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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we describe our experiences working with local government in South Africa on a project aimed to increase citizen participation with their local municipality. In particular the project aimed to investigate if mobile phones could be used as a platform to support dialog between residents and their municipality on water service delivery. The paper provides a critical self-evaluation of the first seventeen months of the working relationship between Rhodes University and Makana Municipality. It identifies factors that were found to be critical to the progress, and act as impedances to the progress of m-government projects. It is hoped that the findings of this paper will be useful for other researchers who are involved in community development projects at local government level

Keywords: ICTD, community development, participation, local government.

INTRODUCTION

Mobile phones have been touted as the answer for a number of developmental challenges (Fernández-Ardèvol, 2010). Yet to complete this work, there are a number of steps that are required in creating a space for the projects to begin. At the same time, the amount of research that is published in ICTD is growing, with most publications discussing the success that projects have had, with little discussion of their failings. Dodson, Sterling and Bennett note that "this lack of critical self-evaluation is common in emerging fields such as ICTD, but it is particularly problematic when community development itself is at stake" (Dodson, Sterling, & Bennett, 2012, pp., p56).

This paper presents a critical self-examination of the progress made over a seventeen month period in a project aimed at creating a platform to support increased citizen participation in local government using mobile phones. It describes the efforts undertaken over a seventeen month period to engage with local government to: access historical documents for a five year review of service delivery in the region; to access current documents (2012/2013 financial year); to present a research project to local government; and finally after local government showed interest in the project to partner with them to look at water service delivery and sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). It is hoped that the findings of this paper will be useful for other researchers who are involved in community development projects at local government level in South Africa.

BACKGROUND

In post-apartheid South Africa, local government structures are designed to offer meaningful opportunities for all residents to participate "by placing more power and resources at a closer and more easily-influenced level of government" (Mogale, 2005). The proximity of government to those who elected them is designed to provide increased motivation for participation. On top of this, the South African constitution requires local government to "provide democratic and accountable government for local communities; to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner; to promote social and economic development; to promote a safe and healthy environment; and, to encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government" (Government of South Africa, 1996, p. Act 151(151) of 1996). Thus local government structures are both designed to enable, and mandated to facilitate service delivery and participation in order to realize the democratic dream.

Despite these structures that have been put in place, South Africa is plagued by problems of poor service delivery. A recent study found that in one year, over 900 service delivery protests were held (Booysen, 2007). Buccus and Mathekga (2007) argue that local government institutions continue to fall short of their constitutional mandate because government's top-down technocratic approach emphasizes local government as a vehicle for service delivery at the cost of (and instead of simultaneously) emphasizing local government as a vehicle for participation.
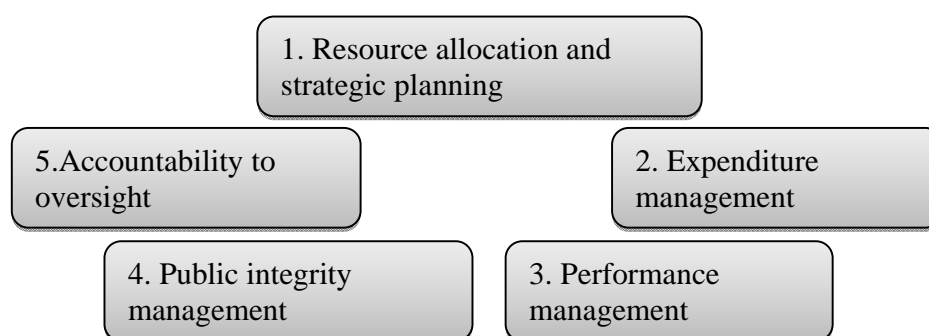
This project aims investigate the viability of the use of mobile phones as a platform to facilitate evidence-based engagement with local government in order to promote increased accountability, improved service delivery and meaningful participation. This section provides background to the research described in this paper. It begins by describing SAM, the social accountability monitoring methodology used in this research for monitoring local government. It then provides background information on Makana Municipality, the area that this pilot study is being undertaken. Finally, it provides an overview of the MobiSAM project.

SAM Methodology

The Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) methodology is one of the most rigorous and successful methodologies, developed by the Public Service Accountability Monitor in South Africa. It offers civic actors a rights-based and evidence-based framework for understanding and participating in government service delivery processes. It is premised on the argument that social accountability is the:

> *right to obtain justifications and explanations for the way in which public resources are managed (whether by public officials or private service providers) and to obtain justifications for the way in which these resources serve to progressively realize people's human rights (in particular their socio-economic rights). This definition requires that officials take corrective action in response to instances of the ineffective use or abuse of resources in order to prevent their recurrence (Centre for Social Accountability, 2011).*

The way in which public resources can be effectively and accountably managed is through the implementation of a social accountability system consisting of five inter-dependent processes which map onto the public resource management system, shown in Figure 1 below.

1. Resource allocation and strategic planning

5. Accountability to oversight

2. Expenditure management

4. Public integrity management

3. Performance management

Figure 1: Social Accountability Monitoring system

This figure shows that a municipality needs to (1) allocate resources to planned activities. By participating in budget and planning discussions, residents can influence how available resources are prioritized against their most pressing needs. The municipality then needs to (2) spend the resources by (3) implementing the activities that were planned. When there is deviation from the planned activities (without clear justification) through corruption or mismanagement, corrective action should be taken (4) and, finally, (5) the municipality should account for its performance to oversight bodies. This in turn can impact the resource allocation and strategic planning (1) for the subsequent iteration of the cycle.

The methodology provides basic tools for citizens to engage in each process by interrogating the government documents the processes produce (including budgets, plans, financial reports, performance reports, audit findings and oversight committee minutes). Equipped with both findings and an understanding of how government processes (should) operate, citizens are able to engage in evidence-based advocacy, demanding justifications and explanations for government performance and, where necessary, corrective action. This methodology provides residents with opportunities to meaningfully participate across national and provincial levels of government. It has been successfully used by civic actors in several SADC countries(Policy Forum, 2010), but as of yet has not been implemented at local government level.

Despite its successful use, there are two limitations to the SAM methodology. Firstly, because the tools focus on the analysis of government documents, the methodology lends itself to desk-based research and (for processes 2 to 4) post-hoc analysis. While oversight bodies are often similarly limited in their ability to hold government accountable, meaningful citizen engagement in government processes would be further strengthened if desk-based analysis was complemented with real-time fieldwork monitoring and research. Secondly, in order to use these tools and to apply the rigorous methodology, citizens require a degree of literacy and specialist analytical skills that often exclude those most affected by service delivery, the poor and marginalized. There is therefore a need to develop additional tools to complement the SAM methodology.

Context

Makana Municipality is situated in the Eastern Cape, one of South Africa's poorest provinces. The 4,379 km^2 municipality is home to an estimated 70 000 people or 16 975 households. The area experiences a high unemployment rate (67.9%) and low levels of education (42.3% of Makana residents have received primary level education or none at all). The result is that 24.2% of households live below the poverty line. Efforts to alleviate poverty are hampered by a sluggish economy and there is an increasing dependency on social grants, with half of all Makana residents receiving some form of government grant in 2009 (Makana Municipality, 2011).

This places a significant burden on the municipality, particularly in delivering basic services. The municipality is responsible for (amongst other things) municipal health services; municipal roads; sanitation; electricity reticulation; potable water; refuse removal, refuse dumps and solid waste disposal; child care facilities; and, local tourism.(Municipal Systems Act, No. 32 of 2000). Despite a R266 million budget in 2009/10 (USD 26.2 million) (Makana Municipality, 2010), only 21% of Makana residents have access to portable water and only 35% to sanitation (Makana Municipality, 2011).

The municipality was recently ranked as the third worst performing municipality in the Eastern Cape Province, with 2,507 instances of misspending (R19.8 million), making up 9% of the total misspending in the province (Mini, 2011a, 2011b). The supreme audit institution has repeatedly found the municipality unable to adequately account for the use of public resources. In 2011/2012, the Auditor-General could not obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to support over R48 million of municipal expenditure (USD 4.7 million) (Mngxitama-Diko, 2013b). This is the fourth successive disclaimer that Makana has received (Mngxitama-Diko, 2013a), meaning that the Auditor-General could not obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence for municipal expenditure.

The situation in Makana municipality is comparable to most local municipalities across South Africa, where "local government capacities are in short supply and financial sustainability is frequently in doubt. This hampers total government ability to perform traditional functions such as service delivery and regulation, collecting rates, user charges and fees" (Mogale, 2005).

This is not a problem that is unique to South Africa, but has been demonstrated on numerous occasions and across a number of different contexts. A recent cross-country, empirical

evaluation found similar evidence across developing countries around the world (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2000).

MobiSAM

MobiSAM is a three year research project, funded by the Ford Foundation. Broadly, the project was divided into three phases. In the first phase, a number of background activities were undertaken: a five year review on Makana's performance in service delivery was performed; a prototype polling application was developed; and local a training manual on SAM at local government level was started.

In the second phase, a local media house was mentored in the use of SAM at local government level. It was initially intended that the second phase would also include the piloting of the polling application to support the SAM. The final phase involved analysis of the impact of MobiSAM and publication and dissemination of findings. The remainder of this section describes the changes that were made to the MobiSAM project in response to the realities of the current situation working with local government.

The MobiSAM project has undergone a number of evolutions in response to factors that were experienced in its implementation in the field. This section describes the broad shifts in the positioning of the project. For ease of reference, the versions of MobiSAM will be referred to as MobiSAM v0 – MobiSAM v2.

In the original proposal, MobiSAM v0, it was assumed that given its success at provincial level and in other SADC countries, SAM would be possible at the local government level. It also assumed that technology could be used to add real-time data to the more traditional desk-based research that is used by the methodology. The project initially targeted each of the processes in the SAM system. It was envisioned that MobiSAM could be used to support evidence-based engagement with the following processes:

- Resource allocation and strategic planning. A key component of strategic planning mandated by the Municipal Financial Management Act (MFMA) (Champanis & Rivett, 2012), Section 23 1(a) and 2 is to allocate resources according to the needs of residents. It was proposed that MobiSAM be used to perform a needs analysis so that needs could

be identified and prioritized by residents. The aim of this was to strengthen plans and budgets.

- Expenditure management and Performance management. It was proposed that MobiSAM be used: to perform citizen satisfaction surveys; as a tool for social auditing; and for monitoring service delivery. The aim of this was to evaluate performance and expenditure against budgets and planned activities, strengthening service delivery.

- Public integrity. It was proposed to use MobiSAM as a tool to report corruption, abuse and misuse of resources.   The aim of this was to improve accountability of municipal employees and provide evidence that could be used as a basis for corrective action.

- Accountability to oversight. It was proposed to use MobiSAM to evaluate the effectiveness of oversight bodies and evaluate the responses of municipality to the oversight committee.

For more information on this original proposal, refer to (Thinyane & Coulson, 2012).

The first shift in the project was to approach the pilot from the perspective of individual service delivery projects (identified in planning and budget documentation) rather than to attempt to begin with SAM and attempt to enhance SAM findings. This shift was due to the availability of accurate socio-economic baseline data. For the needs analysis to be significant, participants would have to be selected to be representative of the Makana population. This was determined to be impossible to implement as there was no existing socio-economic baseline data to select the sample against. At the time that this project was being implemented, the last census data was taken in 2001 which was considered to be too outdated. While subsequently a census has been performed (2011), the results were not available at the time that they were required.

In MobiSAM v1, four to five service delivery projects were to be identified and monitored by the recipients (and therefore beneficiaries) of those projects in Grahamstown. Service delivery projects were to be selected based on the following constraints:
easy for the lay-person to monitor the service

- sufficient detailed information to monitor

- clear responsibility of Makana

- ability to generate stories/content

- clearly articulated service that is easy to identify who the recipients are

- geographically contained

- service delivery project should be scheduled for second half of financial year

Examples of projects that would meet these constraints are: installation of street lighting on B Street; eradication of bucket system on D Street. It was envisioned that recipients of these service delivery projects would have a self-interest in monitoring their implementation, making it more likely that they would participate in the project. This also solved the problems faced by MobiSAM v0 as the recipients of each service delivery project were few enough to allow a baseline study to be performed of each area.

The most significant challenge to MobiSAM v1 was the availability and quality of municipal documents. It was originally proposed that service delivery projects would be identified by analyzing the municipality's 2012/13 budget and planning documentation. However, it proved difficult to firstly access this documentation, and secondly to identify the relevant information. In order to access the required level of detail to ensure in-depth monitoring of key service delivery projects it was found to be necessary to access the service level agreements signed between the municipality and the contracted service providers. These documents were classified as private by the municipality and therefore were not available to the public. On top of this, after consultation with members of council and directorate heads within the municipality, it was found that documents such as the service delivery and budget implementation plan (SDBIP) were completed (as mandated by MFMA(Champanis & Rivett, 2012)), but were not followed. It was therefore impossible to select any service delivery projects in the 2012/2013 financial year.

As mentioned above, the primary hindrance to selecting service delivery project was that there was not enough information on individual service delivery projects. MobiSAM v2 moved away from this and instead focused on services that all municipalities are required to deliver: water, electricity, and sanitation (Government of South Africa, 1996). Given that there is an on-going water crisis in Makana (De Dominicis, 2013; De Waal, 2013), it was decided to focus on the issue of water. In this version of MobiSAM, the use of the polling application has been separated from the monitoring methodology: while SAM focused on water holistically, as set out

in budget and planning documentation, it was proposed the application be used to gather service delivery information not included in the documentation – e.g. number and length of outages, water quality, etc. While the two complement each other, it is not the original idea of using the application to enhance SAM.

A web-based polling solution was developed at the beginning of this project, to be used in conjunction with the SAM methodology to gather information from registered users, to support evidence based engagement with local government. The polling system, also called MobiSAM, allows registered users to create polls and send them to other users. Poll responses can take the form of a variety of different types: Likert scale responses, yes / no answers, text based feedback, and customized select-from-a-list type response. Results are then collated in real time and visualized using pie charts, bar charts, and heat maps.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The main research question that was addressed in this study was: what are the factors that assisted and hindered a participative study within local government in South Africa. In order to answer this question, the following subsidiary questions were posed:

- What factors do team members believe were critical to the success of the formation of the partnership with local government?

- What factors to team members believe hampered the success of the formation of the partnership with local government?

The remainder of this section describes the remainder of the research design: methodology, participants, survey instruments, and method and analysis.

Methodology

This research uses a qualitative, case study methodology, which is defined as a "strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon in its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (Robson, 1993). A case study is also the most appropriate for studying "many variable-small N" types of cases (Liphart, 1971) such as the one described in this research.

Participants

The core MobiSAM team participated in this study: Project Director (PD), Project Coordinator (PC), and MobiSAM Mentor (MM). The PD comes from a technical background, with a PhD in Computer Science. Her research interests are in mobile computing, with a particular focus on the use of mobile devices in ICT for development.

The PC has a background in drama, and is well-known throughout Makana Municipality. He has vast experience working with local, provincial and national organizations.

The MM has an honors degree in philosophy and a Masters in Participation, Power and Social Change. In terms of employment, she worked for five years at the Centre for Social Accountability (CSA), first as a researcher and then heading up the training programme. In her position as Head of Training she was responsible for designing and delivering training to civic actors in Sub-Saharan Africa which empowered them to monitor and hold their governments to account using the innovative Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) methodology developed by the CSA.

Survey Instruments

In this study, a questionnaire and follow up interviews were used to solicit information from participants. The questionnaire consisted of open ended questions, aimed to capture participants' perspective of factors that have hindered and contributed to the success of the engagement with local government. Another space was provided for participants to detail their personal interaction with the municipality. Where necessary for clarification, follow up interviews were used.

Method and analysis

Participants were provided with a one page questionnaire to complete. Once questionnaires were returned to the researcher, responses were analyzed. Where required, a follow up interview was used to clarify responses.

Responses were analyzed thematically, and are presented in the next section according to the themes that arose.

TIMELINE OF INTERACTIONS

This section describes the timeline of interactions between the MobiSAM team and Makana Municipality, as described by the three participants in the survey. The participants engaged with Makana Municipality around four different issues: to access historical documents for the five year review; to access current 2012/2013 documents; to present the MobiSAM project to Makana Municipality; and to partner with Makana with water and signing the MoU. The timeline is summarized below in Table 1.

Date	Intervention
March – June 2012	Access historical documents
June – Sept 2012	Access current documents
Sept – Nov 2012	Attempts to present to council
Jan 2013	Met with Acting Municipal Manager who agreed to participate
Jan – March 2013	Attempt to sign MoU
March 27, 2013	MoU tabled and passed by council
27 March – 31 May 2013	Attempt to sign MoU
31 May 2013	MoU signed by Municipal Manager and Registrar
13 June 2013 – cont.	Participate in pilot study

Figure 1:Timeline of interactions

Accessing historical documents

In March 2012, the MobiSAM team began by trying to access the following municipal documents for the five year period from 2007/2008 to 2011/2012: integrated development plans (IDPs), the final approved budgets, service delivery and budget implementation plans (SDBIPs), and annual reports. These documents were required to perform a five year review of Makana's service delivery performance. Although these documents are mandated to be in the public

sphere (Champanis & Rivett, 2012) they were not all available on the National Treasury or municipal websites. In order to obtain copies of these documents, the MM visited the municipal offices on a weekly basis for a month to request the documents. After this period, she asked the PC to help source the documents from the municipality. The PC is originally from the area and has contacts in many different spheres so it was hoped that he would be more successful at this task. On 29 May the PC was told that to obtain the documents he would have to get an official request from Rhodes University. An official request was made and delivered to the municipality but after a couple more weeks there was still no success at obtaining documents. The PC was told that this was because letters were addressed to the wrong person; and to the wrong division of the municipality. On 12 June the secretary of the Acting Municipal Manager at the time tried to help provide access to the documents that were requested, but could only provide documents that were already accessible from the National Treasury or municipal websites.

The final outcome of these efforts was that none of the outstanding documents were made available by Makana.

Accessing current documents

The second engagement with Makana marked the shift between MobiSAM v0 and MobiSAM v1. At this point in time (June to July 2012), the MobiSAM team refocused their efforts into only accessing current planning documents (budget, SDBIP and IDP). It was intended that these documents be used to identify individual service delivery projects.

In June 2012, a local media house attended a council meeting where the current year's budget and IDP were tabled. The local media house provided a copy of the documents to the MobiSAM team. The PC attended the next council meeting where the SDBIP was tabled. At this meeting we has told that he was unable to access a copy of the document, but to return the next day to collect it (19 June). For the next month, the PC kept going to the municipal offices to obtain a copy of the SDBIP and he was continually denied access to the document. On 18 July members of the opposition party in the council were approached in an attempt to obtain a copy of the SDBIP but they could not provide it to him. On 27 July the MM was granted a meeting with the Acting Municipal Manager who promptly emailed the document to her. The MM notes that "he claims the delay is because it [the SDBIP] was only just finalized by the Mayor". One month

after the document was tabled by Council in the meeting, the final outcome of this engagement was that access was granted to the document.

Unfortunately, after reading the document, the MobiSAM team noted that there were huge inconsistencies in the services and the approved budgets described in the SDBIP. The months of August and September were spent requesting clarification on the SDBIP, with team members visiting municipal offices, emailing, and calling multiple times a week but with no success. When municipal officials did respond, they referred the MM and PC from department to department.

Late in September, the MM met with the Acting Head of Parks and Recreation to discuss a particular service delivery project that was described in the SDBIP. The MM said that although very helpful, this municipal official explained that the "SDBIP is not used as a management document and he won't be implementing the projects identified in the document". The MM found that the SDBIP was made out of obligation, and very few of the projects specified in the SDBIP were intended to be completed. The bulk of the service delivery projects that were going to be completed in the financial year were not mentioned in any of the documents, and would therefore be impossible to monitor.

At this point in time the MobiSAM team changed their approach to monitoring individual service delivery projects. Instead of following the SDBIP, they monitored municipal websites and regional newspapers for tenders. The reasoning behind this was that if a tender was released, then the municipality intended to complete a particular project. Tender specification documents would also then provide more project-specific information that was unavailable in the SDBIP. Unfortunately, after contacting the municipality for tender specification documents, the MobiSAM team were told that these documents were considered classified and would not be released to the team.

The final outcome of this engagement with the municipality was access to the requested SDBIP, but the finding that the document itself, nor any other document, could be used to provide information to monitor individual service delivery projects.

Presentation to Council

After meeting with the Acting Head of Parks and Recreation in September 2012, the team was encouraged by how excited he was by the MobiSAM application. He suggested that the team contact the Council to request an opportunity to present MobiSAM at the next council meeting. He saw a number of ways that the project could benefit his department, and thought that other departments may find it useful too. He gave the MM a list of contacts within the municipality to contact in order to arrange to appear at the next council meeting.

For the next two months, the MobiSAM team tried first to be allowed to present at council meetings, and then to have a letter of introduction of the project tabled for the meetings. Unfortunately, even with the list of contact details and the help of the Acting Head of Parks and Recreation, neither of these requests was granted.

Partnering with Makana

The PD notes that in December 2012 it seemed that they finally made a breakthrough with Makana Municipality. The team was put in touch with a Masters student who had experience working with a different municipality in the Eastern Cape. He had successfully arranged a meeting for the team with the Acting Municipal Manager for early January. On 9th January the PD and MM met with the Acting Municipal Manager, who also held the roles of City Engineer and Director of Technical and Infrastructure Division. In that meeting they presented the MobiSAM concept to the municipality which was warmly received. The PD noted that "when we went to meet with the acting municipal manager I wanted to make sure that we weren't there trying to push a particular technological solution, but to see if the municipality could recognize a need for themselves in their communication with residents". At the meeting the Acting Municipal Manager said that what would help him most would be a way to easily get feedback from residents, and then respond to them via SMS about scheduled or unplanned water outages. The MobiSAM team then demonstrated the MobiSAM application to the municipality, who came up with a list of additional features that Makana would like to see in MobiSAM. These include:

- Capture of additional information such as address in registration process to simplify the process of sending plumbers / water technicians out to investigate reported water outages

- Ability to respond to individual registered residents via SMS after report of a water outage

- Ability to select groups of registered residents (by suburb, or by city) and respond to them via SMS to communicate events such as unplanned / planned water outages

- Visualizations should support drill down technique to provide municipality with more details on demand.

After the meeting, the Acting Municipal Manager requested that the MobiSAM team send him a Memorandum of Understanding that could be tabled for the next council meeting the following week, in order for the municipality to approve the terms of the relationship between Rhodes University and Makana Municipality. Two days after the meeting the PD sent the MoU to the Acting Municipal Manager and then waited for feedback on the results of the council meeting. From 11 January until 27 March, Makana Municipality made no progress with signing the MoU. The PD stated "It was really disheartening. Every week I followed the same procedure. I called the Acting Municipal Manager on his cell phone and his office phone at least once per day. I emailed at least two or three times a week. I sat in the reception to his office at least once per week, waiting for him to walk past. And I left messages, printed copies of the MoU, and business cards with his secretary at least once per week. But nothing worked". When asked why she thought this happened, the PD said "the Acting Municipal Manager is so overworked. He holds three full time positions in the municipality and so really only has time to respond to the biggest fires. We tried to make our own 'fires' three times: we set deadlines for the municipality to sign the MoU or we said we'd pull out. Not surprisingly, each time a deadline loomed, we would hear back from the municipality telling us that the MoU would definitely be discussed in the next council meeting, and to get ready for a signing ceremony".

On 27 March, the MoU was tabled and passed by the council. Once one week had passed after the MoU was passed and not signed, the PD started questioning the Acting Municipal Manager when the document would be signed: "I called the municipality maybe three or four times per day for 3 weeks, but each time it went to a full voicemail box where I couldn't even leave a message. I emailed a couple of times a week and I stopped by the office at least twice a week. I couldn't understand what they problem was now, as it [the MoU] had been passed by council now". On 29 April the Municipality contacted Rhodes University to discuss the MoU. Dates

were made for the signing and were changed a number of times over the period of a month. On 31 May, the MoU was signed between Rhodes University and Makana Municipality. This document commits the two organizations to undertake a joint pilot study for the period of one year. Amongst other commitments, the one that affects this project the most is that Makana Municipality committed to answering any reports made using MobiSAM within the period of one working day.

Since signing the MoU, the PD noted that the relationship between the institutions was still erratic: "At some stages, staff at Makana seem really excited about using MobiSAM. Then weeks go by without any response from them, and then they get excited again … I have found that the heads of divisions (who I have to talk to in order for them to give me permission to train their staff) are the worst of them all. They make appointments and never keep them. When chatting with X about this, she said that her boss uses a diary to make appointments, but doesn't ever consult the diary in order to keep them. This makes it extremely hard to get any work done". The PD said that in the three month period from 13 June to 13 September, she kept a log of all meetings that were arranged. Of the seventeen appointments made with Makana staff in this period, only six of them had been kept by the municipal staff (35%). "This would make getting any work done really difficult, and the saddening thing is that it is not just appointments with people external to the municipality, some staff members have told me that this behavior is common internally as well".

DISCUSSION

The description of the four engagements with Makana Municipality may sound disheartening, but there are still lessons that can be learnt from MobiSAM's interactions. This section describes these lessons, first discussing the impedances, and then turning to success factors (summarized in Table 2). This is then followed by an overall discussion.

Challenges	Success factors
Lack of organizational support from the municipality	Leveraging other role players' relationships
Closed attitudes towards public participation	Newsworthiness of the problem that is to be solved
Lack of access to, and quality of documents	Excitement towards potential of intervention

Figure 2: Challenges and success factors

Impedances to progress

Broadly, the primary impedance mentioned by all three team members was lack of organizational support from the municipality. The PD stated that "it seemed that every time we contacted them, they interacted with us from a place of suspicion and took a very defensive stance". She noted that regardless of the request they made from the municipality, whether it was for a copy of minutes from a public council meeting, to a meeting with a member of council, they were met with such suspicion. "It made it sound like they had something to hide", she said.

Using the terminology of 'invented' and 'invited' spaces (Brown, Marsden, & Rivett, 2012; Rivett & Loudon, 2010), the MM notes that "despite legislation institutionalizing the right of residents to participate in local government processes, the municipality remains closed to meaningful participation. Spaces into which residents are invited are extremely limited and the impact of participation is highly questionable, with Indabas and Road Shows often telling residents of the municipality's plans rather than inviting meaningful participation and a willingness to take on board the views/ideas of residents. Created [Invented] spaces have been equally ineffective – despite protests and meetings between residents and municipal officials, the water crisis in Grahamstown persists with very little visible corrective action taken by the municipality".

Following from this discussion on municipality's closed attitude towards 'invented' spaces, team members also mentioned the unavailability of municipal officials: to provide justifications and explanations where documentation was vague or inconsistent; and to liaise with regarding

presentation to council or partnering with the municipality. The PD noted that "I was visiting the Acting Municipal Manager's office so frequently, and being told so often that he would return my calls, that his secretaries started getting embarrassed at the lack of communication from the municipality's side".

And finally, team members also pointed to issues with access to, and quality of documents that were mandated by the Constitution (Government of South Africa, 1996) and MFMA (Champanis & Rivett, 2012) to be in the public sphere. The MM stated that "Makana Municipality's documents were of a very poor quality, and often did not conform to regulatory requirements or templates. The lack of detail in these documents made it difficult to understand planned projects or budget line items and municipal officials were not open to providing more detailed information … In addition to the above, it became apparent that the documents were not produced to be meaningful management documents, but rather in an attempt to comply with regulatory requirements that budget and planning documents be produced. For this reason, using planning documents to identify projects to monitor became a meaningless exercise, as there was very little intention to implement many of the projects set out in the municipality's strategic plan".

Success factors

The PD stated that "above all else, the most important critical success factor we found in this project was leveraging other role players' relationship with the municipality as a means of introduction for our project. We had tried for months to access municipal officials through emails, phone conversations, and dropping by the municipal offices. The first real traction we got with them was when we were introduced by other researchers in Makana".

Secondly, both the MM and the PD found that the newsworthiness of the problem (water service delivery) became critical to interest and participation from Makana residents. The training of local media in the SAM methodology fuelled this interest by Makana residents, who then in turn protested more about water service delivery in the area.

From a technology perspective, municipal officials seemed excited about the potential for the use of mobile phones to help support a dialogue between residents and their local government. It is important to see however that this excitement did not translate into any support in formalizing

the partnership between Rhodes University and Makana Municipality. As found by Banga, Liesman, Meulensteen, and Wiemer (2009) organizations must support innovation, "without this backing, budgets and new line items will not be approved and technology champions, who the research showed were vital to the promotion of new technology, will not be able to find the support or buy-in they need…".

Overall Discussion

Aware of on-going research into problems with technology driven projects (such as that described in (Dodson, et al., 2012)), the PD said she had been cognizant throughout each re-conceptualization of the project that the technology should not drive the project "even though the project is aimed at identifying if a particular technology can be used to enhance participation in local government. We've known from the start that this is multi-disciplinary research and technology is only part of both the problem and the solution".

One issue that two team members mentioned was the fact that it had taken six months from the for the MoU to be signed by the municipality. One key issue that the MoU stipulated was that Makana Municipality had to respond to reported water outages using the system within a given period of time. MobiSAM team members believe this is critical to the success of the project because it brings up the dialog aspect of the use of the technology. If there is no response when a water outage is reported, then residents will stop using the technology. The PD expanded on this saying "the problems faced in the municipality are not primarily about a lack of communication – this is another problem on top of the poor maintenance of basic infrastructure. It will be interesting to see what change MobiSAM can make, and how much residents will value the increases in communication that MobiSAM provides. MobiSAM can't fix the water, but it can at least support the municipality in giving us warning when there will be problems ahead".

In similar research looking at the use of PDAs by NGOs, Banga, Liesman, Mueulensteen, and Wiemer found that "when the right technology components are used, combined with the other key determinants: funding, technical support, training, and good attitudes, technology can support programs more efficiently and improve program effectiveness significantly" (2009). This research poses that there are other key determinants that are required to improve program effectiveness significantly in the context of engaging with local government in South Africa.

Firstly, a local municipality that is available in both 'invented' and 'invited' spaces. And secondly, a local municipality that functions according to regulatory requirements and templates.

CONCLUSION

This paper has provided a critical self-evaluation of the success of a three year research project investigating the use of mobile phones for increased citizen participation in local government. It has identified the factors that team members believe contributed to the success of the initial stages of the project, as well as the hindrances to the project. The critical success factors found in this project were: leveraging other role players' relationships with local government; newsworthiness of service delivery projects; and potential that the proposed solution offered to municipal officials. The primary impedances were: lack of organizational support; the municipality's closed attitude towards public participation; and access to, and quality of municipal documents.

It is hoped that this paper will help other researchers avoid the pitfalls associated with participating with local government in South Africa.

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