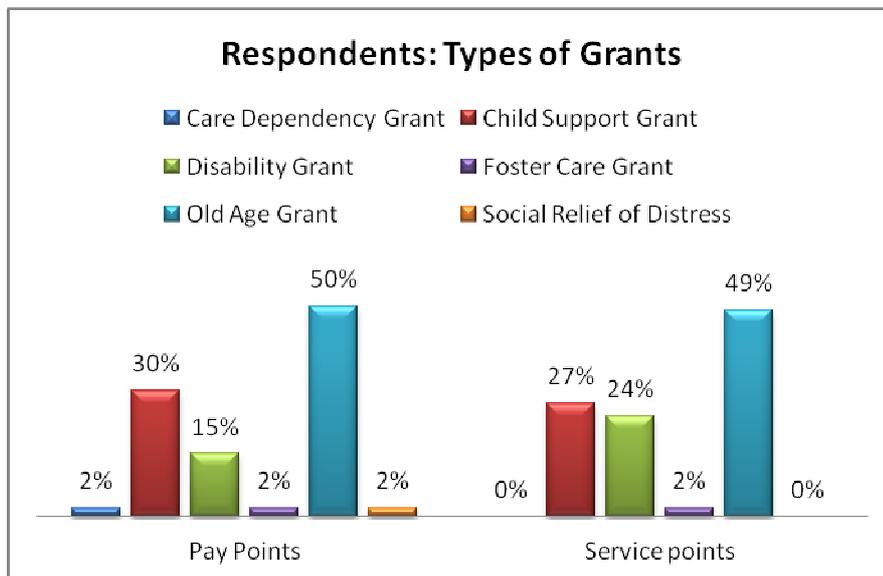
Findings:

The findings presented in this report take into account the experiences and opinions of 113 respondents from



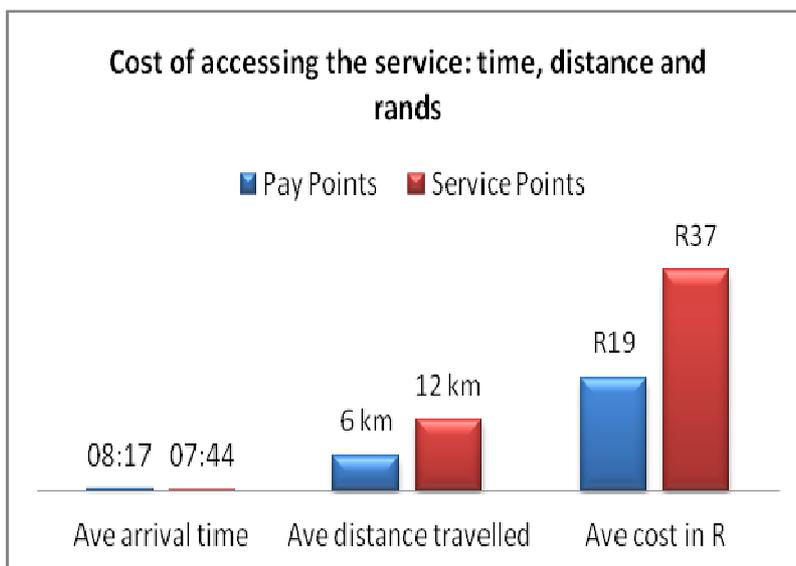
28 service and pay points across 3 districts in the Limpopo Province. These include 51 responses (45 service users, 6 officials) at service points and 72 responses (66 service users, 6 officials) at paypoints. All the interviewees were conducted with South African nationals. The majority of the respondents at both the service and pay points were female, 58% and 52% male respectively. At paypoints, most male respondents were

elderly (older than 60 years). Most visits related to the State Old Age Pension (OAP) and the Child Support Grant (CSG). At the service points; 29% of the respondents reported that their visit related to an appeal, 47% to new applications and 24% to reviews.



At both service and paypoints, half of the beneficiaries were State Old Age Pension beneficiaries or applicants, followed by Child Support Grant beneficiaries or applicants.

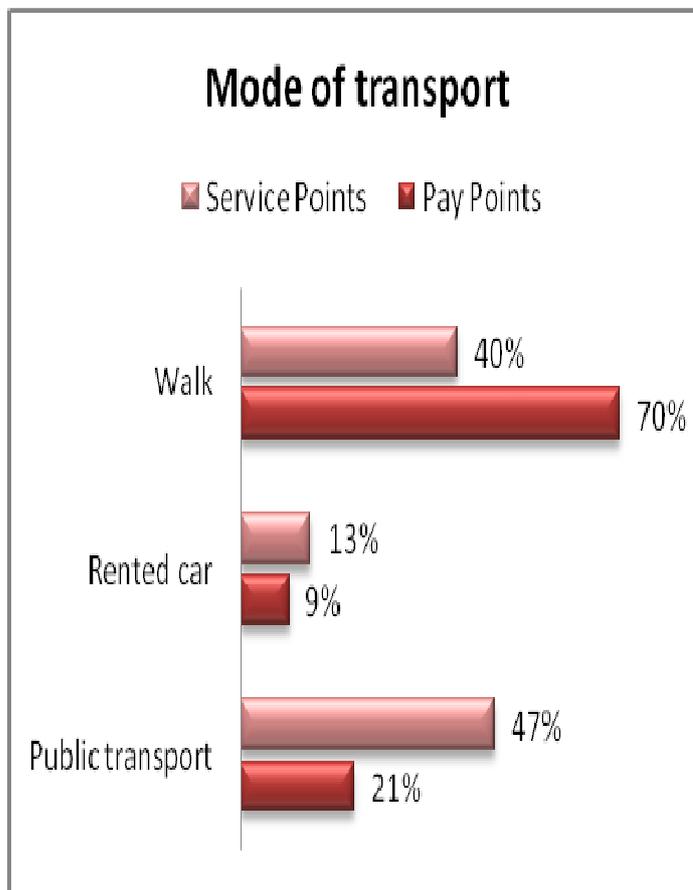
- 1. Time & Venue:** At 4 of the 6 paypoints and 3 of the 6 service points monitored, officials reported that they opened the point later than usual on the day we monitored. At the paypoint in Seshego zone 8 (Polokwane), in the Capricorn district, officials confirmed that they arrived 4 hours later than their scheduled 8am opening time. At the service point in Nkowankowa in Mopani district, officials opened the site 30 minutes later than their scheduled time. The main reasons cited for the late coming was traffic and problems with ATM's. None of the points monitored opened earlier than scheduled. Our findings shows (see bar graph on page 2), shows that, on average clients at service points arrived earlier; travelled longer distances; and paid more to access the service than those using paypoints.



The earliest arrival time recorded was 4:30am at the paypoint in Rakoma, in Mopani District, by an elderly male client who had travelled about 8kms. At the service points, the earliest arrivals included an elderly male who had walked 6km's and a woman who had travelled 12km by taxi. Both arrived at 6am at the Nkowankowa and Dan Village service points respectively.

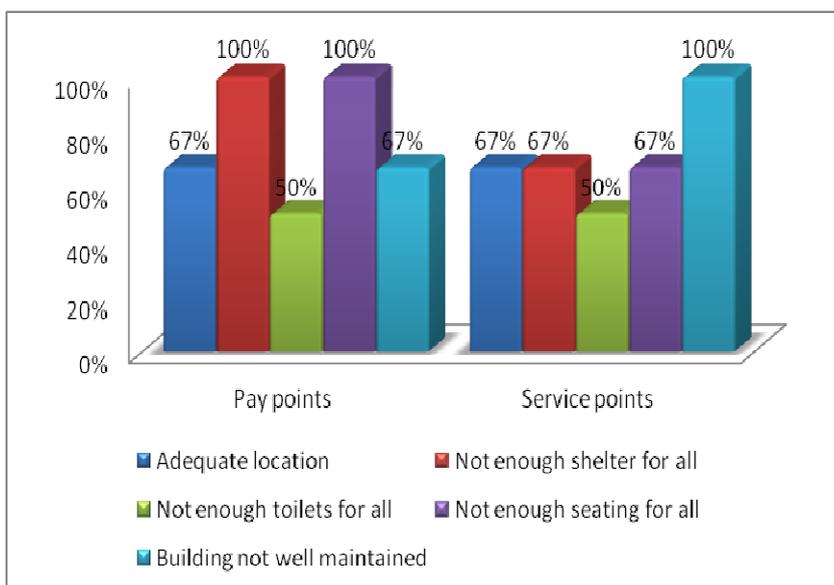
Although the average distances travelled and money spent on travel appear low (see graph above), it is important to highlight the extreme cases in which clients travelled for 40kms and 30kms respectively, paying R150 and R100 to access the service and pay points. . ***This is of particular importance when considering that on average, clients who accessed the service from service points, returned several times.***

We found that more clients accessed the paypoints by foot whilst the majority who accessed service points, did so by using public transport. This relates to the fact that there were more paypoints and mobile paypoints operating within the communities of Limpopo.



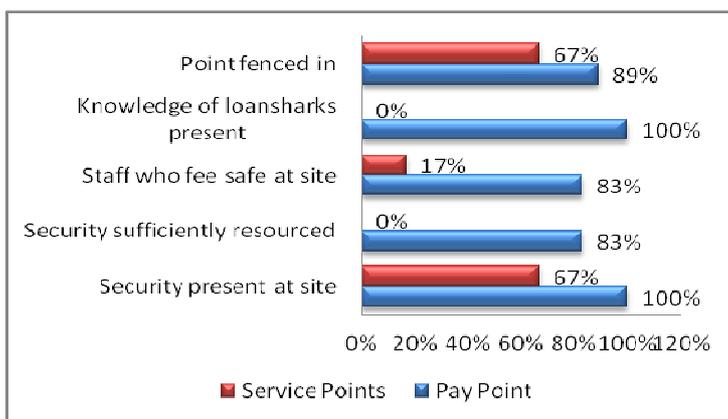
Conditions at Pay- and Service Points

Both officials and clients felt the condition of the service venues were generally inadequate and substandard. Although officials felt that the physical location of the points was sufficient, you can see from the graph on the left, the majority of them felt there was insufficient shelter for all clients;



not enough clean or accessible toilets; and insufficient seating available for those who needed it. It was also apparent from the responses that officials felt that the venues they were using to service clients were either not well maintained or non-existent, as in the case of the Kopermyn paypoint in the Capricorn District (i.e. no or little infrastructure existed at this point).

Security & Personnel: Our findings show that paypoints have better security support than service points. This is most probably due to the fact that the risk of robbery is higher at paypoints than at service points. Our monitoring also revealed that where there is a well- resourced security presence, both staff and clients feel safer even if there are loan sharks present.



Upon arrival at the paypoints monitored, 55% of the respondents said they definitely saw security on duty, compared to 10% at service points. 11% of respondents at paypoints and 14% of the respondents at service points were unaware of the presence of well-resourced security.

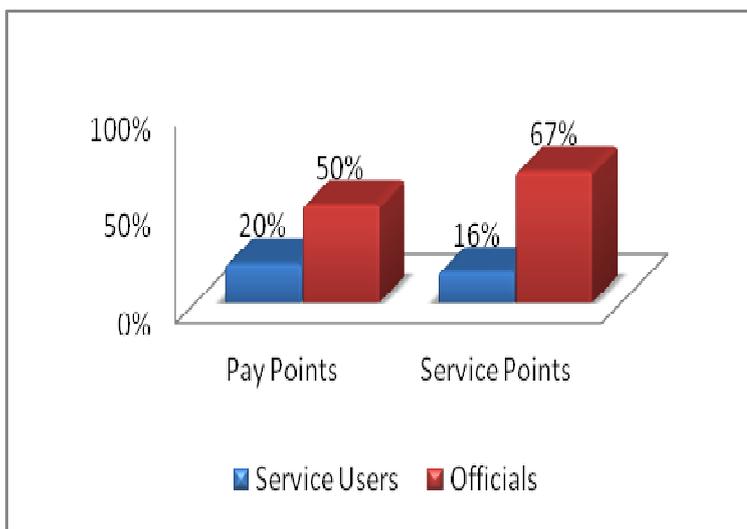
At the Sour A Tree paypoint in the Capricorn district, a CPS official confirmed that it was unsafe to work at that venue as the absence of adequate shelter or a fence made the staff and clients feel vulnerable to criminals

There were mixed views about the presence of loan sharks operating in the vicinity of paypoints. Both officials and beneficiaries confirmed that loan sharks operated close to the paypoints. However, some officials felt it was up to the grant beneficiaries discourage their presence by not borrowing from them.

Some of the beneficiaries said they did not feel threatened by their presence as they were providing a necessary service. Some ***clients reported that they needed the loan sharks even more now that many of their relatives had lost their jobs. They said they had to borrow ‘sometimes’ to supply the basic needs of the family. Because they couldn’t go to banks to borrow money, they felt loan sharks provided the only access to the money they needed, even though they charged high interest rates.***

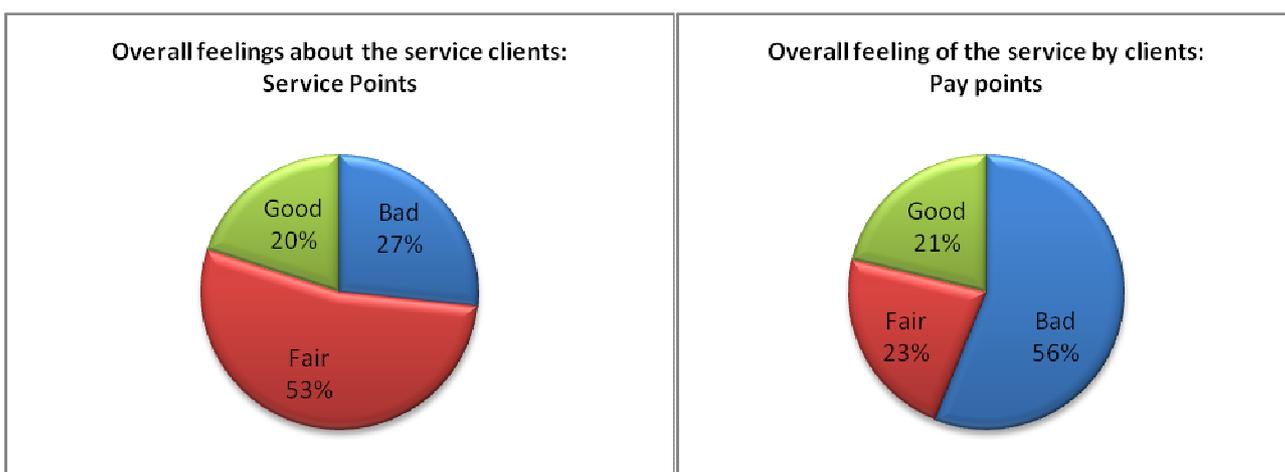
None of the sites monitored displayed any literature about customer care norms, with many of the officials saying that they used ‘**common sense**’ when serving clients.

In rating their understanding and practice of the 8 Batho Pele principles, officials indicated that they at least understood or practiced the following principles: setting service standards, openness and transparency, and redress. They also confirmed that the principles they practiced the most and understood the best were: value for money, ensuring courtesy and consultation.



Our findings illustrated in the graph above show that most clients accessing the service at service points felt the overall experience was fair. This contrasted with the majority (56%) interviewed at paypoints who said they found the service experience bad.

3. Payment & Application Processing:



87% of respondents interviewed at service points started by queuing from the time they arrived. This compares to 97% of respondents interviewed at paypoints who said the process started by queuing from the time they arrived.

The latter happened outside the perimeter fence of the paypoint until officials arrived. At service points, clients were allowed inside the fence and building after the officials arrived on duty. However, at paypoints, only a certain number of clients were allowed inside the fence and building at any one time. Officials said this arrangement was for “security purposes”. Clients claimed it took an average of 20 minutes to be seated and approximately 143 minutes to be attended to by an official after being seated at a service point. This compared to the average 61 minutes it took for clients at paypoints to find a seat and a further average wait of 127 minutes to be seen by an official.

61% of all respondents interviewed at paypoints acknowledge that they were given a receipt detailing the amount of money they received. Of concern however, only 13% at service points received a written acknowledgment, and further details of their visit to the service point. It can be inferred then that a repeat visit by the potential beneficiary has to start all over again with the gathering of data.

An interesting observation is the differences between what officials say the special arrangements for disabled, aged and pregnant clients are, as opposed to what the clients themselves insist, is offered in practice. Officials claim that these groups are serviced as a priority while very few clients acknowledge this is this case. One client remarked that **“there are not even wheelchairs available for someone who needs it when they arrive at the paypoint, but if there are not chairs at the site for everyone else, how do we expect that there can be special rules for some people.”**

53% of respondents collecting grants at the monitored paypoints were doing so for themselves, whilst 47% were collecting on behalf of someone else. The clients felt this system worked very well as it allowed people who did not want to migrate to banks to continue receiving their grant through the paypoint with the assistance of a relative or friend.

Accessing grants through the paypoint was the preferred method of payment by respondents interviewed at the paypoints. They felt they had **‘more control over their money’** than when they received it through the bank. Older clients felt their money was ‘safer’ when they got it through the paypoint instead of losing money to bank charges or to family members who knew their pin codes.

65 out of the 66 respondents interviewed at paypoints said they had arrived at the point with their ID and pay cards whilst only one client said she travelled with the loan shark who kept her ID and pay card while she was repaying her loan. This was a female client who collected Child Support Grants for 2 of her children at the Khujwana Store in Mopani district.

Monitors monitoring at service points found that on average, clients returned between 2 and 10 times to the same point for the same service without any definite outcome. This works against on the value for money principle that the service is meant to uphold. **We found that 93% of the returns were linked to appeals relating to Disability Grants. The highest recorded number of return visits were 8 and 10, all relating to Disability Grant appeal outcomes at the following sites; 950616, Mohlaba Cross, Mariveni and Mhangweni Stores in Mopani District.**

Of the 31% of clients who were given information about the outcome of their visit, only 22% received this information in writing. 42% claimed not to have been informed about outcome of their enquiry.

4. **Use of grants & Communication:** Our findings show that most respondents use their grant money to pay for food, rent, groceries, school uniforms and funeral policies.

Our monitoring also demonstrates that the funds received by the grant beneficiaries are used to support many more individuals than the actual grant recipient. On average, 5 people benefitted from the grant given to one client. The highest recorded number of beneficiaries using a single grant in Limpopo was 11, in the Mopani District.

In most cases (85% of respondents), the grant was the only source of income for the household. Practically all respondents at both pay- and service points reported to have received their information about the grants from either SASSA or their neighbours. Monitors found that 78% of all respondents knew which documents to bring to the paypoint, 65% knew that information was available on the receipts they carried; but only 13% of the respondents said they were actually asked to rate SASSA's service.

The majority (98%) of respondents questioned knew they could receive their money through the bank but most preferred to come to the paypoint. 85% of all respondents knew of legislative changes around the age equalisation of the State Old Age Pension and the extension of the Child Support Grant. **A worrying 90% though had no knowledge of how the Social Relief of Distress Award was administered. On a positive note, a majority (78%) of the clients interviewed felt the officials were respectful and helpful.**

Monitors Observations and Experiences

- Numerous difficulties were faced by monitors in accessing the various SASSA service sites. Monitors were reported to have said:
 - ***“SASSA officials say that they were not briefed about CMAP and know nothing about monitors that need access onto their sites.”***
 - ***“Officials do not like having the Monitors at the Pay Points, they feel intimidated and do not trust them. Security also did not want the Monitors to enter the sites and community members had to be interviewed outside. Security also treats monitors badly, not letting them onto the sites and on some points security took the questionnaires and the monitors had to stand outside.”***
 - ***“At SASSA we had a problem getting onto the grounds and setting up a meeting with the Officials.”***
 - ***“At the service point they were allowed to see people and interview but at the pay point they were not allowed access.”***
 - ***“At some points monitors were allowed to interview clients but not officials.”***

- ***“SASSA has requested a letter so that monitors can get onto the grounds, they have also requested a photo name tag so that monitors can be identified. The questionnaires need to be clarified.”***

The following are perspectives from monitors and needs to be corroborated and points to local advocacy and follow up to be done:

- “At the pay points clients are forced to stand outside of the gates and people need to wait for 6 hours at a time in the sun or rain waiting,” reported one monitor.
- “Pensioners committees are there to help people count the money but they end up assisting the officials steal and you find them afterwards counting the money.” This point was echoed by a number of the monitors in the room. Some pensioners committee experience the challenge of being allowed into the point.
- “People are being assisted in a park and in this setup there is no shelter or assistance for those who are sick or disabled. People also wait for long periods of time to be assisted,” was reported by one of the monitors.
- Many monitors reported the presence of loan sharks: “In most cases you find these loan sharks at these points where people are constantly borrowing and paying them for years. It is a very bad cycle and there are also no precautions for this in the villages.
- Some monitors reported that there were African foreign nationals who had challenges, however they were unsure what information to provide them with or who to refer them too because they were being sent from place to place. Also monitoring in areas with xenophobic tensions need to be looked at.
- One of the Monitors reported the following experience: ***“The Corner Stone Society is deducting money from people’s accounts – What happens is that they visit pensioners and the pensioners agree, Corner Stone changes officers all the time and burial is not covered. The money is being deducted from the people’s SASSA account. Corner Stone makes a stop order with the pensioners and these stop orders cannot be cancelled because these Corner Stone officials cannot be located. When people die the money cannot be claimed because this cannot be located.*”**
- Tribal authorities have looked into this and although the deduction was stopped for a period, it started again a few months later. The programme manager in the Black Sash’s Advocacy Unit advised that they would follow-up with SASSA nationally and provincially over whether this kind of agreement is legal.

Monitors’ Recommendations

The following list of recommendations was made by the province’s monitoring organisations to improve the service delivered at pay and service points. These were based on the experiences and observations of the monitors as well as the interviews done with the respondents.

Venue and Travel

- Paypoints should be available in each and every village. Some people are still travelling too far to access the services provided by SASSA.
- More seats and shelters need to be provided – especially when it is raining or hot.
- Each pay and service point needs to be secured –especially at those venues without fencing.
- Some private property owners offered their property as a paypoint. They recommend that SASSA could erect their own structure to provide the required services. However, there are sometimes conflicts of interest.
- Toilets need to be available at all SASSA pay and service points. SASSA should erect a big tent that can hold approx 1500 people in cases where there is no building/shelter.
- Disabled and senior citizens have to hire transport to the venue – regardless of distance. We recommend that “SASSA operates like the IEC and make home visits to give people their grants at their home”.

Paypoint and application processing

- Officials must conduct payments on time and arrive with enough money to fulfil their payment obligations
- Frail beneficiaries should be allowed to enter the service- or paypoint with an assistant
- Machines should be regularly serviced as they sometimes get “stuck.” Beneficiaries do not get their payments due because of the above – some get cash whilst others have to wait hours for machines to get fixed.
- The option to receive cash vs bank payments via eft transfers remains a controversial issue in Limpopo. Beneficiaries should have the final choice regarding their preferred payment option.
- Monitors must be allowed to monitor to ensure that the above is addressed.
- More staff are required at underserviced pay points. SASSA staff should be readily identifiable and should have uniforms and identification tags.

Safety and Security

- The elderly should be allowed to bring along someone they trust to help count their money if required – e.g. Pensioners Committee members in some areas.
- Payments should be made in private – not from cars or in the open – as it increases the security risk.
- Independent observers should be allowed to have access to these facilities in order to report on bad practice or maladministration.
- Security should not only be available when the paymaster arrives – there should also be protection for the beneficiaries at all times.
- Payments should be made within paypoints and not outside of the paypoints.
- Mashonisas (loan sharks) should be removed from paypoints (even at the gates). Some people reported that loan sharks operated from their cars.
- There is limited security – boundaries/red tape should be changed. Most of the paypoints are not fenced – and we would recommend that security operate both inside and outside the boundaries of the venue. Secure and well fenced paypoints are required.

- Security staff needs to be more visible – we recommend that they wear uniforms.

Communication

- We recommend that “Telkom phones be installed” so that clients can call the toll free number when they have a problem.
- SASSA should provide more information for clients in the form of handouts, flyers, CD’s and other materials accessible to all, including people who are visually impaired.
- Communication needs to be improved generally between SASSA officials and beneficiaries. From what we observed, there appears to be no official communication around termination of grants or the reasons for that termination. Information on where or how to complain is also not generally known.
- Each and every staff member should be identified and evidence of the staff and paymaster’s contact details on the receipt should be clearly stated.
- The availability of the Social Relief of Distress Award needs to be better publicised.
- The next pay date should be printed on every invoice/receipt and the name and location of the paypoint should also be put on every receipt.
- SASSA should provide information in the clients’ local language.
- The Pensioners Committees should be used to help improve communication.
- Sometimes beneficiaries give SASSA the wrong address – usually post-boxes are given and e.g. PO Box 182 is recorded as PO Box 128 – recommend home addresses are used.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE BLACK SASH

General

Comments from beneficiaries and officials to monitors that were at pay point and service points highlight a range of challenges outside of the control of SASSA – we have found this to be true all across South Africa. These include:

- The absence of Department of Home Affairs services that are located very far from many SASSA Service and Paypoints
- The stark reality of conditions at paypoints from testimonies at monitored sites. The information provided through these testimonies clearly violate the most basic norms and standards by Agencies subcontracted to render these services to people in Limpopo – these include lack of shelter, seating, water and ablution facilities.

Recommendations: Time

- We recommend the release of an updated and relevant National Norms and Standards Policy that guides the implementation of the SASSA’s and its service providers operations at all pay points and service points in all provinces.
- We further recommend the implementation of clear norms and standards which guides the operations and payment grants through mobile units and fixed pay points to ensure that beneficiaries do not wait longer than 30 minutes for their grant payment.

- We recommend that the implementation of the recommendations in all the categories below will reduce the time beneficiaries will spend at pay points and at service points.
- We recommend that SASSA engages in an education drive that alerts and create awareness of the fact that Refugees have the right to Disability, foster care and Care dependency.

Recommendations: Venue

It is essential to have an overall appraisal of whether SASSA or service providers honor the 5 km radius of bringing the service to the people. It is critical for clients and civil society organizations to know how far away are these points are, whether there are adequate mobile services available, and how frequent these services occur. We further recommend that:

- SASSA takes appropriate measures to ensure that grants are paid to beneficiaries in a dignified manner and therefore must ensure basic facilities shelter, seating, toilets, water, fencing are available at all times at all pay points and at service points.
- It is recommended that the Agency negotiate service level agreements with service providers that allow for review and standard application at all sites which will ensure that the beneficiary is maximally protected and provided for. We further recommend the contracts allow the Agency to monitor regularly and to act reasonably when a breach of contract occurs.
- The Agency must produce an assessment report on the banking and post office infrastructure that exists around fixed paypoints and in areas where the current mobile paypoints operate to measure where beneficiaries are situated in relation to this infrastructure.
- We recommend that the Agency negotiate with relevant banks, post office for reduced rates and charges to pay beneficiaries, where appropriate, and their grants through these institutions. However all charges should be borne by the Agency and not the beneficiary.
- We recommend that the Agency embarks on an effective communication strategy to educate beneficiaries of the benefits of more convenient ways to receive grants. Beneficiaries must be able to elect the payment method most convenient for beneficiaries.

Recommendations: Security

In order to minimise the need for beneficiaries, especially females, to wait outside in unprotected, unfenced and insecure areas for hours before opening of pay point sites, we recommend the following;

- SASSA should introduce a standard in the proposed Norms and Standards which ensures that beneficiaries will at all times feel safe from the time they arrive and leave a SASSA service and pay point.
- That SASSA implement the recommendations made in the section on “Time” to address the unacceptably long queues and pay special attention to this issue with regards to the waiting times at mobile service and paypoints;
- SASSA immediately prioritise and employ security guards at the sites where inadequate or no security exists.
- SASSA should arrange with the South African Police Service to monitor pay point and service sites regularly during the early mornings specifically and on the days the sites are open for business as an additional security measure. Furthermore, we recommend that SASSA arrange with the South African Police Service to monitor in the proximity of pay points regularly, as an additional security measure.
- We recommend that additional measures like patrol vehicles are employed at paypoints to patrol areas immediately outside the pay point and ensure the safety of beneficiaries when they leave the premises.

Recommendations: Transport

In order for beneficiaries to spend less money and time to reach the service points we recommend that;

- SASSA Limpopo (LP) implements a norm as part of its proposed Norms and Standards which ensures that service points are within 5 km range of beneficiaries.
- SASSA Limpopo investigates the public transport system and recommends intervention in far flung areas.
- We recommend that SASSA LP inform beneficiaries about their nearest service point through intensifying public campaigns in Limpopo to prevent beneficiaries’ spending money and time unnecessarily.
- SASSA LP must educate and communicate effectively with beneficiaries about what documents are needed for services like reviews and further to inform beneficiaries about what is required of them in order to reduce the visits to the service site for the same reason.

- We further recommend that SASSA LP prioritise and appropriately adjust its communication strategy to reach beneficiaries in more rural areas.

Recommendations: Personnel

We must acknowledge that at whilst the interviewed beneficiaries thought that SASSA officials at paypoints were well trained, there was an inadequate visible display of customer care norms. We recommend the following:

- SASSA immediately start to implements the above recommendations especially those made under heading 'Time'.
- SASSA increases staff to ensure the average waiting time of the number of beneficiaries serviced is reduced to one hour at service points to administer the new changes in regulations as well as for the review process.
- However, if Table 6 is a general reflection of staff ratios of SASSA MP /or Service Provider staff, it may reflect seriously disproportionate under- or overstaffing, that has ultimately led to poorer service that undermines the beneficiaries' dignity and the well being of staff members. The staff to beneficiary ratios varies greatly in the areas we monitored and we recommend that this discrepancy be addressed urgently.
- SASSA implements the same administrative system used in local offices at satellite offices and provides officials at service sites with laptops equipped with IGAP, SOCPEN and the relevant network connections and relevant work systems.
- Where this is already not practiced, SASSA appoints a floating official to reduce and manage queues at all sites all the time. Where no official at a service site is appointed in the interim we recommend that each official at the site play that role for at least half an hour of their time at the service point until a dedicated person is appointed.
- That all SASSA officials at all service points have identifiable name tags.
- That SASSA design and displays and distributes its customer care norms at all service points.
- Those SASSA officials are made aware of legislative and regulatory change in order for the officials to communicate the right information to clients.
- That SASSA make beneficiaries aware of legislative and regulatory changes through information materials suitable for the sites and rural areas, and in relevant languages. Photocopies of information sheets should be seriously considered if budget allocations are exhausted for printed materials and radio and other means be considered for rural areas.
- That information material should be displayed at all SASSA service sites to address standing issues such as: the validity of documentation, relevant time periods, required documentation for reviews, right to apply for Social Relief of Distress and the SASSA toll free number.
- That SASSA continues to employ officials who are able to communicate with their clients in the language of their choice.
- That all SASSA's information materials are available in all three languages and are distributed at all service points.
- That an effort is made to ensure the availability of sign-language interpreters where they are need.

Processing of grants: Recommendations

- We recommend that the application process be in line with the norms and standards of SASSA and take no more than 30 minutes to complete; and further that the verification takes place within same amount of time.
- We recommend that the same administrative support, personnel, technology infrastructure are extended to the satellite service points (on the assumption that the satellite service points are seen as an extension of the local/district offices), and that immediate efforts are made
- to increase the number of staff (formal or informal/volunteer) to enable an efficient service.
- to provide SASSA officials with appropriate technology (including laptops equipped with SOCPEN and the relevant network connections for it to operate effectively)
- to implement the same administrative system used in local offices at satellite offices.
- That SASSA and service providers clients with the option of a receipt as a matter of course for any service that was offered, since almost a quarter of interviewees indicated that they do not receive a receipt.
- We recommend that each pay point of SASSA (or service provider) ensures that beneficiaries are educated through information materials. It would then also be necessary to ensure that the receipt amount stated must be the same as the monies received in hand.

- We recommend that SASSA inform applicants of the outcome of the application in writing and not verbally, as indicated by almost 40% of the respondents. This is highly irregular and not in line with promotion of administrative justice and the constitutional requirement to be informed requires an administrative decision in writing.

Recommendations: Language and Communication

We recommend:

- That information material should be displayed at all pay points and service points to address standing issues such as: the validity of documentation, relevant time periods, required documentation, right to apply for Social Relief of Distress and the Agency's toll free number and the review process.
- That SASSA make beneficiaries aware of legislative and regulatory changes through information materials suitable for the sites and rural areas, and in relevant languages. Photocopies of information sheets should be seriously considered if budget allocations are exhausted for printed materials and radio and other means be considered for rural areas.
- That SASSA continues to employ officials who are able to communicate with their clients in the language of their choice.
- That the pay point service providers employ translators to ensure they are able to communicate with beneficiaries in their language. This is a serious problem highlighted and can attribute to the fact that the amounts of money receive in hand differs from what is on the receipt.
- That all SASSA's information materials are available in local languages and are distributed at all service points, viz. isiZulu, seSwati and seSotho or otherwise indicated.
- That an effort is made to ensure the availability of sign-language interpreters where they are needed.

Recommendations: Use of Grants

- We recommend the continued payment of grants to beneficiaries because it assists with the immediate needs of not just the direct beneficiaries but others in the household where grants are received.
- We recommend that the policy gaps that remain in the grants system be narrowed and the inclusion of more vulnerable into this safety net, such as the unemployed and the chronically ill. Specifically, we also recommend that orphaned children in the care of relatives also have access to foster care grant in the absence of any other form of grant for those children, other than CSG, as it currently is provided for.
- We understand that the Agency may not necessarily be able to implement all of these recommendations. However, these findings once again highlight the important role of the Agency as a delivery agent entrusted to effectively deliver the grants to beneficiaries with dignity, but requires massive intergovernmental support to address the range of determinants that impede and challenge access. Failing to do so not only affect the beneficiary, also the households receiving these grants. Therefore we must reiterate our recommendation that the Agency ensures that grants are paid in a dignified manner and on time.