

1-2 December  
**2025**

# NATIONAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE 2025

*Southern Sun  
O.R. Tambo,  
Kempton Park*

**Reimagining Developmental Local Government:  
New Approaches to Legacy Challenges**

**NATIONAL RESEARCH CONFERENCE REPORT**



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## ACRONYMS

Acronym	Description
ABC	Asset Based Community
ABCD	Asset-Based Community Development
ACD	Active Change Drivers
AG	Auditor-General
API	Application Programming Interfaces
CBM	Citizen-Based Monitoring
COGTA	Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
DAG	Development Action Group
EC	Equality Collective
ESA	Engage South Africa
EU	European Union
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IA	Integrity Action
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IGR	Intergovernmental Relations
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KT	Kagiso Trust
L&D	Learning and Development
MayCo	Mayoral Committee
MPAC	Municipal Public Accounts Committee
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PARI	Public Affairs Research Institute
PMS	Performance Management System
SAAPAM	South African Association of Public Administration and Management
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SDBIP	Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan
UNISA	University of South Africa

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UP	University of Pretoria
UJ	University of Johannesburg
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The South African Local Government Association (SALGA), in collaboration with its research and academic partners, convened a national conference that brought together municipalities, researchers, and intergovernmental relations (IGR) stakeholders to reflect on the theme “Reimagining Developmental Local Government: New Approaches to Legacy Challenges.” A call for papers and provocations was issued, and an impressive range of submissions received. The conference took place on 1–2 December 2025 in Johannesburg. The conference provided a platform for engagement with the findings and recommendations emerging from the COMPACT project, alongside other research initiatives that examined accountability, citizen participation, and development planning within local government. Through dialogue, reflection, and knowledge exchange, participants deliberated on governance challenges and explored innovative, practical responses to strengthen local government.

The COMPACT programme, jointly implemented by the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), SALGA, and Integrity Action (IA), was co-funded by the European Union. Since its inception in April 2022, the project sought to enhance accountability through strengthened public participation protocols within South African local government. As the project approached its conclusion in January 2026, it generated a significant body of action research, tools, and evidence-based recommendations informed by work undertaken in 12 partner municipalities. Building on these achievements, COMPACT aimed to influence decision-makers and municipalities by sharing actionable insights aimed at improving participatory governance and accountability practices.

The conference provided a platform for researchers, policymakers, and local government practitioners to engage and reflect on research findings within the context of ongoing political, legislative, and institutional

changes in the sector. Participants deliberated on how these insights could inform the future trajectory of local government and contribute to more responsive, inclusive, and accountable municipal governance.

The objectives of the conference were to:

- Reflect on the COMPACT action research, with particular emphasis on the recommendations contained in the COMPACT Consolidated Technical Findings Report.
- Bring together diverse contributions demonstrating how evidence is being used to address challenges, improve performance, and inform policy at the local level.
- Encourage peer learning and the sharing of good practices to strengthen community participation and accountability in municipalities.
- Provide a platform for local government researchers to share findings on accountability, citizen participation, and development planning with municipalities and other stakeholders.
- Advocate for the institutionalisation of the COMPACT tools within municipal systems to support their systematic integration into local governance frameworks.

This report provides an overview of the key insights that emerged from the conference, highlighting key insights, evidence-based perspectives, and practical considerations for strengthening accountability, participation, and developmental local government.

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## DAY 1: Facilitated by Winnie Dhlamlenze, SALGA



## 2. OPENING AND WELCOME | Luncedo Njezula: Executive Manager OCEO, SALGA



Mr Luncedo Njezula opened the COMPACT National Conference 2025 and expressed his privilege in addressing delegates at such a pivotal moment for South Africa's local government sector. He reminded the delegates that this year marks 30 years since South Africa's first democratic local government elections, a milestone that calls not only for celebration but for honest reflection. "It's hard to believe that three decades

have passed," he noted, "and while we have witnessed profound change, this moment invites us to consider both our achievements and the challenges still before us".

Mr Njezula spoke about the collective process of revisiting the 1998 White Paper on Local Government, a foundational document that shaped the architecture of developmental local government. He highlighted that the anniversary provides an opportunity to examine how far the nation has come since the reforms of the 1990s and to confront the persisting gaps between the ideals of policy and lived realities in communities, especially around responsiveness, accountability, and citizen engagement.

Anchored by the conference theme, "Reimagining Developmental Local Government: New Approaches to Addressing Legal and Governance Challenges", Mr. Njezula emphasised that this is not a time to merely identify problems. Instead, he called for informed, actionable change that positions local government structures as more inclusive, responsive, and accountable.

He highlighted the important role of the COMPACT Project (co-funded by the European Union), which since 2022 has been focused on strengthening accountability and enhancing participatory governance. The project's research, tools, and recommendations form a key pillar of the conference discussions. Mr Njezula stressed that this gathering provides a platform to share insights, interrogate lessons learned, and collectively shape the future of more effective and equitable local governance. He extended a warm welcome to the diverse stakeholders in attendance, which include research partners, civic organisations, municipal leaders, policymakers, and practitioners, acknowledging their role in driving collaborative solutions. Their collective expertise, he said, is what makes it possible to bridge policy and practice in meaningful ways.

In closing Mr Njezula pointed to the findings of the COMPACT Programme which illuminate both the barriers that hinder public participation and the opportunities that can be harnessed to strengthen democracy at the local level. His message was clear: the journey ahead demands partnership, innovation, and commitment to the principles that underpin developmental local government.

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## 3. SETTING OF SCENE

| Dr Sithembile Mbete:  
Executive Director, PARI



Dr Sithembile Mbete began by taking delegates back to the origins of South Africa's local government system. She highlighted that local government was deliberately designed to be the sphere closest to the people the part of the state that interacts most directly with citizens and embodies co-governance and public participation.

Quoting a councillor she once interviewed, she reminded attendees that “we can spend our days thinking about national issues, but we all go to sleep in a ward.” It is at the ward level, she emphasised, where people experience democracy most tangibly: whether water runs in their taps, whether they can get to work easily, whether robots and streetlights function, and whether their neighbourhoods feel safe.

She rooted her analysis in Section 152 of the Constitution, which outlines the objects of local government to provide

democratic and accountable governance, ensure service delivery, promote development, create a safe and healthy environment, and critically, encourage community involvement. Yet, she noted, the daily experience of many South Africans is far from this aspiration.

Dr Mbete outlined the reality:

- Local government remains difficult to access for ordinary people.
- Participation processes have increasingly become tick-box exercises, worsened by the shift to virtual meetings where meaningful engagement is often bypassed.
- There is limited knowledge not only among communities but also among councillors, ward committees, and even officials about what the law requires and how participation should work.

Against this backdrop, she explained the rationale for the COMPACT Project, which sought to examine participation in municipal development and budgeting processes, both for accountability and to understand whether community priorities genuinely shape decision-making. The research findings revealed deep systemic challenges, including weak institutionalisation of participation and the exclusion of key groups most notably youth.

She pointed to the rise of service delivery protests, especially ahead of local government elections, as evidence that young people are not apolitical but “simply rejecting formal participation processes that exclude them”. The protests, often accompanied by frustration and unrest, reflect citizens' desperation to be heard.

To address these gaps, the COMPACT Programme developed a suite of tools, citizen-based monitoring systems digital platforms for tracking municipal plans, civic education materials, and collaborative platforms for problem-solving. Over the past year, these tools were piloted in 12 municipalities, generating new insights into what strengthens participation and what continues to hinder it. Some findings reinforced earlier research while others challenged assumptions and revealed new complexities in how communities engage with local governance.

Dr Mbete emphasised that while the EU-funded project formally concludes in January 2026, the work is far

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from over. Partners are committed to continuing pilots, refining tools, and embedding participatory practices more broadly across the country. She noted that the review of the White Paper on Local Government presents a critical opportunity for these innovations to influence policy and shape the next 30 years of the local governance system.

In closing, she connected South Africa's challenges to a global crisis of representative democracy. From Latin America to Asia, Europe, and even the United States, people are questioning whether democracy can feed them, keep them warm, and keep them safe. The work of strengthening participation, accountability, and trust at the local level, is essential to answering these fundamental questions. She thanked the audience and invited them to engage deeply with the insights, tools, and research that the COMPACT initiative has generated.

## 4. KEYNOTE ADDRESS | Shanaaz Majiet, Head of Learning & Development, City of Tshwane



Ms Shanaaz Majiet began her address by expressing how energising it felt to be in a room full of colleagues,

partners, and friends, people she described as comrades in a shared mission. She thanked the partners for allowing her to reconnect and to participate in a conversation focused not only on looking back over the past 30 years but on intentionally shaping the next 30.

Ms Majiet grounded her reflections in her own journey through the NGO sector, the City of Cape Town, provincial and national government, and now the City of Tshwane. This cross-sectoral path, she noted, has kept her connected to community realities while giving her a front-row seat to the internal workings and limitations of bureaucratic systems.

She spoke candidly about the questions posed to her by younger leaders: "You've been around, what have you done? What difference have you made with the seats you've occupied?" These questions, she said, are often difficult and sometimes painful, because they force honest reflection on what went wrong, what could have been done differently, and what still needs to change.

To stay grounded through the years, she explained, she has always kept "one foot in the NGO sector" to remain honest about the blind spots in government practice, and "one foot in the bureaucracy" to humanise institutions and ensure activism and purpose never get lost in administrative work.

Ms Majiet expressed appreciation for the work produced through the COMPACT project. The research is compelling and offers real hope for doing things differently. It reinforces what many long-standing research institutions, including Isandla Institute, with whom she has worked closely, have been arguing for decades. This includes:

- Strengthening local voices
- Improving the quality of public participation
- Enhancing capacity within municipalities
- Recognising the wisdom and solutions already present in communities

She challenged delegates to build on this work rather than waiting for others to act. "We cannot trust the bureaucracy alone to get it right," she cautioned. Change must come from leaders in every seat, elected officials, administrators, civic partners and community organisers.

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A core theme of her presentation was the need to radically rethink how government conceptualises and engages communities. Past approaches have often been paternalistic or even condescending. Communities possess deep wisdom, knowledge, and lived experience. Thus, participation must move from compliance to meaningful collaboration.

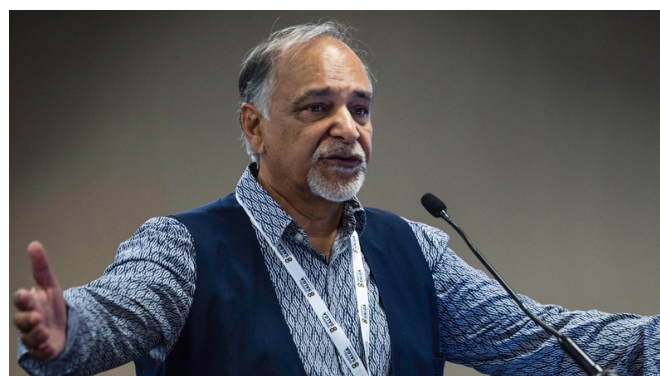
Drawing from research by organisational development experts such as Caroline Lucas-Wei, Ms Majiet stressed that community is the “structure of belonging” and that democracy cannot deepen without honouring this truth. Public participation is not an obligation; it is central to accountability, legitimacy, and responsive governance.

Ms Majiet argued that South Africa’s next 30 years of local government must be fundamentally different. She highlighted critical capacities missing from the sector, informed by both research and practice including:

- Visionary thinking
- Emotional intelligence, especially under stress
- Dialogue, conflict management, and consensus-building
- Crisis communication and adaptive leadership
- Honest engagement with communities about constraints and hard choices
- Collaboration between officials and councillors

Referencing the book *How to Get Good at Crisis*, she urged leaders to recognise that development, governance, and service delivery increasingly operate in a state of ongoing crisis and municipalities must be equipped for this reality. She closed with a reflection on trust, a central theme for rebuilding the social contract. Ms Majiet concluded by thanking the COMPACT partners for their work and by encouraging delegates to continue the conversation throughout the conference.

## 5. COMPACT PROJECT SHOWCASE | Mr Girish Daya: COMPACT Programme Lead, PARI



Mr Girish Daya began by reflecting on the origins of the COMPACT Programme that officially commenced on 1 February 2022. He described it as a “beautiful programme”, one that had taken stakeholders through a long, intentional journey of learning, discovery, and co-creation. Funded by the European Union, the COMPACT Programme brought together three primary partners:

- Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI): leading the research foundation of the programme
- SALGA: driving municipal engagement
- Integrity Action (IA) - contributing global experience in community-driven accountability approaches

He paid special tribute to colleagues who contributed significantly, including Dr Bazi and earlier project team members whose groundwork shaped the programme.

A substantial portion of the programme was devoted to action research aimed at understanding what truly happens in the public participation landscape in South Africa’s municipalities. Researchers engaged with over 600 community members, officials, and stakeholders to gain clarity on:

- How participation is experienced
- Where systems break down
- Why certain mechanisms fail

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- What communities expect from meaningful participation

He emphasised that communities consistently expressed a desire to be listened to and included, rather than merely being called into compliance-driven participation sessions. He stressed that learning both by officials and communities is the foundation of genuine participation and that learning together is what builds trust.

Mr Daya spoke about the importance of thinking long-term, not only for today's residents but for future generations. Drawing from what participants shared, he noted that communities want to shape the future of their spaces, their municipalities, and the well-being of their children and grandchildren. Planning should therefore be understood not only as a technical exercise but as a shared developmental process.

Reflecting on the programme's geographic reach, he highlighted the six provinces where COMPACT was implemented. He expressed admiration for the dedication of the SALGA provincial teams who travelled long distances to ensure that engagements succeeded from Newcastle to uMgungundlovu, from the Western Cape's rural to Limpopo's municipalities.

Throughout these engagements, the team learned the importance of language and communication. Technical terminology often alienates communities, creating unnecessary distance. Part of the COMPACT approach was to translate technical language into the everyday languages and expressions that people use in their homes and communities.

After completing the research phase, the programme moved into a prototyping stage, where the aim was to turn findings into practical, structured tools. This included:

- Designing processes that made participation easier
- Developing tools to strengthen transparency and accountability
- Introducing methods for municipal culture change
- Creating mechanisms for collaboration between communities, politicians, and administrators

This work culminated in the comprehensive COMPACT action research publication, a 160-page volume

consolidating findings and proposing practical ways to strengthen participation.

One of the most important insights Mr Daya shared was the identification of fragmented systems inside municipalities. Using a triangular model of community, political and administration, he explained how each group often operates in isolation, with each "arrow pointing in a different direction." This silo behaviour results in:

- Poor communication
- Weak oversight
- Minimal collaboration
- Misaligned development priorities

Even the concept of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) is misunderstood at community level, where it is viewed merely as a document rather than a developmental process that should bring all stakeholders together.

He emphasised the need to address gaps such as:

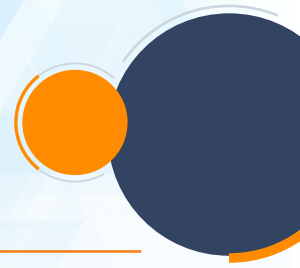
- Low participation levels among youth and women
- Limited access to engagement platforms
- Restrictive processes that discourage attendance
- Weak performance management cultures

He also stressed that modern participation must reflect current realities, including digital engagement, as young people increasingly prefer online channels. Mr Daya concluded by introducing the COMPACT Toolbox, a set of practical tools designed to support:

- A culture of meaningful participation
- Strengthened municipal collaboration
- Community-centred planning
- Improved accountability and transparency
- Practical mechanisms for changing behaviours and systems

He emphasised that these tools are not meant to replace what exists, but to enhance, complement, and strengthen current practices across municipalities. Mr Daya closed with a powerful reminder: Participation is not about ticking boxes, it is about communities and municipalities co-creating a future that honours both today's needs and the generations still to come.

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## 6. SESSION 1: TOOLS & TECHNIQUES FOR ENHANCED CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

This session interrogated the practical and political dimensions of citizen participation in local government. Moving beyond procedural compliance, presenters explored how communities organise, mobilise, and engage both within formal “invited” spaces and through self-initiated “invented” spaces when institutional mechanisms fall short. The session examined the tension between confrontation and collaboration, digital and face-to-face engagement, and policy design versus lived experience, challenging participants to rethink participation as a mechanism for accountability and co-creation rather than symbolic consultation.

### 6.1 Reclaiming Developmental Local Government through Democratic Decommodification and Fiscal Justice from Below | Mazibuko Jara, Zabalaza Pathways Institute



Mr Jara’s presentation explored the experiences of 16 social movements across four national processes,

focusing on citizen-driven policy development. He emphasised that the initiative was grounded in the principle that local government should serve the common good, particularly for poor and marginalised communities, advancing its constitutional mandate through functional, participatory governance.

#### Key Insights

The demands of communities and social movements should inform governance and policy making from the ground up, rather than being imposed top-down. The social employment initiatives during COVID-19 are examples of policies that operationalised the principle of the common good.

Growing challenge of anti-constitutionalism and the need for elites and public officials to actively enable transformative constitutionalism from below, ensuring that governance serves all citizens equitably.

Importance of the national dialogue process, which encourages radical reforms in local government financing, management, contracting, and service delivery. These reforms must go beyond incremental changes to reimagine the local government system entirely.

Local government in South Africa is in crisis, with declining public trust exacerbated by underfunding, misaligned mandates, and market-oriented solutions that undermine public service delivery. Outsourcing and corporatisation of municipal services have led to exclusion, inefficiency, and reduced accountability.

Mr Jara proposed a shift toward public systems that serve the common good, drawing on international examples from Argentina, India, Brazil, and Canada. He emphasised that functional public services must be well-funded, publicly accountable, inclusive of workers and citizens alike.

He discussed the potential for a municipal equalisation or development fund, which would redistribute resources to ensure equitable service delivery. He also highlighted opportunities for public-private partnerships and mobilisation of community, union, and faith-based funds to strengthen local governance capacity.

In conclusion, Mr Jara stated that reimagining local government requires both structural and participatory

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innovation. Local government must be responsive, democratically accountable, and oriented toward the common good, ensuring that all citizens benefit from effective, inclusive public services.

## 6.2 Community Action to Advance the Right to Water: An Analysis of Invited and Invented Participation in South Africa | Tinotenda Muringani, Equality Collective



Mr Tinotenda Muringani delivered an online presentation examining how communities can advance the constitutional right to sufficient water in contexts where municipal service delivery and accountability mechanisms are weak or inconsistent. The presentation located water access as a core local government responsibility and highlighted that persistent failures in water provision are not only technical or operational challenges, but also governance and accountability failures that require stronger participation and oversight.

A key contribution of the presentation was the distinction between “invited” and “invented” participation spaces. Invited spaces refer to formal, state-created platforms for participation such as IDP consultations, ward committees, public hearings, and complaint processes through which communities are expected to shape municipal priorities and influence decisions. However, Mr Muringani argued that in practice these spaces are frequently undermined by barriers such as poor accessibility, low responsiveness, procedural compliance approaches,

limited feedback loops, and weak enforcement of municipal duties. As a result, communities often resort to invented spaces, community-driven, self-organised forms of participation and action, where residents mobilise outside formal municipal channels to demand accountability and secure service improvements.

Drawing on multiple case examples across different community contexts (including rural areas, peri-urban settlements, townships and informal settlements), the presentation demonstrated how communities deploy a range of strategies in both invited and invented spaces to address water challenges. These strategies may include documenting service failures, organising local advocacy structures, engaging oversight bodies, leveraging legal and policy frameworks, building coalitions with civil society organisations, and engaging in structured campaigns aimed at compelling municipal action. Importantly, the presentation emphasised that invented spaces are not necessarily a replacement for formal participation; rather, they often emerge as a corrective response when invited spaces fail to function effectively or credibly.

### Key insights and implications

Participation is only meaningful when it has consequences. Where invited spaces do not result in action, communities lose trust and shift toward alternative mechanisms.

Invented spaces can strengthen accountability, particularly when communities organise around evidence, clear demands, and sustained engagement but these approaches also carry challenges, including capacity constraints, uneven access to information, and risk of conflict.

Context matters. Strategies that work in one setting may not translate directly into another; rural areas, for example, face distinct participation barriers linked to distance, infrastructure gaps, and uneven access to information and digital tools.

Improving water governance requires strengthening both the “space” and the “system”: expanding access to participation platforms, ensuring feedback and responsiveness, and enabling communities to act on rights-based information.

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The presentation concluded that strengthening local accountability for water services requires a dual approach: (1) improving the quality, accessibility, and responsiveness of formal participation channels, and (2) recognising and supporting community-led accountability practices as legitimate contributors to local governance.

This aligns with the broader conference emphasis that developmental local government is strengthened when participation moves beyond compliance to become a practical mechanism for influencing decisions, improving delivery, and restoring trust.

## Session Q&A

Questions	Answers
How is government spending on capital determined?	Mr Jara referenced the state of Kerala in India, noting that its decentralisation efforts have been ideologically driven by leftist governance, but maintained continuity due to democratic structures. He suggested that over 60 years, Kerala’s model has created a durable framework for citizen participation and local governance, regardless of which political party is in power.
How do ideologies across the political spectrum converge on giving local governments the powers and resources to fulfil their mandates?	He posed the challenge of whether South Africa can achieve a similarly resilient democratic context through decentralisation and citizen engagement.
How can we ensure equitable distribution of national funding to provinces like Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, and Free State to reduce economic migration and relieve infrastructure pressures?	While acknowledging that national allocations to social services have been substantial, he highlighted declining real value in critical areas due to inflation and budgetary constraints.
Why does community participation face challenges with legality and bureaucratic rules, and how can officials collaborate with communities under these constraints?	Child grants and other social transfers growing below inflation.
How can we maximize participation in rural areas with limited ICT infrastructure, especially ensuring youth engagement in schools ?	Mr. Jara emphasised that increasing allocations alone is insufficient; the capacity of municipalities to absorb and utilise funds effectively is critical.

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## 6.3 Online and Offline, Confrontation and Collaboration: How FixLocal is Building on Community Campaigns for Fixing Local Service Delivery Issues | Mark Heywood, FixLocal/ Nelson Mandela School of Governance, UCT



Mr Mark Heywood delivered a provocation on the role of civic activism in strengthening local governance and improving service delivery, drawing on extensive experience in civil society and the development of the FixLocal platform. His presentation challenged conventional perceptions that activism is antagonistic to government, arguing instead that active, organised communities are essential partners in accountable and capable local government.

He began by highlighting that across South Africa, communities are already engaging in practical problem-solving organising food drives, repairing infrastructure, addressing sanitation challenges, and mobilising around service delivery failures. However, these efforts often remain fragmented and isolated, resulting in communities repeatedly “reinventing the wheel” without access to

shared knowledge, support, or scalable solutions. This fragmentation, he argued, weakens collective learning and limits the broader impact of local activism.

A central argument of the presentation was that activists should be understood as an early-warning system for local government, rather than as adversaries. Drawing on long-standing civil society experience, Mr Heywood emphasised four interrelated principles:

- **Robust activism strengthens democracy and governance.** Vocal demands for transparency and accountability are not threats to government, but vital mechanisms that surface problems early and compel responsiveness.
- **Community action drives service delivery improvements.** Organised citizen pressure often accelerates attention to urgent service delivery issues more effectively than bureaucratic processes alone.
- **Understanding local government powers and limits is critical.** Activism is most constructive when communities are informed about legal mandates, institutional responsibilities, and available accountability mechanisms.
- **Capable local government requires capable citizens.** Informed and organised communities contribute ideas, local knowledge, and oversight that strengthen municipal performance.

Mr Heywood introduced FixLocal, a digital platform and WhatsApp-enabled tool designed to connect community activists, share practical solutions, and support collective action around local service delivery challenges. The platform enables users to report problems, access guidance when issues are unresolved, and learn from documented examples of successful community-led interventions. Importantly, FixLocal does not seek to replace municipal systems, but rather to support communities to engage more effectively with existing local government structures, particularly where formal processes fail or stall.

The FixLocal Solutions Hub was highlighted as a key feature, showcasing real cases where communities have successfully organised, collaborated with municipalities, or applied pressure to resolve service delivery failures. Partnerships with media organisations including News24, Radio 702, CapeTalk, and the Association of

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Independent Publishers help amplify these experiences, ensuring that local knowledge is shared nationally and contributes to broader learning.

Mr Heywood stressed that as South Africa approaches the 2026 local government elections, strengthening everyday accountability between elections is essential. Platforms such as FixLocal help bridge the gap between electoral participation and ongoing civic engagement, reinforcing the idea that democracy is not limited to voting, but is sustained through continuous citizen action and oversight.

The provocation concluded with a clear message: developmental local government cannot succeed without empowered, informed, and organised communities. When activism is constructive, rights-based, and connected to practical tools and knowledge, it becomes a powerful

## 6.4 FROM BALLOTS TO BELIEF: REIMAGINING LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY BETWEEN AND BEYOND ELECTIONS | Sarah Findlay, Open Cities Lab



Ms Sarah Findlay delivered a provocation that challenged delegates to rethink how accountability operates at the local level, arguing that democratic accountability must extend beyond election cycles and be embedded in

everyday relationships between residents and their elected representatives. She opened her presentation with an interactive audience exercise, asking participants to stand or remain seated in response to three questions: whether they knew their ward councillor, whether they had ever raised an issue with their councillor, and whether that issue had been resolved.

The exercise revealed a striking pattern: while many participants knew who their councillors were, significantly fewer had engaged with them directly, and even fewer had experienced successful resolution of issues. This moment powerfully illustrated the accountability gap that exists between formal democratic representation and lived citizen experience and set the tone for the discussion that followed.

Ms Findlay highlighted challenges faced by voters during elections, noting that ballots often include unfamiliar candidates and parties, making informed voting difficult. This lack of accessible, reliable information undermines democratic choice and weakens accountability from the outset. She argued that accountability cannot be reduced to voting alone; it requires continuous access to information, communication channels, and performance feedback throughout the term of office.

She introduced Open Cities Lab, an organisation focused on improving urban governance through data-driven tools, digital infrastructure, and capacity-building that connect municipalities, civil society, and residents. Central to her presentation were two civic technology tools developed to address information asymmetries in local government:

- a) MyCandidate – developed ahead of the 2021 local government elections, this tool allows residents to enter their address and view all candidates contesting in their ward, including party affiliation and available background information. The platform reached over 118,000 users and generated approximately 1.4 million interactions, demonstrating strong public demand for accessible electoral information.
- b) MyRepresentative – designed to function between elections, this tool provides residents with ongoing access to information about their ward councillors, including attendance records, questions raised in council, voting behaviour,

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project updates, and contact details. It also links users to relevant ward-level communication platforms such as WhatsApp groups and social media channels.

Survey data shared during the presentation indicated that more than 60% of respondents struggle to access information about their councillors, while nearly 70% expressed the need for a centralised platform that enables them to track performance, raise concerns, and engage representatives over time. Together, these tools demonstrate how digital infrastructure can support continuous accountability, enabling citizens to make

informed choices and engage more effectively with local government.

Ms Findlay concluded by posing a critical provocation to the audience: what would it take to institutionalise such tools within local government systems? She emphasised that while civil society can pilot and demonstrate innovation, the long-term value of these tools depends on their adoption, resourcing, and integration into official municipal processes. Without institutionalisation, accountability innovations risk remaining peripheral rather than transformative.

## Session Q&A

Questions	Answers
How can civil society ensure that community activities are meaningful, particularly considering instances where groups organise themselves to exert influence over municipal processes, sometimes disguising themselves as residents' associations or concern groups. The delegate expressed concern that such activities, even if well-intentioned, might create more problems than they solve.	The presenter acknowledged that while some local structures or activities may be hijacked for ulterior motives, most community activism is motivated by genuine intentions to improve local life. To ensure meaningful participation, three key approaches were suggested:
A participant suggested the idea of implementing a centralised website at the ward level to improve access to information about community meetings, attendance, and municipal updates. They asked whether such a project could be piloted to increase community awareness and participation	The presenter supported the proposal, noting that centralising access to information at the ward level would help residents stay informed about local governance and facilitate better engagement with councillors. Such a platform could strengthen participation, improve accountability, and support civil society in promoting meaningful activism.
A participant asked whether the data collection systems used by civil society are aligned with national statistical frameworks, to ensure the information is credible and can be integrated into broader governance processes.	The presenter clarified that while alignment with national statistical systems is important, the priority is ensuring that civil society data is accurate, transparent, and accessible. Standardised frameworks and clear data-sharing practices would enable communities and municipalities to use this information effectively, supporting informed decision-making and accountability.

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## 7. SESSION 2: POLICY ROUNDTABLE

The policy roundtable examined whether existing local government reforms are delivering meaningful change on the ground, and what adjustments are required to ensure that democratic governance translates into improved service delivery, accountability, and community wellbeing. The discussion was framed within the context of South Africa's ongoing review of the White Paper on Local Government, offering a timely opportunity to reflect on lessons from practice and research.



### 7.1 LEVERAGING LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORMS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN MUNICIPALITIES | Panel Discussion



**Moderator:** Michael Chauke, SALGA

**Panellists:** Andrew Boraine: COGTA, Tamzin Hudson: Planact, Nonhlanhla Dube: Activate! Change Drivers, Curtly Stevens: Academic & Governance Practitioner, Dullah Omar Institute

#### 7.1.1. Are current reforms fit for purpose?

Opening the discussion, the moderator emphasised that democratic systems and governance tools must ultimately be judged by their impact on citizens' daily lives. Panellists agreed that while South Africa has a strong legislative and policy framework for local government, implementation has often been uneven, compliance-driven, and disconnected from community realities. Reforms that focus only on formal structures without addressing institutional culture, capability, and accountability mechanisms are unlikely to produce transformative change.

#### 7.1.2. Strengthening accountability within municipalities

A key theme across the discussion was the need to reinforce internal accountability mechanisms while simultaneously strengthening downward accountability to communities. Panellists highlighted persistent weaknesses in consequence management, oversight, and transparency, noting that accountability often flows upwards to provincial and national institutions rather than outwards to citizens.

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Proposals discussed included:

- strengthening audit committees and oversight structures
- improving transparency through proactive disclosure of budgets, contracts, and performance information
- clarifying roles and responsibilities between political and administrative leadership; and
- using digital tools and open data to enable public scrutiny and citizen oversight

The panel emphasised that accountability reforms must be accompanied by institutional capability and political will to be effective.

## 7.1.3. Reimagining citizen participation

The discussion noted that citizen participation in many municipalities remains procedural and adversarial, rather than collaborative and empowering. Ward committees and public participation processes are often under resourced, politicised, or inaccessible to ordinary residents. As a result, communities frequently experience participation as symbolic rather than meaningful.

Panellists argued for a shift toward continuous, relational engagement, where communities are treated as partners in governance rather than passive recipients of information. This includes:

- participatory budgeting and planning processes
- accessible grievance and feedback mechanisms with clear response timelines
- civic education to enable informed participation
- recognising diverse forms of community organisation, particularly among youth and informal groups

## 7.1.4. The role of youth, civil society, and innovation

Youth participation emerged as a critical concern. Panellists noted that young people are not disengaged from governance, but are often excluded by technical language, rigid processes, and limited access to information. Youth-led activism and civic initiatives were highlighted as important entry points for renewing

democratic participation, provided that systems are simplified and responsive.

Civil society organisations were recognised as important intermediaries that can support civic education, accountability, and innovation. However, the panel cautioned that civil society should complement rather than substitute the responsibilities of local government. Sustainable reform requires municipalities to institutionalise participatory practices rather than relying on external actors.

## 7.1.5 Reform as a practice, not just a policy

A central conclusion of the panel was that transformative reform is not achieved through policy change alone. Reform must be understood as an ongoing practice, embedded in how municipalities plan, communicate, manage performance, and engage communities. This requires leadership that values learning, transparency, and collaboration, as well as systems that enable experimentation and adaptation.

The panel underscored that the review of the White Paper on Local Government presents a critical opportunity to:

- embed participation and accountability more deeply into municipal systems
- align reforms with lived community experience
- ensure that governance frameworks support inclusive, capable, and developmental local government

## 7.1.6. Key outcomes

The panel concluded that leveraging local government reforms for transformative change requires:

- stronger internal and external accountability mechanisms
- meaningful, continuous citizen engagement beyond compliance processes
- accessible information and transparent governance practices
- inclusion of youth and marginalised groups as active governance actors

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- alignment between policy intent, institutional capability, and everyday municipal practice to restore trust, improve service delivery, and advance developmental local government.

Overall, the discussion reinforced that transformative local government reform must be people centred, evidence-informed, and institutionally embedded if it is

## Panel Q&A

Questions	Answers
How can communities drive better service delivery?	By being actively involved raising their voices and taking ownership. Transparency, accountability, and access to information help residents hold municipalities accountable.
What does an ideal municipality look like?	One where everyone can access essential services, report issues, and live safely, with basic needs like water, electricity, and schooling met.
How can corruption and maladministration be addressed?	Through transparent decision-making, proactive publication of contracts and budgets, and simpler access to information. Municipalities must take responsibility rather than relying solely on national or provincial interventions.
How should communities respond to service failures?	While communities often fill gaps through self-help, systemic solutions and stronger enforcement of municipal responsibilities are needed.
How can citizens effectively engage with municipalities?	Through clear reporting channels, accessible information, and active participation in decision-making to ensure consistent service delivery and accountability.

## 8. SESSION 3: GENDER & YOUTH INCLUSIVE DECISION- MAKING

This session centred the question of inclusion within participatory democracy, examining how gender dynamics, youth engagement, and mediation practices shape access to decision-making spaces. Presentations highlighted that constitutional guarantees alone are insufficient without intentional design, institutional sensitivity, and targeted capacity-building to ensure that historically marginalised groups meaningfully influence local governance processes.

### 8.1 GENDER INCLUSIVE, A CONDUIT TO POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND SERVICE DELIVERY | Mr Ndabezitha Tenza, Harry Gwala District Municipality



Mr Ndabezitha Tenza's presentation examined the relationship between gender, political communication, and public participation in local government, highlighting how inclusive engagement practices can strengthen service delivery and democratic governance. His contribution was grounded in evidence-based research and situated within South Africa's constitutional commitment to participatory democracy.

Mr Tenza began by reaffirming that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 provides a strong legal

foundation for citizen engagement in local government. However, he emphasised that a significant gap persists between constitutional ideals and lived realities. In practice, many citizens, particularly women; remain passive or marginalised participants in municipal decision-making processes. Participation is often procedural, with communities treated as recipients of information rather than active agents shaping development outcomes. This disconnect has contributed to declining trust between communities and local government.

The presentation focused on how gendered experiences shape participation in municipal processes. Mr Tenza highlighted that political and governance spaces in South Africa have historically been male dominated, reinforcing power imbalances and limiting women's access to decision-making platforms. Structural barriers, social norms, and limited exposure to civic processes continue to restrict meaningful participation, particularly for women at ward and community level.

Drawing on empirical research and literature, Mr Tenza argued that effective public participation is not optional or symbolic, but a prerequisite for informed decision-making, responsive service delivery, and accountable governance. He illustrated how participation processes that fail to consider gender dynamics risk reproducing exclusion, even when they comply with legal requirements.

A key insight from the presentation related to communication styles and preferences. Mr Tenza observed that women and men often engage differently in political spaces. Women frequently prefer participatory formats that allow for dialogue, collective discussion, and empathetic engagement, while men are more likely to adopt assertive or confrontational communication approaches. These differences have implications for how public meetings, consultations, and feedback mechanisms are designed and facilitated.

While acknowledging the growing role of digital platforms in public participation, Mr Tenza cautioned that technology alone cannot address deep-seated structural inequalities. Digital tools can expand access and complement engagement strategies, but they should not replace face-to-face interaction, which remains central to local politics and relationship-building, particularly for women and marginalised groups.



Mr Tenza proposed a multimodal approach to political communication, combining traditional engagement methods such as door-to-door outreach and community meetings with digital and mass communication strategies. Importantly, these approaches must be intentionally gender-sensitive, ensuring that participation processes are inclusive, accessible, and responsive to diverse experiences.

In concluding, Mr Tenza emphasised the need for gender-responsive capacity building within municipalities. Municipal leaders, councillors, and officials require training that goes beyond procedural compliance to address power relations, communication practices, and inclusive facilitation skills. Without a deliberate focus on gender, even well-designed participation initiatives risk reinforcing exclusion and undermining the developmental mandate of local government.

The presentation underscored that gender-inclusive participation is central to effective political communication and improved service delivery and must be embedded within municipal governance systems if local government is to become more responsive, equitable, and accountable.

## 8.2 CIVIC EDUCATION FOR MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION | Rendani Manugu, Engage South Africa



Ms Manugu's presentation explored how the public, private, and civil society can collectively strengthen development planning and civic participation. She emphasised that civil society holds a unique position: it engages directly with communities, understands local realities, and can bridge gaps between citizens and governance structures.

Ms Manugu highlighted a concerning trend. Research shows that while South African youth express empathy toward democratic processes, they have limited trust in democratic systems, procedures, and policy actors. This disconnect has resulted in low levels of participation in local governance. She stressed that this growing disengagement underscores the urgent need for targeted civic education interventions that can rebuild trust, foster engagement, and promote sustained democratic involvement.

Her presentation focused on the work of Engage South Africa, an organisation that has developed evidence-based programmes aimed at equipping young people with critical thinking, communication, leadership, and civic participation skills. Since 2018, Engage South Africa has reached more than 2,000 young people across the country through the My Voice programme, workshops, and community-based events.

Ms Manugu outlined three core pillars that guide their approach:

- Engaged South Africa provides leadership, public speaking, debate, and critical thinking training to high school learners. The programmes introduce youth to democratic principles, electoral processes, and practical avenues for civic engagement.
- Through structured programmes, young participants learn to identify local issues and design community initiatives that advance human rights and democracy.
- The organisation creates platforms where young people engage directly with local leaders, policy actors, and civil society organisations, enabling them to exercise their civic rights meaningfully.

The methodology uses transformational training and experiential learning ensuring that civic education is not only informative but also practical and enjoyable. Engaged South Africa trains young facilitators from the same communities they serve, fostering peer leadership and creating a sustainable support network. Importantly,

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the organisation provides long-term pathways to continued civic and leadership engagement.

Ms Manugu highlighted the programme's impact at three levels:

- Disadvantaged youth develop self-awareness, civic literacy, and leadership skills that empower them to shape their futures.
- Equipped youth initiate local projects, strengthen social cohesion, and contribute positively to community wellbeing.
- A growing network of socially conscious young leaders collaborates with organisations to drive community development and influence local governance. She then outlined the organisation's structured programme pathway

Highlights from 2022–2025 include:

- Over 240 active alumni across three provinces.
- Operations in Vhembe, Gqeberha and Mahikeng.
- 3 alumni now serving in local government.
- Five community events strengthening intergenerational engagement.
- Over 200 learners empowered through community-based action initiatives.
- 29 school-based initiatives implemented.
- More than 500 learners equipped for civic engagement and leadership.
- Partnerships with 20 schools in three provinces.

To date, Engage South Africa has worked with more than 1,800 high school learners, supported 121 youth-led initiatives, and continues to demonstrate how targeted, practical civic education can transform young people into active, confident, and engaged citizens.

## 8.3 SURFACING AND QUESTIONING THE CONTRIBUTION OF MEDIATION TO INCLUSIVE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION | Boitumelo Matlala, University of the Witwatersrand & Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)



Ms Boitumelo Matlala opened her presentation by grounding it in her PhD work. Her research grew out of a deep concern shared by many in the sector: while South Africa has strong constitutional provisions for public participation at the municipal level, the lived experience of citizens reveals persistent limitations. Much of the national debate has focused on long-term participation platforms, IDP processes, ward committees, municipal forums and on the shortcomings that plague them: low turnout, tokenistic engagement, and procedural inefficiencies. These platforms are temporarily ad-hoc, yet they play a critical role in shaping who gets to speak, decide, and influence outcomes in local development.

In the South African context, this deficit is familiar. Despite well-developed frameworks, many citizens remain excluded from public decision-making. It is within this gap that mediators step in, often unintentionally taking on roles of representation, advocacy, and interface.

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Ms Matlala’s research focuses particularly on NGOs as mediators and offers several reasons why they occupy this position so powerfully. NGOs have historically been framed as agents of democratisation and social justice.

Ms Matlala examined the role of the Development Action Group (DAG) in Cape Town, specifically in the redevelopment of the Woodstock/Salt River area. DAG’s work in this urban context demonstrates how NGOs navigate complex community dynamics, sustain relationships, interpret administrative processes, and interface with the state ultimately enabling marginalised

communities to access housing, planning processes, and other public decision-making spaces.

Ms Matlala highlighted concerns around representation, agenda-setting, and the risk that intermediaries may shape or filter community interests. Mediators can unintentionally or intentionally redefine who is heard and what issues gain visibility. She argues that mediation can be salvaged, and even strengthened, if its broader dimensions are recognised. Beyond representation, mediation also involves.

## Section Q&A

Questions	Answers
How can NGOs deal with communities not fully understanding mediation work?	NGOs must explain their role clearly and use mediation to help communities organise, understand processes, and engage better with government.
Funding remains a challenge for youth programmes. What can be done?	Donors and policymakers need to recognise that youth work needs proper funding. Community work cannot rely on unpaid labour.
Is volunteer work still realistic for young people?	No. Due to economic hardship, expecting youth to work for free is not reasonable. Paid participation is more sustainable.
Should digital tools replace face-to-face engagements?	No. Many people still rely on in-person engagement. Digital tools can support but not replace face-to-face participation.
How do organisations attract youth aged 16–25?	They work with schools, use youth facilitators, run leadership programmes, and create opportunities that benefit young people
What is empowerment mediation?	It is when NGOs help communities organise, understand issues, and engage effectively with government processes
How do NGOs balance accountability to donors and communities?	By being transparent and involving communities in planning while meeting donor requirements.
What role should NGOs play in public participation?	Support, educate, and guide communities not replace them while helping them engage directly with government.

## 9. SESSION 4: CASE STUDIES OF INNOVATIVE PRACTICE IN CITIES & TOWNS

The session transitioned conceptual debate to applied municipal practice, showcasing innovative approaches to procurement planning, place-based collaboration and regulatory reform. The case studies illustrated how existing municipal systems can be recalibrated to improve transparency, efficiency, economic development and trust to reinforce that innovation often lies in reforming core administrative processes rather than introducing entirely new frameworks.

### 9.1 FOSTERING INNOVATIVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT THROUGH PUBLIC PROCUREMENT PLANNING | Tholakele Nyathi. University of Pretoria / University of South Africa



Ms Tholakele Nyathi's presentation examined the role of public procurement planning as a strategic lever for advancing developmental local government. She argued that procurement is often narrowly understood as a technical or compliance driven function, yet in practice

it sits at the centre of service delivery, accountability, and local economic development. When poorly planned, procurement processes contribute to delays, cost overruns, community dissatisfaction, and erosion of trust in municipal institutions.

Drawing on research and practical examples, Ms Nyathi highlighted that procurement planning failures frequently stem from weak integration between planning instruments such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP), and supply chain management processes. In many municipalities, procurement plans are developed late, updated inconsistently, or treated as administrative requirements rather than strategic tools. This disconnect undermines the municipality's ability to deliver services efficiently and respond to community priorities.

A key focus of the presentation was the governance and accountability dimension of procurement. Ms Nyathi noted that opaque procurement processes create conditions for mistrust, allegations of corruption, and conflict between communities and municipalities. Communities often experience procurement outcomes only at the point of failure when projects stall, contractors abandon sites, or services are delayed without access to information on how decisions were made or how performance is monitored.

Ms Nyathi emphasised that innovative procurement planning requires a shift toward:

- Early and integrated planning, where procurement is aligned with development priorities and budget cycles.
- Transparency and accessibility, enabling communities to understand planned projects, timelines, and responsible actors.
- Proactive risk management, identifying capacity constraints, contractor performance risks, and implementation bottlenecks before projects commence.
- Stronger oversight and monitoring, linking procurement performance to municipal performance management systems and consequence management mechanisms.

She further highlighted the potential of digital tools and data systems to strengthen procurement governance.



When procurement information is digitised and made accessible, municipalities are better positioned to track project progress, identify delays, and respond to issues in real time. Importantly, such transparency also enables community oversight, allowing residents to monitor whether planned projects are implemented as intended.

Ms Nyathi concluded that procurement planning should be repositioned as a developmental and accountability instrument, not merely a compliance function. When municipalities strengthen procurement planning, align it with participatory planning processes, and open it to greater scrutiny, procurement can become a powerful mechanism for improving service delivery outcomes, rebuilding public trust, and supporting inclusive local economic development. Her presentation reinforced the broader conference theme that innovation in local government often lies not in new policies alone, but in rethinking how existing systems are planned, governed, and implemented.

## 9.2 ENHANCING LOCAL GOVERNANCE THROUGH PLACE-BASED INTERMEDIARY INFRASTRUCTURES | Simon Sizwe Mayson, The CoLab



Mr Simon Mayson's presentation focused on the role of place-based intermediary infrastructures in strengthening local governance, accountability, and collaborative development. Drawing on research and practice from The CoLab, he argued that many of the challenges facing municipalities cannot be resolved by government acting alone. Instead, effective local governance increasingly depends on intermediary organisations that can convene stakeholders, build trust, and coordinate action within specific geographic areas.

Mr Mayson explained that place-based intermediaries operate at the intersection of communities, local government, civil society, and the private sector. Their value lies not in replacing municipal authority, but in enabling cooperation where formal systems struggle—particularly in contexts characterised by fragmentation, mistrust, or limited institutional capacity. These intermediaries often provide “soft infrastructure”: facilitation, relationship-building, data coordination, and shared problem-solving platforms that allow diverse actors to align around common development goals.

Using practical examples, he illustrated how intermediaries can support municipalities by:

- Convening stakeholders who rarely interact constructively, including residents, officials, businesses, and NGOs.
- Translating community priorities into actionable projects that municipalities can incorporate into planning and implementation processes.
- Building trust over time, especially in areas where historical exclusion or service delivery failures have eroded confidence in government.
- Coordinating data and knowledge, enabling evidence-informed decision-making at a local scale.

A key insight from the presentation was that place matters. Development challenges are spatially specific, and governance responses must be tailored to local contexts rather than imposed uniformly. Intermediary infrastructures are particularly effective because they are embedded within communities and understand the social, economic, and political dynamics shaping local outcomes.

Mr Mayson also cautioned that intermediaries require

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clear roles, accountability, and sustainable resourcing. Without these, there is a risk of duplication, dependency, or unclear authority. He emphasised that successful intermediary models are those that work in partnership with municipalities, align with formal planning instruments such as IDPs, and contribute to long-term institutional strengthening rather than short-term project delivery.

The presentation concluded that place-based intermediary infrastructures offer a powerful mechanism for enhancing collaborative governance, particularly in complex urban and peri-urban environments. When properly supported and aligned with municipal systems, intermediaries can help unlock local innovation, strengthen participation, and improve development outcomes in ways that are responsive to lived realities.

## 9.3 CAPE TOWN'S EASE OF DOING BUSINESS INDEX AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT | Mr Kenneth Wynne and Mr Daniël Eloff, City of Cape Town



Mr Kenneth Wynne and Mr Daniël Eloff presented the City of Cape Town's Ease of Doing Business Index, positioning it as an innovative governance tool that supports developmental local government by improving regulatory efficiency, transparency, and investor confidence. The presentation demonstrated how data-driven reform of municipal processes can directly contribute to economic development while strengthening accountability within local government systems.

The presenters explained that the Index was developed in response to persistent challenges faced by businesses and investors when interacting with municipal regulatory processes, including:

- long approval timelines
- fragmented procedures
- limited visibility of decision-making processes

These challenges not only deter investment but also undermine local economic growth and employment creation. The Ease of Doing Business Index was therefore designed to measure, track, and improve the efficiency of key municipal processes that affect economic activity.

The Index assesses several core regulatory and administrative processes, including development approvals, construction permits, utility connections, and business licensing. By establishing clear benchmarks and tracking performance over time, the City has been able to identify bottlenecks, standardise processes, and

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introduce targeted reforms aimed at reducing delays and improving service quality. Importantly, the Index is not used solely as a reporting mechanism; it functions as a management and reform tool that informs policy adjustments and operational improvements.

A key strength highlighted in the presentation was the integration of the Index into broader municipal planning and performance management systems. Data generated through the Index feeds into decision-making at both political and administrative levels, enabling the City to align regulatory reform with strategic development objectives. This approach has contributed to measurable improvements in turnaround times and greater predictability for businesses engaging with the municipality.

The presenters also addressed common concerns raised during the discussion, including resistance from investors and developers, delays in housing projects, and coordination of bulk infrastructure such as water and electricity. They explained that these challenges are addressed through improved process design, clearer communication with stakeholders, and coordinated infrastructure planning supported by digital systems. By improving transparency and predictability, the City has

been able to reduce conflict, manage expectations, and build trust with both the private sector and communities.

Importantly, the presentation emphasised that the Ease of Doing Business Index is not a pro-business instrument at the expense of social objectives. Rather, it is a developmental tool that enables municipalities to attract investment while safeguarding public interest outcomes. By reducing inefficiencies and administrative friction, municipalities can free up capacity to focus on inclusive growth, spatial transformation, and improved service delivery.

The presentation concluded by highlighting that the success of the Index depends on political commitment, institutional capacity, and continuous learning. While digital systems and data play a critical enabling role, sustained improvement requires organisational buy-in, interdepartmental coordination, and a willingness to adapt policies and practices based on evidence. The City of Cape Town's experience demonstrates how municipalities can use performance measurement and transparency to drive reform, support economic development, and advance the objectives of developmental local government.

## Session Q&A

Questions	Answers
1. How does the City handle resistance from investors and property firms?	By improving processes, digitising services, and updating policies to reduce delays and conflicts.
2. Why are housing projects delayed?	Due to statutory approvals, public participation, and complex informal planning requirements.
3. How are utilities like water integrated into planning?	Through coordinated infrastructure management and digital systems that align services with development.
4. What does it take to implement innovative city systems?	Investment in digital tools, political commitment, and collaboration with businesses to identify bottlenecks.
5. Did the index evaluation drive policy changes?	Yes, it highlighted areas for improvement, while some pre-existing policy changes also improved index scores.

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**DAY 2:** Facilitated by Girish Daya, PARI



**10.1 LEADING PERFORMANCE MONITORING: ASSESSING MAYORAL COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT CAPABILITY FOR CULTIVATING A PERFORMANCE CULTURE CASE STUDY IN NELSON MANDELA BAY MUNICIPALITY | Ms Ntombekaya Baart, SAAPAM**



## 10. SESSION 5: PERFORMANCE MONITORING IN MUNICIPALITIES

This session interrogated whether municipal performance management systems are functioning as strategic accountability instruments or merely as compliance tools. The discussion explored the role of political oversight, leadership capability, data integrity and institutional culture in cultivating a performance-oriented environment that improves service delivery and restores public trust.

Ms Ntombekaya Baart delivered a comprehensive reflection drawn from her experience as Chief of Staff to the Executive Mayor of Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. Her presentation examined the role of mayoral committees in shaping performance culture, oversight capability, and accountability within the municipality. The research interrogates whether political leadership, particularly mayoral committees possess the capability to effectively execute their oversight responsibilities and influence institutional performance. She emphasised:

- Leaders are elected, not appointed, and often enter office without the necessary technical understanding of performance systems.
- Oversight depends not only on authority but also on capability, training, and commitment to accountability.

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She reviewed several instruments that guide municipal performance oversight, including:

- The Integrated Performance Management Policy (2014)
- The Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP)
- Annual and oversight reports (including MPAC reports)
- Municipal audit outcomes and the Auditor-General's findings

Ms Baart highlighted gaps such as irregular policy reviews, insufficient use of performance tools, and inadequate monitoring of outcome indicators. Her research engaged committee members and senior officials within Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. Significant findings include:

- Most committee members lack formal training in performance management, leading to limited understanding of KPIs, audit processes, and oversight duties.
- 86% of respondents indicated that consequences for poor performance are not enforced. Leadership instability, such as suspended senior managers and high staff turnover creates accountability vacuums.
- Performance management is treated as a tick-box exercise rather than a strategic tool.

- Oversight is hindered by excessive bureaucracy and unclear delegations of responsibility.
- While some leadership pockets drive a strong performance culture, this is inconsistent across the institution.
- The AG continues to cite system deficiencies, insufficient evidence, and unreliable data signalling weaknesses in oversight and institutional controls.

Ms Baart presented a dedicated framework for enhancing the effectiveness of mayoral committees. It comprises four pillars:

1. Clear tools, policies, and processes for oversight.
2. Professional research and advisory capacity to support committees (similar to national and provincial legislatures).
3. A structured approach to enforcing accountability for both non-performance and misconduct.
4. A unified strategy for performance oversight across the political leadership collective, supported by change-management principles.

Ms Baart emphasised that while the framework provides a practical pathway for strengthening oversight and building a robust performance culture, implementation requires political will consistency, and leadership stability.

## Session Q & A

Questions	Answers
1. Do Mayoral Committee members sign performance agreements?	Some municipalities do, but it is not required everywhere.
2. Is there a law that says Mayoral Committee must sign performance contracts?	No. The law requires a PMS but does not force MayCo to sign contracts.
3. Why was the IDP not included in the research?	It was only an abstract. The IDP will be added in the full study.
4. How is the Mayor held accountable?	Mainly through the PMS and Council, but accountability is often weak.
5. Is Mayoral Committee an oversight structure?	No. Real oversight should be done by Section 79 committees and the Speaker.

## 10.2. THE MISSING INFRASTRUCTURE – REBUILDING LOCAL GOVERNMENT THROUGH DATA AND DIGITAL SYSTEMS | Joanne Parker, Open Cities Lab



Ms Joanne Parker delivered a provocation on the role of data and digital infrastructure in rebuilding local government capability, accountability, and service delivery. She argued that many of the challenges facing municipalities are not the result of a lack of technology, but rather the absence of coherent, interoperable digital infrastructure that enables systems to communicate, share data, and support informed decision-making.

Ms Parker highlighted that in many municipalities, service delivery and performance management

are undermined by fragmented data environments. Information is often captured manually, stored in disconnected spreadsheets, or locked within proprietary systems that cannot communicate with one another. This fragmentation creates inefficiencies, limits oversight and fosters a culture of risk aversion and fear, where data is perceived as a liability rather than an asset for learning and improvement.

A central argument of the presentation was that digital transformation should prioritise interoperability rather than the proliferation of new systems. Ms Parker cautioned against the common tendency to introduce additional digital tools without addressing underlying system incompatibility. Instead, she advocated for requiring vendors to provide open Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) and for municipalities to invest in systems that can integrate across departments and functions, such as planning, finance, performance management, and service delivery.

Ms Parker further introduced the concept of shared digital public infrastructure, where a single digital platform or system can serve multiple municipalities. This approach offers several advantages, including reduced costs, improved consistency, and more equitable access to digital capabilities, particularly for smaller or resource-constrained municipalities. Shared infrastructure can help level the playing field by ensuring that all municipalities, regardless of size or capacity, have access to essential digital tools for governance and service delivery.

Importantly, Ms Parker emphasised that ownership and sustainability of digital infrastructure are critical considerations. While civil society organisations and private actors often play an important role in innovation and piloting, she argued that long-term hosting and stewardship of core digital governance infrastructure should reside within the public sector. Civil society organisations typically rely on short-term funding cycles and are not positioned to maintain critical systems indefinitely. Public ownership, by contrast, supports continuity, accountability, and institutionalisation.

The provocation also raised key governance questions for discussion, including:

- Who should own and host digital tools that support local governance and accountability?



- How can municipalities balance centralisation and decentralisation to avoid single points of failure while ensuring accountability?
- What institutional arrangements are required to build and sustain shared digital infrastructure over time?

Reflections from the floor indicated strong support for open-source, modular, and interoperable systems that enable flexibility and choice. Participants emphasised the importance of collaboration between national and provincial government, municipalities, civil society, and the private sector in developing and governing shared infrastructure. Proposals included phased or hybrid hosting models, where national institutions initially host platforms while municipal capacity is strengthened over time.

Ms Parker concluded by urging delegates to advocate for digital public infrastructure as a foundational component of capable, accountable local government. When designed as a shared, interoperable public asset, digital infrastructure can support better data use, improve transparency, enable performance monitoring, and ultimately strengthen service delivery and trust between municipalities and residents.

## 11. SESSION 6: THE COMPACT TOOLBOX AND LESSONS ON CO-CREATION

This session deepened the conference conversation by focusing on the practical application of research insights through the COMPACT Toolbox. Building on earlier discussions about participation and accountability, it showcased how co-creation methodologies, community assets, and digital tools can be translated into structured, usable instruments that strengthen collaboration, transparency and developmental governance within municipal systems.

### 11.1. UNPACKING THE COMPACT TOOLBOX | Kate Tissington: Senior Researcher, PARI



Ms Kate Tissington introduced the COMPACT Toolbox as a central outcome of the COMPACT programme, designed to translate action research findings into practical, accessible tools that strengthen participation, accountability, and collaborative governance in municipalities. She emphasised that the toolbox responds directly to a recurring challenge identified through research, while policies and legal frameworks for participation exist, many municipalities and communities lack clear, usable guidance on how to implement them effectively in everyday practice.

The COMPACT Toolbox is a curated set of practical resources developed through a co-creation process involving municipalities, civil society organisations, researchers, and community stakeholders across the 12 partner municipalities. Rather than proposing a single model, the toolbox offers modular tools that can be adapted to different municipal contexts, capacities and resource levels. Its intended users include senior political leadership, councillors, municipal officials, ward committee members and community actors.

Ms Tissington outlined several core focus areas of the toolbox, including:

- Strengthening ward committees and community participation structures, with guidance on roles, responsibilities, and effective engagement practices.

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- Youth participation in local government, addressing the systemic exclusion of young people from formal participation processes.
- Municipal financial transparency and accountability, supporting clearer communication of budgets, projects, and performance information.
- Collaboration models, which provide practical frameworks for municipalities, communities, and other stakeholders to work together on shared development challenges.
- Performance and accountability tools, linking participation processes to monitoring, feedback, and learning within municipal systems.

A key feature of the Toolbox is its emphasis on accessibility and usability. Ms Tissington highlighted that many of the tools are presented as checklists, templates, guides, and case studies rather than lengthy technical manuals. Civic education materials have been intentionally simplified to demystify municipal processes and are being translated into local languages to broaden reach and impact. This approach reflects the programme's commitment to ensuring that participation is not limited by technical language or institutional barriers.

Ms Tissington also noted that several tools are already available online, including the Community Participation Index, Local Government Collaboration Model, and selected performance management resources. Additional tools are in the final stages of development and will be released in the coming year. Importantly, the Toolbox is designed to be a living resource, capable of evolving as municipalities test, adapt, and refine tools in practice.

The presentation emphasised that the COMPACT Toolbox is not intended to replace existing municipal systems or statutory processes. Instead, it is designed to complement and strengthen them by providing practical guidance that supports institutionalisation of good practice. Ms Tissington stressed that real impact will depend on municipalities integrating the tools into their own planning, participation, and performance management frameworks, rather than treating them as stand-alone or pilot interventions.

In conclusion, Ms Tissington highlighted that the COMPACT Toolbox represents a shift from research as diagnosis to research as implementation support.

By equipping municipalities and communities with concrete tools, the toolbox aims to close the gap between policy intent and lived experience, contributing to more inclusive, accountable, and developmental local government.

## 11.2. STRENGTHENING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY THROUGH COMMUNITY ASSETS, COLLABORATION AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY | Panel Discussion



**Moderator:** Paul Smith, *Kagiso Trust*

**Panelists:** Dr Paul Plantinga (*HSRC*), Mr Conrad Jardine (*Gauteng COGTA*), Mr Phelelani Ntshingila (*Newcastle Local Municipality*)

The panel discussion explored how participatory democracy can be strengthened in practice by leveraging community assets, fostering collaboration across stakeholders, and using digital technology as an enabling tool rather than a standalone solution. A central theme throughout the discussion was that meaningful participation is rooted in relationships, trust and leadership, with technology serving as a support mechanism rather than a substitute for human engagement.

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## 11.2.1. Community assets as the foundation of participation

The panel emphasised that communities should not be viewed merely as beneficiaries of government programmes, but as active assets with knowledge, skills, networks and lived experience. Drawing on Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approaches, Mr Jardine highlighted the importance of starting engagement processes by identifying what already works within communities such as local leadership, social networks, institutions and cultural resources rather than focusing solely on deficits and problems.

This asset-based approach was shown to build local ownership and legitimacy, shift relationships from dependency to partnership and create conditions for more sustainable and context-responsive solutions.

## 11.2.2. Collaboration as a governance practice

A recurring insight was that complex local challenges cannot be solved by municipalities acting in isolation. Effective participation requires collaborative governance, where municipalities, communities, civil society organisations, and in some cases the private sector, work together to co-define problems and co-produce solutions.

Examples shared during the discussion illustrated how collaboration models help municipalities:

- map stakeholders more effectively
- align interests and responsibilities
- reduce conflict through dialogue
- improve implementation outcomes by drawing on shared resources and expertise

Mr Ntshingila explained how the Newcastle Local Municipality experience demonstrated how structured collaboration can address issues such as informal economic activity and revenue collection by involving affected stakeholders directly in problem-solving processes.

## 11.2.3. The role of digital technology

Panelists were clear that digital tools are enablers, not replacements, for participatory democracy. Technology can enhance participation by:

- expanding access to information
- supporting data collection and feedback
- enabling real-time communication
- improving transparency in planning and implementation

However, the discussion cautioned against over-reliance on technology, particularly in contexts where digital access is uneven. Face-to-face engagement remains essential, especially in rural areas and among communities with limited connectivity. Digital tools were most effective when integrated into existing community-based processes rather than introduced as standalone interventions.

## 11.2.4. Leadership, data and institutional readiness

Another cross-cutting theme was the importance of leadership and institutional culture. Even well-designed tools and collaborative models will fail without political and administrative commitment to participation. The need for the following was expressed:

- leadership that values community input
- clear governance arrangements
- reliable and credible data
- mechanisms that ensure community inputs influence decisions rather than being symbolic

Ensuring data accuracy and completeness requires combining official municipal data with community-generated information, supported by structured tools and regular feedback loops.

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## 11.2.5. Key outcomes and implications

The panel concluded that strengthening participatory democracy requires a balanced approach that integrates:

- community assets and local knowledge
- collaborative governance models
- appropriate and accessible digital tools
- institutional commitment to acting on community input

Participation is most effective when communities can see how their contributions shape decisions and outcomes. Scaling such approaches will require awareness-raising, implementation support, and coordination across local, provincial, and national government, as well as continued partnership with civil society and research institutions.

Overall, the discussion reinforced the conference's core message: participatory democracy is not achieved through tools alone, but through relationships, collaboration, and shared accountability, supported by systems that make engagement meaningful and impactful.

## Panel Q&A

Questions	Answers
How can digital tools help with community planning and IDPs in rural areas?	They support data collection and engagement but do not replace face-to-face meetings. Tools like WhatsApp or Microsoft Forms can make participation easier.
How do we handle resistance to new tools or culture change in municipalities?	Leadership, training, and collaboration are key. Engaging communities and staff together helps reduce resistance.
How can we ensure data is accurate and complete?	Combine official records with community-led data collection. Structured tools and regular updates help maintain quality
Can these tools work in areas with poor internet?	Yes, through offline workshops, low-tech tools, and zero-rated mobile data. Face-to-face engagement remains important.
How do we make sure community input influences decisions? How can these initiatives be scaled?	Inputs must be visible, traceable, and acted upon. Communities should co-create and own the data to ensure impact.
How can digital tools help with community planning and IDPs in rural areas?	Focus on implementation support, awareness-raising, and collaboration between national, provincial, and local government

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## 12. HANDOVER OF 12 COMPACT CERTIFICATES



**PROVINCE: Eastern Cape**

**MUNICIPALITY**

- Blue Crane Route Local Municipality
- Kouga Local Municipality



**PROVINCE: Free State**

**MUNICIPALITY**

- Matjhabeng Local Municipality
- Tswelopele Local Municipality



**PROVINCE: KwaZulu-Natal**

**MUNICIPALITY**

- Newcastle Local Municipality
- uMhlatuze Local Municipality



**PROVINCE: Northern Cape**

**MUNICIPALITY**

- eMthonjeni Local Municipality
- Sol Plaatje Local Municipality

**PROVINCE: North West**

**MUNICIPALITY**

- JB Marks Local Municipality
- Moses Kotane Local Municipality

**PROVINCE: Western Cape**

**MUNICIPALITY**

- Oudtshoorn Local Municipality
- Witzenberg Local Municipality

## 13. SESSION 7: COMPACT CITIZEN- BASED MONITORING CASE STUDY

This session presented Citizen-Based Monitoring (CBM) as a structured accountability innovation emerging from the COMPACT programme. Through pilot reflections, the discussion demonstrated how trained community monitors, supported by digital tools and collaborative engagement, can strengthen project oversight, improve service delivery outcomes, and build trust between municipalities and residents.

### 13.1. CITIZEN-BASED MONITORING APPROACH TO ACCOUNTABILITY | Ms Hannah Hudson, Integrity Action



Ms Hannah Hudson delivered the anchor presentation on CBM, positioning it as a practical accountability mechanism that enables communities to actively monitor public projects and engage constructively with local government to improve service delivery outcomes. She emphasised that while CBM is not a new concept globally, its application within the South African local

government context through the COMPACT programme represents an important innovation in participatory governance.

Ms Hudson explained that CBM shifts communities from being passive recipients of services to active partners in oversight, enabling residents to systematically observe, document, and engage on the implementation of municipal projects. The approach is grounded in the principle of shared ownership, where accountability is co-produced by communities and municipalities rather than enforced through adversarial or punitive mechanisms.

She outlined the core objectives of CBM within the COMPACT programme:

- To strengthen transparency and accountability in municipal service delivery.
- To create structured channels for dialogue between communities and municipalities.
- To enable early identification of implementation challenges before projects fail.
- To build trust and improve relationships between residents, officials and contractors.

The CBM approach involved the selection and training of community monitors, primarily ward committee members and community representatives, with deliberate inclusion of women and young people. Monitors were trained in basic monitoring principles, observation techniques, relationship management, negotiation skills, and the use of a mobile application developed to standardise data collection. This combination of skills development and technology ensured that monitoring was consistent, credible, and constructive.

Ms Hudson described how pilot CBM projects were implemented in Kouga Local Municipality and Oudtshoorn Local Municipality, focusing on infrastructure and service delivery projects such as water and sanitation facilities, stormwater systems, causeway upgrades, and housing related infrastructure. Monitors conducted regular site visits, recorded observations both manually and through the digital platform, and engaged municipal technical teams to raise issues and seek resolution.

A critical insight from the presentation was that CBM is most effective when it is collaborative rather than confrontational. Ms Hudson stressed that the programme

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deliberately focused on building relationships with municipal officials and contractors, clarifying roles and expectations, and framing monitoring as a support to implementation rather than an exercise in fault-finding. This approach helped reduce resistance and encouraged problem-solving.

Also highlighted several implementation challenges, including initial resistance from project managers, uneven technical knowledge among monitors, safety concerns, and limitations related to digital access. These challenges were addressed through continuous engagement, refresher training, simplified tools, and the use of low-tech alternatives such as WhatsApp groups where necessary.

She concluded by emphasising that the long-term value of CBM lies in its institutionalisation within municipal systems. For CBM to be sustainable, it must be integrated into existing public participation, performance management, and oversight frameworks, rather than remaining a stand-alone pilot. When embedded effectively, CBM can strengthen accountability, improve service delivery outcomes, and contribute to a more participatory and responsive model of developmental local government.

## 13.2 EXPERIENCES & LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE CBM PILOTING | Panel Discussion



**Moderator:** Winnie Dhlamlenze, SALGA

**Panelists:** Danielle Schaap: Kouga LM, Dessiderius Claassen: Oudtshoorn LM, Concelia Choma: SALGA, Jabu Hlatshwayo: PARI, Hannah Hudson: Integrity Action

The panel discussion provided grounded reflections on the practical implementation of CBM within the COMPACT programme, drawing on pilot experiences from participating municipalities. Panelists reflected on both the operational realities of CBM implementation, and the institutional conditions required for the approach to succeed and be sustained over time.

### 13.2.1. Practical Experiences from the Pilot Municipalities

Municipal representatives shared firsthand experiences of implementing CBM in live service delivery contexts. Ms Danielle Schaap described the CBM pilot in Kouga Local Municipality, focusing on the monitoring of the Jeffreys Bay Causeway upgrade following storm damage. She highlighted how structured monitoring, early approval of funding, and regular engagement between community monitors, municipal officials, and contractors enabled early identification of challenges and timely resolution of issues. The process contributed to improved infrastructure outcomes, better water flow management, and increased community confidence in the project.

Mr Dessiderius Claassen reflected on the experience in Oudtshoorn Local Municipality, where CBM was applied to infrastructure and service delivery projects in a context of capacity constraints and high community expectations. He noted that initial scepticism from project managers and contractors was a significant

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challenge. However, clarity around the purpose of CBM, supported by facilitation and technical engagement, helped shift perceptions from viewing monitoring as a policing exercise to recognising it as a collaborative support mechanism.

## 13.2.2. Key challenges encountered

Identified several common challenges during the piloting phase:

- Initial resistance from project managers and technical officials, driven by concerns about scrutiny and accountability.
- Limited technical knowledge among some community monitors, requiring additional support and simplified tools.
- Unclear reporting and escalation pathways, particularly at the start of implementation.
- Safety and logistical concerns for volunteer monitors working on infrastructure sites.
- Volunteer fatigue and sustainability risks, especially where monitoring demands were high and incentives limited.
- Digital access constraints, including inconsistent connectivity and limited access to devices.

## 13.2.3. Adaptive responses and mitigation strategies

It was highlighted how these challenges were addressed through adaptive and context-sensitive approaches:

- Continuous engagement with municipal officials to clarify roles, expectations, and the developmental intent of CBM.
- Refresher training and ongoing mentorship to strengthen monitors' confidence and technical understanding.
- Use of low-tech and hybrid approaches, including WhatsApp groups and paper-based tools, to complement digital platforms.
- Support from municipal public participation and technical units to improve coordination and safety.
- Emphasis on relationship-building and trust as foundational elements of effective monitoring.

## 13.2.4. Lessons on institutionalisation and sustainability

A central theme emerging from the panel was the need to institutionalise CBM within municipal systems. It was agreed that CBM should not remain a project-based or election-cycle-dependent initiative. Instead, it should be integrated into:

- municipal public participation frameworks,
- performance management and oversight systems,
- ward committee and community engagement structures, and
- internal reporting and feedback mechanisms.

Ms Choma emphasised that a key lesson emerging from the pilots is that institutionalisation enhances continuity, strengthens coordination between communities and municipalities, and enables CBM findings to inform planning, budgeting, and corrective action more systematically. COMPACT is developing a CBM institutionalisation guide to assist municipalities.

## 13.2.5. Key outcomes and value of CBM

The panel concluded that CBM offers tangible benefits for both communities and municipalities when implemented collaboratively:

- Early identification of service delivery issues, reducing project failure and cost escalation.
- Improved transparency and accountability, through shared access to information and monitoring data.
- Strengthened relationships and trust between communities, officials, and contractors.
- Enhanced community ownership of local development outcomes.
- Practical feedback loops that support learning and continuous improvement.

Overall, the discussion reinforced that CBM is most effective when framed as a shared accountability mechanism, supported by training, appropriate tools, and institutional commitment. The COMPACT pilot

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demonstrated that CBM can bridge gaps between municipal performance management systems and community experience, offering a scalable model for strengthening participatory governance and service delivery across South African municipalities.

## Panel Q&A

Questions	Answers
1. What challenges did monitors face?	Challenges included resistance from project directors, unclear reporting structures, limited technical knowledge, safety risks, volunteer fatigue, and access to technology.
2. How were these challenges addressed?	Through clear communication, support from municipal staff, refresher trainings, WhatsApp groups, logistical support, and inclusion of safety measures.
3. What were key successes from the pilot?	Successful projects included the Jeffreys Bay Causeway upgrade, with improved infrastructure, better water management, positive community feedback, and stronger collaboration between monitors, municipalities and contractors.
4. How can CBM be sustained?	By institutionalising CBM within municipal structures, linking it to performance management, training new monitors and maintaining community engagement.
5. How does CBM benefit communities and municipalities?	It increases accountability, transparency, and shared ownership, allowing early identification of issues, constructive engagement with municipalities and improved service delivery outcomes.

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## 14. CLOSING REMARKS & VOTE OF THANKS | Ms Rebecca Matsie-Makhathini, SALGA



In her closing remarks, Ms Rebecca Matsie-Makhathini reflected on the COMPACT National Research Conference as a rich and purposeful platform for learning, dialogue, and collective reflection on the future of developmental local government. She noted that over the course of the conference, participants engaged deeply with evidence, lived experience, and practical tools aimed at strengthening accountability, participation, and service delivery within municipalities.

Ms Matsie-Makhathini highlighted that the conference journey spanned a wide range of interconnected themes. These included innovative tools and techniques for enhancing citizen participation; policy-level discussions on local government reform in the context of the White Paper review; the critical role of gender and youth inclusion in democratic decision-making; and practical case studies demonstrating how municipalities

and partners are rethinking planning, procurement, performance monitoring, and collaboration. Collectively, these discussions reinforced the idea that developmental local government requires both systemic reform and everyday practice change.

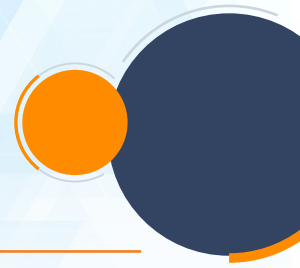
She further reflected on the value of the COMPACT programme in grounding these discussions in action research and real municipal experience. The piloting of CBM in partner municipalities illustrated how communities, when equipped with appropriate tools, training, and institutional support, can play a constructive role in monitoring service delivery and strengthening accountability. A key takeaway from these discussions was the importance of institutionalising CBM and other participatory mechanisms within municipal systems to ensure sustainability, continuity, and integration with performance management processes.

Ms Matsie-Makhathini emphasised that while the COMPACT programme is approaching the end of its formal funding cycle, the work does not end here. The insights, tools, and relationships built through the programme must now be embedded within municipal practice, policy reform processes, and sector-wide learning initiatives. She encouraged participants to take forward the lessons from the conference and actively apply them within their respective institutions and communities.

In closing, Ms Matsie-Makhathini expressed sincere appreciation to all contributors who made the conference a success. She thanked the presenters, panellists, researchers, and municipal representatives for sharing their knowledge and experiences. Special appreciation was extended to the COMPACT partners: PARI, Integrity Action, and SALGA as well as the EU for its support of the programme. She also acknowledged the participating municipalities, conference organisers, and support teams whose commitment ensured a productive and engaging event. Ended by urging all delegates to remain engaged beyond the conference, to champion meaningful participation and accountability, and to contribute to building a more responsive, inclusive, and developmental local government system for the years ahead.

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## CONFERENCE RESOURCES

The conference abstracts, programme and gallery are available online at:  
<https://pari.org.za/conference-compact-national-conference/>

### PROGRAMME:

<https://pari.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/COMPACTconfPROGRAMMEdigi62.pdf>

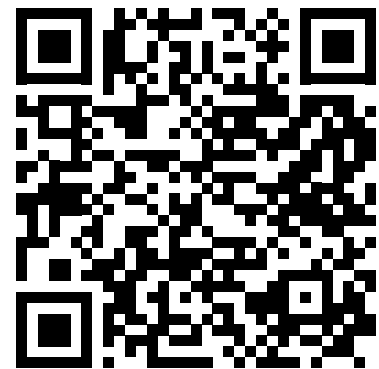
### ABSTRACTS:

<https://pari.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/COMPACTnatconfABSTRACTdigi56.pdf>

### GALLERY:

<https://pari.org.za/gallery-compact-national-research-conference-2025/>

SCAN FOR  
MORE INFO





**Telephone:** 012 369 8000

**Fax:** 012 369 8001

**Physical Address:**

Menlyn Corporate Park, Block B  
175 Corobay Avenue, Cnr Garsfontein  
and Corobay, Waterkloof Glen ext II,  
PRETORIA 0001

**Postal Address:** PO Box 2094  
PRETORIA 0001



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