

Social accountability as a form of active citizenry:

Insights and reflections from the Community Monitoring and Advocacy Programme (CMAP)

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BLACKSASH
MAKING HUMAN RIGHTS REAL

The concept of active citizenry

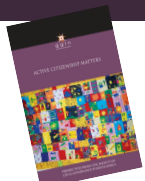
- Traditional definitions of active citizenry, mostly Western experience, distinguish between liberal, communitarian and civic republican interpretations
- Liberal - focuses on the citizen as an individual with legal rights, such as the right to equality, and within a nation state respecting the rule of law.
- Communitarian theory focuses on group identity and pursuing the common good,
- Civic republican theories, the citizen has an overarching responsibility of civic morality and participation

(Jochum et al. 2005)



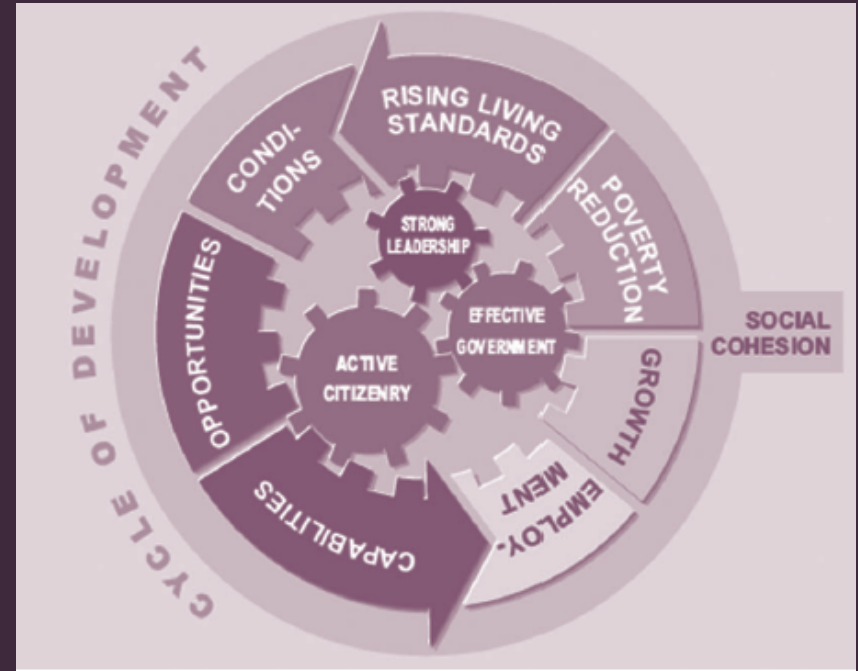
The concept of active citizenry

- UK experience shows how governments Conservative (1979–1997) promoted active citizenship as a way of discouraging reliance on the welfare state, and subsequent Labour government (1997–2010) used interpretation of active citizenship, both civic-republican and communitarian model.
- Current UK Conservative–Liberal coalition government is again promoting individual responsibility, pursuing cuts to public funding and calling for public volunteering under the banner of “Big Society” (United Kingdom Parliament 2011).
- In contrast, active citizenry in the South emphasises citizen leadership as a key element required for deepening democratic accountability: citizen leadership is promoted and consolidated through using and reclaiming participatory spaces and using the right to information (Jha et al. 2011). Thus, active citizenry in the South most closely resembles a communitarian approach.



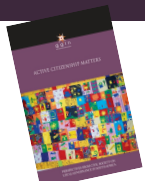
Active citizenry and the NDP

- Ambitious forecast - sets out key goals for the coming decades and “shares” responsibility for delivering its objectives with the population: ‘It is up to all South Africans to fix the future, starting today’
- Uses the term active citizenship in this context of responsibility.
- ‘ Cycle of development’ : close link between capabilities, opportunities and employment on social and living conditions, shows how ‘leadership, active citizenry and effective government can help drive development in a socially cohesive environment”



Active citizenry and the NDP

- Active citizenry a la NDP relies on government allowing citizens to participate in government processes.
- Yet the invented and State-sanctioned spaces for participation are often ineffective - became sites of fierce contests and politicisation, often in order to pander to sectoral interests.
- Civil society advocates of active citizenry have called for more channels of participation to open up at all levels of government
- Consequently, the definitions of active citizenry proposed by civil society (and this paper) generally has a more inclusive and active focus, aimed at finding ways to make the voice of the citizen heard by the relevant state institution or department.



CMAP and active citizenry

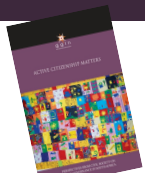
- 2010 - Black Sash, in partnership with the Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT), launched CMAP, in a bid to help improve government service delivery, with a particular focus on poor and vulnerable communities in South Africa.
- CMAP used community monitors, nominated by local organisations, to maintain a regular and disciplined presence at service delivery points, such as pension pay points and health facilities.
- Monitors recorded their observations against standardised monitoring questionnaires. Black Sash analysed the data from the questionnaires in order to advocate for improvements in service delivery at local, provincial and national levels.
- CMAP monitors participated in a total of 36 workshops, carried out 477 field visits and submitted more than 8 900 questionnaires that were developed into 44 reports.
- SASSA pay points and service points, Department of Home Affairs, primary healthcare providers (clinics) and basic services.
- Black Sash sought permission from the relevant government department, but the level of engagement and feedback was disappointing, especially from the Department of Home Affairs and the district departments of health. The lack of response from more than 280 municipalities in South Africa was even worse. However, a significant breakthrough came when the CEO of the Social Security Agency (SASSA) gave permission for monitoring at all SASSA pay points and service points.



Conclusion

Having examined “active citizenry” and contrasted perspectives and experiences of Western countries and the South with South Africa’s :

- Concept “active citizenry” needs to be broader, more inclusive and participatory.
- Views active citizenry as built on the tenet that citizens are not passive users of public services but active holders of fundamental rights.
- Provides the basis of a framework for active citizenry that works, supported by evidence-based feedback and valuable insights from those who were involved in the project.
- In a relatively small and tenuous way, able to transform the quality of service delivery at a local level - examples steeped in very different contexts + unique challenges requiring local innovations.
- Broad support and potential to make a significant contribution to independent, community-driven frontline service delivery monitoring in South Africa (followed by local advocacy).



‘One cannot remove fluff with one finger’

– Venda saying

We, the participants of this CMAP National Conference [...] recognise that accessible and quality public services are essential if we are to ensure a dignified life for all living in South Africa, and particularly for those in poor and marginalised communities, celebrate the work done by [approx] 480 Volunteer monitors from over 300 community based organisations across all nine provinces.

[...] We are committed to bring the valuable experience, skills, materials, networks and practices that have been developed by and between CMAP partners over the past two years into the process [...] remain committed and inspired to build a culture of active citizenry in South Africa.

- “Moving from CMAP as a project to a practice”

- CMAP National Conf Sept 2012

