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Social Accountability in the Delivery of Social Protection

South Africa case study

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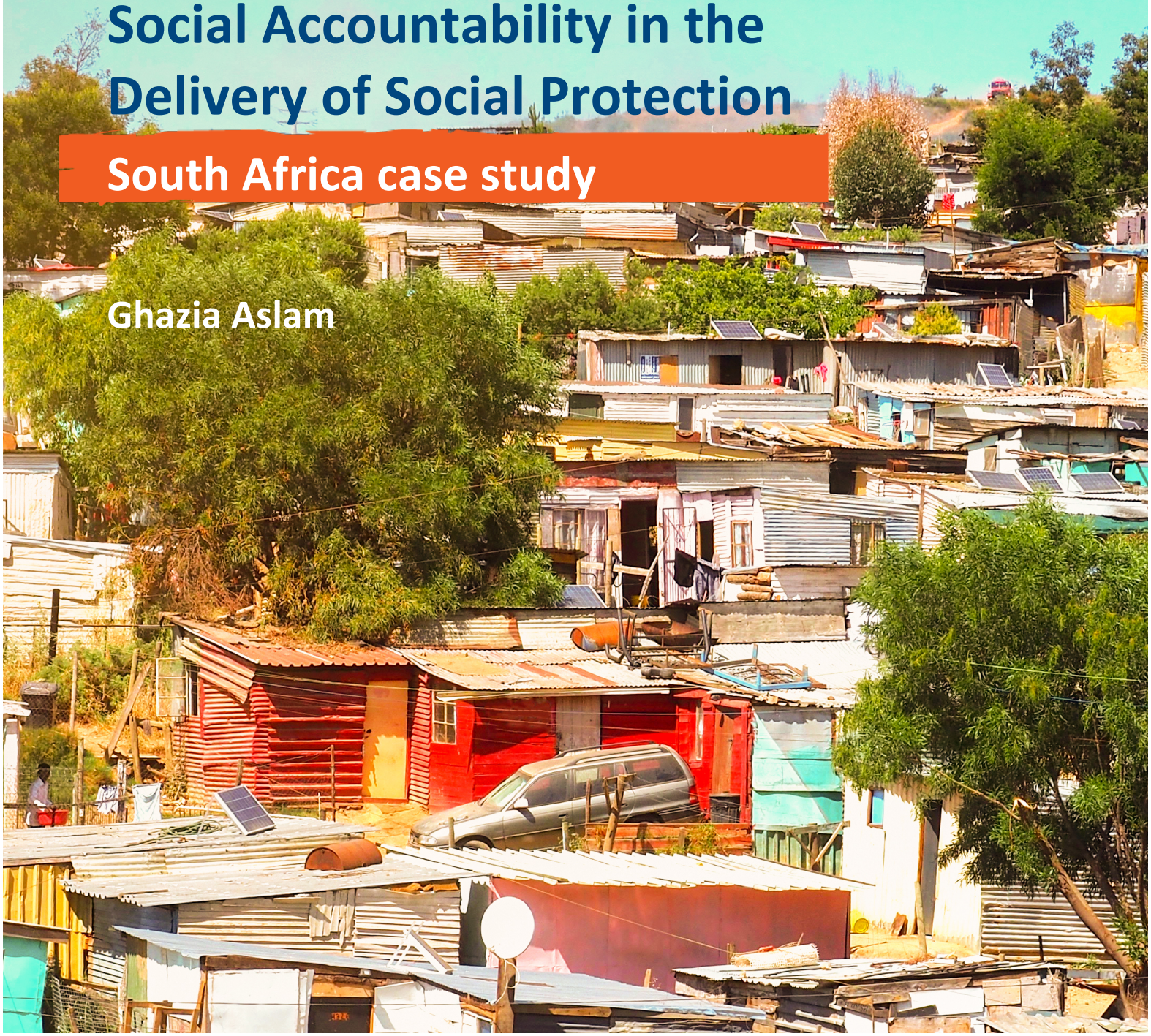

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Acronyms

ACESS	Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security
CASE	Community Agency for Social Enquiry
CBM	Community Based Monitoring
CMAP	Citizen Monitoring and Advocacy Project
CPS	Cash Paymaster Services
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
DPME	Department of Monitoring and Evaluation
DSD	Department of Social Development
GRM	Grievance Redress Mechanism
ICROP	Integrated Community Registration Outreach Program
HDI	Human Development Index
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a case study on social accountability in South Africa's social protection programmes. It is one of four case studies, which taken together form one of the outputs of a global policy research project that DFID has contracted Development Pathways to undertake. These four case studies will inform a final research report and a guidance note for practitioners.

The overall purpose of the global research project is to bring together existing evidence and generate new evidence on the effects that social accountability mechanisms have on the delivery of social protection services and on state-society relations. Through a review of existing literature and in-country qualitative research in South Africa, the present study seeks to assess the effects of social accountability interventions implemented by the state as well as by the civil society organisations. Specifically, we assess the effects of the Mikondzo project, the Integrated Community Registration Outreach Program (ICROP), and the Grievance Redress Mechanism implemented by the Government of South Africa. Furthermore, we look at the Community Monitoring and Advocacy Project (CMAP) and the Citizen Based Monitoring (CBM) programmes implemented by Black Sash.

Few societies have been more deeply divided than South Africa. For several decades, state and society imposed de jure racial classification, which led to a situation where a White minority dominated the majority population. The resulting inequalities in the social, political and economic realms persist. In this context, the delivery of social grants has been hailed as the government's chief initiative for tackling inequality, and is protected by the country's constitution. The social grant system has seen a massive expansion of the programmes in recent years. In 2002, South Africa had about 4.2 million beneficiaries of social grants. This grew rapidly to about 17 million beneficiaries in the year 2017/2018. It is estimated that almost one-third of the country's population depends on social grant directly or indirectly.

The administration of social grants is the responsibility of the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) – an independent government agency – while the Department of Social Development (DSD) is responsible for policy and regulation and for the monitoring of SASSA. There are five major social protection schemes in South Africa: the Old Age Grant is targeted towards older people;[1] the Child Support Grant and the Foster Care Grant are targeted towards children and adolescents, while the Disability Grant is targeted to people with disabilities who cannot participate in the labour market. Eligibility for most social grants is currently dependent on an income-based means-test, which varies depending on the grant, marital status of the beneficiary, and other characteristics (the only exception is the Foster Care Grant, for which no means-test is applied).

[1] In addition to the Old Age Grant, there is a war veteran grant, for veterans of the Second World War and Korean War. This beneficiary group is small and is declining through natural attrition.

Many social accountability initiatives have been implemented in South Africa's social protection sector. The Mikondzo project implemented by DSD aims to engage communities and the service provider through community dialogue and gatherings to receive and provide feedback to citizens about social grant services. The Integrated Community Registration Outreach Program (ICROP), implemented by SASSA, targets remote areas where integrated services related to social grants (including processing of documents) are dispatched to provide one-stop services to the beneficiaries. Black Sash has also implemented the Community Monitoring and Advocacy Project (CMAP) in which detailed information is collected by community based organisations about service delivery. This information is then later compiled for advocacy purposes. The programme later evolved into a Community Based Monitoring (CBM) programme that uses ICT to collect information and analyse it in real time.

We adopt a theory-based approach to our assessment. We have developed a conceptual framework to inform our research, which is grounded in the wider literature on social accountability, and has been adapted to the context of social protection. The framework suggests social accountability is the interplay of citizen and state action, supported by three elements: civic mobilisation, the state-citizen interfaces, and information.

Simply stated, the framework suggests that citizen action (e.g. in the form of demand-making) and state's response to citizens' action depends on: how effectively the information flows; how credible, legitimate, and functional state-society interfaces are; and how well citizens are mobilised to trigger and facilitate citizens' voice, especially for vulnerable or marginalised individuals and groups. It is argued that when these components function effectively, service delivery and state-society relationship will improve. We, therefore, assess the effect of social accountability interventions by observing these elements. We also assess if these elements have led to improvements in service delivery and the state-society relationship.

Information: SASSA has made several attempts to provide information about the grants as well as about the opportunities for citizens to communicate with the government officials. People are aware of the grants that are available to them. However, there is still confusion on some aspects of eligibility criteria and documentation required especially for the Disability Grant. A misunderstanding of these aspects sometimes leads to multiple visits and can result in the exclusion of rightful beneficiaries. Regular contact through programmes like Mikondzo, ICROP and SASSA local offices has not alleviated this information gap for two reasons: First, people generally do not know that these platforms are there for them to provide information; and second, people are afraid to ask for information from the staff out of fear of being treated rudely. The gaps are most significant for the refugee groups.

Interface: Social accountability interventions have also established avenues where citizens and government officials can engae. These include meetings during the ICROP and the Mikondzo projects. SASSA local offices with regular office hours, scheduled pay-points, and service points can also act as effective interfaces. Most of these interfaces are geographically quite close to the communities they serve. SASSA also has a well-structured Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) system. Yet, our research did not find a particularly strong interaction between state officials and citizens. Citizens are unaware of these interfaces, or are unable to access them due to costs. They also do not feel confident in engaging with the government officials, as sometimes they think that they do not have the right to complain about service delivery, or are afraid of rude behaviour of the staff.

Civic mobilisation: Social accountability approaches implemented in South Africa for the delivery of social grants do not provide strong mobilisation. Even though there are local associations that perform other functions in the community (e.g. luncheon clubs), they do not enable mobilisation on social grant issues. One of the reasons why beneficiaries are hesitant to discuss these issues with community members is that they feel that these matters are personal, and that it is difficult to talk to others about a difficult economic situation. However, it was observed that people also do not take the initiative to talk about other issues that impact them collectively (other than the neighbourhood security). This issue is also related to the fact that even though there are spaces for citizens to interface with the government, citizens do not participate in these forums. Since there has been no effort to mobilise the citizens to take collective action, non-participation of citizens in these spaces is not surprising.

Citizen action: Despite there being widespread information available and sufficient opportunities for engagement, we found that citizen action is not strong. Citizens are not demanding better services, either individually or collectively, nor are they accessing any of the available interfaces. Though citizens deem social grants (especially the Old Age Grant and the Child Support Grant) to be their right rather than a gift, they are hesitant to take individual or collective action. A number of constraints, including lack of information about how to take action, high costs of action, and fear of rude behaviour from the staff, contribute to this situation. Lack of mobilisation opportunities and the socio-political environment with high inequality and social hierarchies also seem to be a contributing factor. It is important that social accountability activities, in addition to providing better interfaces and information, also ensure that they enable citizens to mobilise to use these interfaces and to act on this information.

State action: State officials have limited resources available to them to respond to citizens' demands and are constrained by the national policy on social grants. Some government officials are, however, enthusiastic about their role in SASSA and have used innovative ways to solve service delivery problems in their areas in response to citizens' demands.

Impact on service delivery: Many gaps remain in the service delivery of social grants. Yet, SASSA, in an attempt to address these gaps, has made several changes in recent years. ICROP and Mikondzo have helped improve information dissemination to potential beneficiaries regarding social grants and their accessibility. SASSA offices, service points and pay-points bring services to remote areas, helping to improve coverage and reduce travel costs of people. They have also provided avenues for people to raise concerns and register complaints. While it is difficult to directly attribute these changes to citizens' demands and to social accountability interventions, it can be surmised that since these are the issues that have been raised by the citizens and beneficiaries, these changes respond to their demands.

Impact on state-society relationships: It is difficult to attribute any change in the state-society relationship between citizens and the government to any of the social accountability interventions. One of the reasons for this lack of impact is the issue of attribution, which also points to the gap in social accountability interventions that the government has not been able to convey this information. Many beneficiaries we met simply did not know that social grants came from the government. They either mistook these grants as coming from a private company contracted out to make payments, or were unaware that SASSA was part of the government. The other constraint is that even though the state has invited citizens to participate in the service delivery process (which is eventually expected to lead to a stronger state-society relationship), they have not created conditions in which citizens feel safe to participate. If citizens are not able to participate and engage with government officials, it is very difficult to see how these interventions can help improve the state-society relationship.

Introduction

This case study is one of four that together comprise one output of a larger research project conducted by Development Pathways, and funded by DFID. The overarching research questions for this project relate to understanding the direct and indirect impacts of social accountability on service delivery and the state-society relationship, as well as how these impacts are mediated by the context. This report aims to respond to these questions in the case of South Africa's social protection system. It is important to note that the main objective of this report is to provide input to the overall research report.

For the purpose of our research, we define 'social accountability' and 'social protection' in the following ways: Accountability is the obligation of power-holders to take responsibility for their actions. It is a 'process by which public officials inform about and justify their plans of action, their behaviour and results, and are sanctioned accordingly' (Ackerman, 2005). DFID defines social protection as 'a sub-set of public actions that help address risk, vulnerability and chronic poverty'. We follow this definition, however, we focus on non-contributory programmes, including conditional and unconditional cash transfers that are either universal or means-tested, as well as public works programmes.

The report is informed by desk research as well as qualitative field research undertaken in South Africa. It is structured as follows:

Section 2 of the report reviews the overarching social contract that defines the relationship between citizens and the state in South Africa. We also briefly review the socio-economic context within which the South African social protection system exists.

Section 3 discusses the social protection system in South Africa. We outline the administrative structure of the agency in charge of the social grants system and review the different social protection benefits that are available in South Africa. We also look at their eligibility criteria and the challenges around service delivery.

Section 4 presents our theoretical framework and our research questions and **Section 5** details our methodology. **Section 6** provides an overview of the social accountability interventions that have been implemented in an effort to improve service delivery.

Sections 7 and 8 present findings from the qualitative research. **Section 9** concludes by providing policy lessons for South Africa's social grant system, as well as overarching lessons that this case study provides for implementing social accountability in other contexts.

Chapter 1: Socio-political context

In this section, we examine the context of poverty and inequalities — both social and political — that provides the setting within which social protection programmes are implemented in South Africa. Few societies have been more deeply divided than South Africa. For several decades, state and society imposed de jure racial classification that led to a situation in which the White minority dominated the majority population. Apartheid organised the state and society around rigidly imposed identities where subordinate status was assigned to African, Coloured and Indian South Africans (Sisk, 2017). In addition to the state, racial discrimination was institutionalised in the political and social structures of the country. The White majority used their power to further racial exclusion and socio-economic inequality, to the extent that even after the end of Apartheid, the White population continue to be economically ascendant and inequalities continue to deepen.

The level of inequality found in South Africa is not usually found in an upper middle-income country. While South Africa's living standards are on average significantly above those in countries where chronic poverty is assumed to be most severe, its legacy of racially embedded inequality and poverty has kept a large proportion of the population living in extreme poverty. May et al. (2000) show that Black South Africa's Human Development Index (HDI) is equivalent to that of Zimbabwe or Swaziland. At the same time, White South Africa's HDI rests comfortably between that of high-income countries, such as Israel and Italy. According to Statistics South Africa, the Gini coefficient measuring relative expenditure and income reached 0.65 in 2014, based on expenditure data (excluding taxes), and 0.69 based on income data (including salaries, wages, and social grants). The poorest 20 per cent of the South African population consume less than 3 per cent of total expenditure, while the wealthiest 20 per cent consume 65 per cent.[2]

The situation appears to be worsening all the time. The combined effects of high levels of unemployment, a rampant HIV epidemic and the crisis around the affordability of basic services are leading to a significant reversal in the living standards of the working class and people living in poverty.

Even within these circumstances, and under the strain of a prolonged economic crisis, the country is moving towards an inclusive democracy (Sisk, 2017). Social protection has turned out to be the single most effective anti-poverty tool deployed after 1994 (Meth, 2004), and has been hailed as the government's chief initiative for tackling inequality.

[2] http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southafrica/overview

The social protection system in South Africa: institutions, governance and challenges

The provision of social protection in contemporary South Africa is rooted in the country's constitution. The South African Constitution of 1996, touted as one of the most progressive in the world, includes social security as one of the socio-economic rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights. It stipulates that everyone has the right to access appropriate social assistance for those unable to support themselves. Furthermore, the state should take reasonable legislative and other measures – within its available resources – to achieve the progressive realisation of this right.

Courts have upheld this important right in many instances and have played a crucial role in shaping the social protection sector in the country. The courts have decided on many cases that have defined the landscape of social grants in South Africa. For example, in Khosa (2003) the court ruled that the citizenship requirement to be eligible for social grants infringed the constitutional right to equality of citizens of other countries living in South Africa as permanent residents, and that permanent residents were bearers of the right to social security that the Constitution vested in everyone. Accordingly, the Social Assistance Act (Act 13 of 2004) expanded the eligibility for social assistance to include South African citizens and persons who are resident in the country.

Similarly, in a 2004 case, the court found that 'social assistance is a matter that cannot be regulated effectively by provincial legislation and that requires to be regulated or co-ordinated by uniform norms and standards that apply generally throughout the Republic, for effective performance'. The same year, legislation was introduced that provided a framework for social assistance and laid the basis for a centralised national agency to administer social grants. The South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) was established in 2006 and is responsible for the management, implementation and payment of grants nationally, while the Department of Social Development (DSD) is responsible for policy and legislation.

As we will discuss later, the constitutional provision for social security has provided a strong and effective tool for civil society and citizens' groups to demand effective service delivery and accountability from the government.

1.1 Administration of social grants

SASSA acts as a sole agency that is responsible for management, administration and payment of social assistance. However, the DSD still has the authority to monitor SASSA. The DSD also leads the development and review of social policy relating to social grants. In addition to monitoring social grants, DSD also regulates other existing private, non-governmental welfare services in its endeavour to 'create a better life for the poor, vulnerable and excluded people in society'.[3] It also oversees the National Development Agency that is responsible for the disbursement of NGO funds in the social protection sector, as well as other sectors too.

While SASSA administers social grants, the actual payment of grants to the recipients has been contracted out to private companies. Recently, the system of delivery and administration of social grants has become more technologically sophisticated, with the adoption of biometric identification and an electronic payment system using payment cards. Many recipients now receive their payments electronically into bank accounts. Others can go to SASSA offices or pay-points where SASSA staff can facilitate payment through ATMs. The introduction of this system in 2012 required all social grant beneficiaries to re-register with SASSA.

SASSA has a network of local offices throughout the country where they process social grant applications. All applicants must go to the SASSA office to apply for the grant, where an application form is completed in the presence of a SASSA official.[4] In addition to local offices, SASSA also operates mobile service points and pay-points in remote areas, where beneficiaries can apply for grants and receive their payments. The service and pay-points operate according to a set schedule. Once the applicant has all the documents, the decision on eligibility is made on the same day. Successful applicants are given an ATM card through which they can access their payments.

There are five major social protection schemes in South Africa. The Old Age Grant is targeted towards older people.[5] The Child Support Grant and the Foster Care Grant are targeted towards children and adolescents, while the Disability Grant is targeted to people with disabilities who cannot participate in the labour market. Eligibility for most social grants is currently dependent on an income-based means test, which varies according to the grant, marital status of the beneficiary, and other characteristics (the only exception is the Foster Care Grant, for which no means test is applied). However, since the income thresholds are relatively high, the means test is in effect a form of affluence testing, aimed at excluding the most affluent, rather than an attempt at targeting those in extreme poverty. There are no explicit conditionalities associated with the grants.

[3] https://www.westerncape.gov.za/your_gov/61
[4] http://www.gov.za/services/child-care-social-benefits/child-support-grant
[5] In addition to the Old Age Grant, there is a war veteran grant, for veterans of the Second World War and Korean War. This beneficiary group is small and is declining through natural attrition.

The following paragraphs examine the particulars of each grant, their impact, and the challenges encountered in implementation and access.

1.2 Old Age Grant

The Old Age Grant is the oldest social grant in South Africa. It was introduced in the 1920s but was limited only for Whites. The benefit of the grant was gradually extended, but with dissimilar benefit levels, to other race groups. During the Apartheid era, the system was racially discriminatory in many respects. Means tests were more stringent, and the benefit levels were much lower, for Blacks. The extension of the social pension to the whole population took several years and it started to operate fully in all areas by the beginning of 1993.

Individuals — that is, South African citizens, residents and refugees — who are older than 60 and have a monthly income below a certain level are eligible for this grant. The maximum value of the Old Age Grant is R1,600 per month. If you are over the age of 75 you will receive an additional R20 per month. This amount roughly translates into USD 125 or USD 1500 per year. In South Africa, the average household net-adjusted disposable income per capita is USD 8,712 a year.[6]

The Old Age Grant is a significant source of income for more than 3.2 million South Africans[7] and contributes not only to recipients' wellbeing and food security, but also to that of their household (Neves et al., 2010). Given the high level of unemployment, the pension recipient is frequently the main income earner in the household (Duflo, 2000).

Previous research has suggested that the Old Age Grant is well targeted and does not have large exclusion errors. The Old Age Grant is means-tested, which is applied to self-reported income and assets of the applicant and his or her spouse. However, there is a suggestion that this is not strictly applied (Duflo, 2000). If an applicant is African and neither conspicuously wealthy nor in receipt of a government employee or private pension, the Old Age Grant is relatively easy to claim. Consequently, take-up rates and awareness of the grant are high (Van Der Westhuizen and Van Zyl, 2000). As of September 2016, the Old Age Grant is estimated to cover about 77 per cent of older people above the age of 60 in South Africa.[8]

In addition, the Old Age Grant enjoys high levels of political and social acceptability. Not only is age a readily verifiable criterion, it is also less likely to create work disincentives than other forms of social protection (Grosh et al., 2008; Lund, 1999).

[6] http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/south-africa/
[7] Source: Administrative data from SASSA, September 2016
[8] Source: Administrative data from SASSA, September 2016, and population estimates from UN DESA

1.3 Child Support Grant

The Child Support Grant is one of the fastest growing social grants in South Africa. The Child Support Grant is available to children under the age of 18, whose primary caregiver must be either a South African citizen, a permanent resident or a refugee. The income of the caregiver must also fall below a means-tested household level. The age eligibility rules for the Child Support Grant have been changed in gradual steps. When it was introduced, caregivers who met the means test criteria could receive the grant until the child turned seven. This was expanded to children under nine years in 2003, to under 11 years in 2004, and now it applies to those under 18. The Child Support Grant reaches over 10 million children in South Africa (UNICEF, 2012). Currently, the value of the Child Support Grant is R380. More than 90 per cent of the grant recipients are female (Fultz and Francis, 2013).

The Child Support Grant requires caregivers to provide proof of school enrolment and attendance for children aged 7-18 years. However, this does not amount to a hard conditionality as school attendance is not an eligibility requirement, nor will the grant be suspended or terminated if a child is not attending school or proof is not provided.

Many research studies have provided strong evidence that the Child Support Grant is associated with many benefits, not just for the children receiving the Child Support Grant, but to the community as well. The Child Support Grant has been associated with improvements in the quantity and quality of food consumption (Delany et al., 2008; Goldblatt and Hall, 2008). The Child Support Grant has a small but positive impact on child school enrolment (Budlender and Woolard, 2006). Early Child Support Grant receipt improves cognitive development and reduces the likelihood of child illness and of risky adolescent behaviour (DSD et al., 2012). Indeed, the grant has been hailed as 'one of government's most successful social policy tools for combating child poverty' (UNICEF, 2014). In addition, some studies have also suggested that the Child Support Grant enhances women's power and control in household decision-making over finances (Patel et al., 2012).

There are some challenges in accessing the Child Support Grant. One of the challenges that has been highlighted in previous research is the need for documentation and administrative requirements. It used to be necessary for the applicant of the Child Support Grant to have a South African ID book and birth certificate for the child. However, following demands by the recipients and civil society groups, this is no longer a requirement. After legal action by the Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security (ACESS), an amendment to regulation 11(1) was introduced in 2008 to allow applicants who lack the prescribed 'proof of identity' documentation to use alternative documentation when applying for the Child Support Grant. This usually takes the form of a sworn statement or affidavit and allows applicants to apply for, and begin receiving, the Child Support Grant while obtaining official documentation from the Department of Home Affairs (DHA).

Despite the expanded reach of the Child Support Grant, many children are still excluded from the programme. Almost 18 per cent of income eligible children are still not accessing the grant (DSD, SASSA and UNICEF, 2016). Budlender et al. (2005) compared General Household Survey data with DSD data to show that by late 2003, an estimated 78 per cent of children eligible for the Child Support Grant were receiving it. According to another estimate, only a fifth of teenagers who bear children are Child Support Grant recipients (Makiwane, Desmond, Richter and Udjo, 2006).

A recent study has found that the highest rates of exclusion are in the urbanised provinces of the Western Cape and Gauteng, while poorer and more rural provinces perform better in reaching eligible children. The Child Support Grant therefore has good coverage in the poorest areas (DSD, SASSA and UNICEF, 2016).

Another issue that has been highlighted in delivery of the Child Support Grant is the social stigma that women face while receiving the grant. There is a growing concern in the popular discourse and media that social grants, including the Child Support Grant, might weaken the motivation to work. There is an impression that women who receive the Child Support Grant are 'not deserving' (Surender et al., 2010). Even though none of the studies have found this connection,[9] the idea remains popular. For example, Hochfeld & Plagerson (2011) found that negative discourses around Child Support Grant receipt have contributed to a stigmatisation of some women who receive such grants.

1.4 Foster Care Grant

The Foster Care Grant seeks to reimburse individuals for the cost of raising a foster child. It is not subject to a means test of the guardian or the child. However, it is necessary that the court places the child in the custody of a recipient who is not the biological parent. It requires a relatively complex administrative and legal process, supervised by a social worker. The value of the Foster Care Grant is R920 per month.

1.5 Disability Grant

The Disability Grant is intended for adults who are severely incapacitated by mental or physical disability and are therefore unable to work. Eligibility is determined by medical criteria, working age (between 18 years and retirement age), and is subject to a means test. Grants are either temporary (six months) or permanent (subject to periodic review). The maximum value of the Disability Grant is R1,600 per month. The exact value depends on the extent of disability.

[9] For example, see Surender et al., 2010 who provide a review of such studies.

It has been argued that both the eligibility criteria to qualify for the Disability Grant and the definition of 'people with disability' are too vague. As a result, eligibility for the grant is open to subjective interpretations both by applicants and the healthcare providers, including doctors, who have been appointed as medical assessors. For example, Lund's (2006) review of the evidence suggests that the application of the medical eligibility criteria has been applied inconsistently. Moreover, the on-going challenge of human resource capacity in the public healthcare sector – in particular the shortage of doctors – means that few staff are available to assess disability in public facilities, leaving very little time (as little as three minutes) to assess a patient's disability (Govender et al, 2015).

Chapter 2: Framework and research questions

We adopt a theory-based approach to our research. We have developed a conceptual framework to inform our research, which is grounded in the wider literature on social accountability, and has been adapted to the context of social protection. The framework suggests that social accountability constitutes five elements as the interplay of both citizen and state action, supported by three mobile elements: civic mobilisation, interface and information. Citizen action is the central constitutive element of social accountability and the basis for citizen-led engagement. Citizen action comprises diverse activities and typically includes demand making (for information, justification, or sanctions), such as protests against injustice or claims for better public goods. The citizen action element within this framework also unpacks the collective action problem. State action is the second primary element of social accountability as the role of the state is pivotal to the social accountability concept. State action can be in the form of a positive response, for example, by improving services and reducing corruption. However, it can also be in the form of a negative response, with the state ignoring citizens' complaints or there being repression or a backlash.

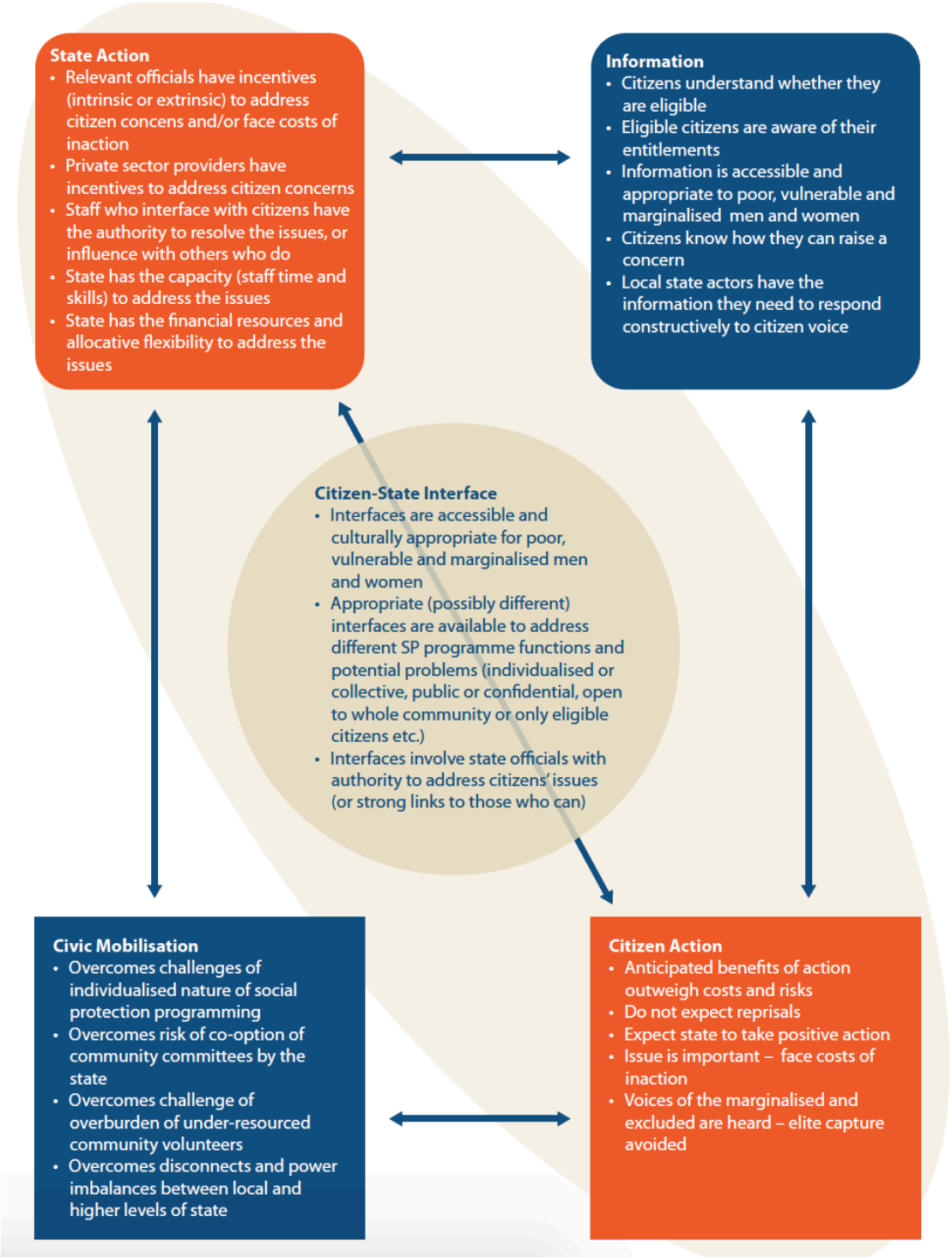
Information flows are essential for an accountable and responsive state that engages citizens in decision-making. These flows need to move in various directions: from citizens to the state; from the state to citizen;, between the various parts of civil society and within the state apparatus. Similarly, it is necessary to bring citizens, whether individuals or collectives, together in an interface. Interface is a complex locus of interaction between state and citizen actors. What matters are not only the interactions occurring through the interface, but also the processes that lead up to it and those that follow. Lastly, civic mobilisation is an essential constituent of social accountability. Information or the existence of a state-society interface does not necessarily spur citizen or state action on an issue. Civic mobilisation is often necessary to trigger and facilitate citizen voice, especially for vulnerable or marginalised individuals and groups. Similarly, on the state side, officials need to be mobilised to seek out and engage with citizens.

Building on a careful remapping of the available evidence along social accountability's five constitutive elements, our conceptual framework also lists factors that respectively impact these constituents. Figure 1 shows the interplay of the five constituents of social accountability, as well as the factors that impact the workings of each constituent.

The research report aims to shed light on the following research questions for the overall report, in the case of South Africa:

a) How have social accountability mechanisms been used within social protection programmes in South Africa, and what have been the outcomes? In answering this question, we follow our conceptual framework and focus on outcomes in relation to information, interface and social mobilisation.
b) How are these social accountability interventions in social protection programmes associated with impacts on improved service delivery outcomes and strengthening of state-society relations?

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



2.1 Methodology

South Africa is one of four case studies carried out as part of the overall research project. The motivation behind choosing South Africa included its middle-income status, as well as the fact that it has a large-scale social protection system. The fact that several interesting social accountability initiatives have been implemented in relation to the social protection programmes, some of them initiated by the government, was also a key factor. As of September 2016, there were a total of 17,149,931 recipients of social grants out of the total population of about 55.91 million.[10] Total expenditure on social grants is expected to be 150 billion South African Rand.[11] According to SASSA's administrative data, South Africa's public spending on social assistance programmes was about 3.42% of GDP. The social grant system has also seen a massive expansion of the programmes in recent years. In 2002, South Africa only had about 4.2 million beneficiaries of social grants. This grew rapidly to about 17 million beneficiaries as the grants were expanded to include older children. In addition, social accountability mechanisms are championed by the state. In fact, most of the initiatives that are the focus of analysis in this study were implemented by the state.

2.2 Institutional assessment

Before the field research, we conducted an institutional assessment using desk-research, document reviews and interviews with national stakeholders in Pretoria and Cape Town. We met with several stakeholders, including SASSA, DSD, Department of Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), and the NGO Black Sash. The aim of these interviews was to understand the landscape of social grants in the country, to get a sense of stakeholders, and to ensure that we take into consideration all social accountability mechanisms. We were also able to understand broader service delivery challenges. While in Pretoria, we also visited the national call office of SASSA, which manages complaints from across the country about the SASSA service delivery.

2.3 Site selection

Within the country we used a purposive methodology to select research sites. We wanted to make sure that we included sites from both rural and urban areas. In urban areas, we focused on townships. We also wanted to have a variation in proximity of research sites to bigger cities. Lastly, we wanted to select sites that had implemented Black Sash's Citizen Monitoring and Advocacy Project (CMAP).

[10] Administrative data from SASSA, September 2016
[11] http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2016/speech/speech.pdf

Given these characteristics we chose two provinces: Western Cape and Limpopo. Within each province we further selected villages: two for Western Cape (Samora and Paarle) and two for Limpopo (Polokwane and Burgersfort). One urban neighbourhood – Mitchell's Plain – was also selected for field research in Western Cape province.

2.4 Data collection instruments and methods: Focus groups and interviews

The fieldwork was conducted from March 13 to April 1, 2017. Fieldwork in communities started with a visit to the local SASSA office. We interviewed the manager, observed the office environment, and time and circumstances permitting, we conducted a focus group with the beneficiaries in the local office. At each service point and each pay-point, we organised focus groups and interviews with beneficiaries. If at the service points we were not able to organise focus groups (e.g. due to lack of space), we focused on conducting interviews instead. In addition, we conducted focus groups in communities using snowballing methodology. Here, participants of the focus groups and interviews at SASSA offices and pay-points helped us recruit other individuals who have had experiences with SASSA and/or are eligible for social grants. In Western Cape, we conducted seven focus group discussions with beneficiaries and community members, five interviews with beneficiaries and community members and two interviews with local leaders. In addition, we visited two service points and two local SASSA offices. We also conducted an interview with the regional head of SASSA. In Limpopo, we conducted eight focus group discussions and five interviews with beneficiaries and community members, interviewed three local and regional leaders, and visited two local offices and one pay-point. We also visited the regional call centre in Limpopo. Table 1 provides an overview of the different instruments used in different sites.

Table 1: Interviews conducted per location

	Western Cape		Limpopo		**Total**
Regional	1		1		**2**
	Mitchell's Plain/Samora	**Paarl**	**Polokwane**	**Burgersfort**	
Local office visit	1	1	1	1	**4**
Interview with local office manager	1	1	1	1	**4**
Service point visit and interview with staff	1	1		1	**3**
Pay-point visit and interview with staff	1			1	**2**
Focus group discussions with beneficiaries	3	2	2	5	**12**

	Western Cape		Limpopo		**Total**
Interviews with beneficiaries	1	4	2	3	**10**
Focus group discussions with community members	1	1		1	**3**
Interview with local leaders		1		1	**2**
Total interviews, focus group discussions and visits	**8**	**10**	**6**	**7**	**30**

Each focus group comprised 4-6 individuals. At local offices, service points and pay-points, individuals were recruited from those who were visiting to apply for a grant. In communities, we recruited participants both through a local leader and using a snowballing methodology. We took special care not to let SASSA staff pick the respondents. We conducted both mixed-gender focus group as well as female only focus groups. Some focus groups included beneficiaries of only specific grants. In other interviews, beneficiaries of various grants were included. In at least two focus groups, beneficiaries had experience with more than one type of grant, e.g. a grandmother receiving an Old Age Grant as well as Child Support Grant.

A single facilitator led all the focus group discussions and interviews. The facilitator was given a list of topics to cover during the discussion and was presented with some guiding questions to lead the discussion. The facilitator was thoroughly trained in relevant topics and was briefed on confidentiality protocols and norms of the discussion. Most of the discussions were audio recorded. However, when participants and interviewees were reluctant to use audio recorders, hand-written notes were taken instead.

In addition, facilitators were also asked to fill in an information sheet for every focus group discussion to record information on the number of participants, the grant they were receiving (if any), and some basic characteristics (such as their gender and whether they held a position in any local association or institution).

Chapter 3: Social accountability initiatives in the social protection sector

Many social accountability initiatives have been implemented in South Africa's social protection sector. Civil society has a long and active history of demanding efficient service delivery and accountability from the government in social protection. The ways in which civil society has engaged with social grants ranges from assisting people in overcoming obstacles to accessing social security, to advocating for the expansion and extension of the availability of the social security system (Frye, 2008).

Civil society has used several approaches including: media interventions; information dissemination; and mass mobilisation. In addition, as the right to social security is enshrined in the country's constitution, civil society has also actively used the courts.

Some of the issues that civil society has focused on in the social protection sector include: advocating for the introduction of Child Support Grant in the late 1990s; fighting to increase the value of the grants; using the courts to enforce administrative justice for applicants whose grant applications were delayed; fighting to reinstate the right of successful applicants to receive payment of their grants from the date of application rather than the date of approval; and fighting to extend the eligibility of the child support grant to all children under 18 (Frye, 2008).

More recently, civil society has brought the issue of 'deductions' from social grants to the attention of the courts. Deductions is a catch-all term to describe deductions of money – for airtime, electricity, insurance and loans – from grant beneficiaries' bank accounts. Sometimes, these are authorised by the grant recipients, but are at other times unauthorised. Many times, recipients may have formally authorised the deductions but did not understand the process, or did so unwittingly. Civil society's involvement sparked a case against Cash Paymaster Services (CPS) – the private company contracted by SASSA to make the payments – to bar CPS and its subsidiary partners from making deductions from social grants.

In addition to civil society, the South African government has also initiated social accountability approaches in the social protection sector. In the following paragraphs, we briefly review some of the most prominent approaches before moving on to our findings on the impact of these interventions.

3.1 Mikondzo project

In 2013, the DSD introduced the Mikondzo project (which means footprints). The project aims to improve services to all South Africans, especially the marginalised and the vulnerable. The programme was specifically focused on citizens in remote communities. The name represents the programme's mission to expand and leave a positive service delivery footprint by bringing all its services to the people. Mikondzo is targeting 1,300 wards in 23 municipalities that have been identified by the Cabinet as a priority. The project is also informed by engagements with provincial and municipal authorities, councillors, ward committees, social workers and community development workers who provide the government with first-hand information about the situation on the ground.

The primary objective of the programme is to engage with communities and service providers through community dialogue and gatherings in order to really understand the issues that communities are facing. At the same time, government officials are also able to provide valuable information about services directly to the citizens. The Chief Director of Monitoring and Evaluation at DSD explained that the executives from DSD and SASSA lead fact-finding missions that identify household issues using a data collection instrument developed for the function. Once the issues are identified, they are ranked and prioritised to link them to the government's five-year and annual priorities. The services are then packaged in an integrated manner for the various households, shifting away from isolated service offerings.

> *The executive and senior management spend less time in exotic offices and be closer to the communities* (Interview with Chief Director: Monitoring and Evaluation, DSD).

> *This was the first time government leadership from national offices are getting their hands dirty*. The same official explained: *It is more an eye opener for many*.

This programme is still relatively new and external reviews are not available.

According to our framework, the Mikondzo programme fulfils two levers of social accountability. First, it provides information to the community about services and government processes. Second, it provides an interface where citizens and state officials can interact with each other. While there are no formal mechanisms for citizens to get together, it provides an informal avenue for citizens to come together and provides them with an opportunity to discuss challenges and solutions in accessing services.

3.2 The Integrated Community Registration Outreach Program (ICROP)

The Integrated Community Registration Outreach Program (ICROP) is an attempt by SASSA to reach excluded people to provide social grant services in a more integrated way. According to this programme, SASSA's mobile units are dispatched to deliver services through fully equipped mobile one-stop service units, or vehicles equipped with modern technology. In these mobile units, SASSA can register potential beneficiaries and issue cards through which they can access payments. Officials from related departments, especially Home Affairs (that can provide identity documents required for some grants), are also involved in the programme delivery. The police are also dispatched to ensure safety. ICROP primarily targets deep rural and semi-urban areas, which, according to the 2007 deprivation index, were the most socially excluded and isolated areas.

The Chief Director of Monitoring and Evaluation at DSD explained that ICROP was implemented in order to attempt to reduce exclusion errors. According to the Executive Manager, the programme was established in response to observations by civil society groups that many children in rural areas were being excluded. The traditional leaders and the civil society have always worked hand in hand to drive the programme. The mobile units also facilitate access to the appeals process as they accept and help individuals submit appeal applications.

The same programme is also used to provide information on existing benefits and services. In the beginning of every ICROP event, an information session is held by the SASSA staff to provide information about the eligibility requirements, documentation required, as well as about the process required to apply for these grants. In addition to information - similar to the Mikondzo programme – ICROP also provides a channel for citizens to communicate with government officials. The traditional leaders, Community Development Workers, and councillors participate in the programme to encourage citizens to attend. They also play a facilitating role during the activity, for example, by helping individuals to file applications. They allow these local leaders to act as intermediaries between citizens and state officials, making the interface more effective.

3.3 Black Sash's Community Monitoring and Advocacy Project (CMAP) and Citizen Based Monitoring (CBM) programme

The South African NGO Black Sash implemented a three-year pilot project called Community Monitoring and Advocacy Project (CMAP), which was rolled out across all nine provinces in South Africa from 2010 to 2013. The key objective of CMAP was to collect detailed and accurate information about service delivery and to use this information to advocate for improvements at the public facility level. More specifically, the project was implemented to assess and report on the quality of service delivery in specified government departments

across South Africa as experienced by beneficiaries. The project was implemented for several services, including the social grants.

The core of the model was the formation of partnerships with both community-based organisations (CBOs) and the government to strengthen the role of civil society in improving service delivery and holding public and private sectors to account. CMAP was implemented by civil society organisations (CSOs) based within communities, who were the drivers of monitoring and advocacy in their own rights. Over the project period, over 400 individual monitors drawn from all nine of South Africa's provinces conducted the monitoring. Monitoring occurred through collecting data at SASSA offices on citizen experiences with service delivery. Each community partner endeavoured to survey at least 300 respondents per facility to ensure accurate sampling. Monitors conducted on-the-spot surveys of people waiting in queues at SASSA offices, as well as recording their own observations of the process.

After the data was collected, it was processed, analysed, and converted into reports by Black Sash. The data was also presented back to the communities in a way that made sense for them, including through posters and handouts. The compiled data and information was then used as a starting point for collaboration with different stakeholders though dialogue. During the dialogue, improvement (action) plans were developed and adopted to improve service delivery at the public facilities.

Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) conducted a qualitative evaluation of the CMAP programme in 2012. Research included in-depth interviews with various stakeholders of the programme including CSO partners and CMAP monitors. The report showed that CMAP significantly improved citizens' awareness and, importantly, strengthened the voice of citizens around the monitoring of service delivery. CMAP monitors suggested that as a result of the CMAP programme, officials were said to treat service beneficiaries with respect and dignity and were more receptive to their demands. CMAP also helped strengthen the relationships between service beneficiaries, government officials, participating CBOs, and monitors (CASE Report, 2012). The evaluation did not assess the programme on impacts such as service delivery.

Based on lessons learned from the CMAP pilot, Black Sash has developed a technologically innovative model that essentially aims to follow the same process as CMAP. The programme is called Citizen Based Monitoring (CBM) and has been piloted in one of our research sites for this report in Western Cape (Paarle). In the more technologically advanced version, the data is collected on tablets and is immediately transferred to Black Sash, where it is quickly processed and made into reports and other information pieces. This data is then used for dialogue and advocacy with various stakeholders.

Black Sash's CBM programme also took cues from a similar CBM program that had also been piloted by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) for several sectors, including social protection. The pilot ran from October 2013 to September 2015. The CBM programme piloted by the DPME also included three steps:[12] a) collecting and compiling feedback from the people on the ground through a deliberative process where community volunteers, SASSA local office staff and the community worked together; b) responding to feedback by prioritising sets of commitments that are announced through the community meetings; and c) monitoring the progress of the implementation of commitments. While information is available for the first step,[13] the progress of the last two steps is unclear.

3.4 Grievance Redress Mechanism / Customer Care

SASSA also has an extensive grievance redress mechanism (GRM) which is referred to as Customer Care. The main objective is to allow the uptake of citizens' grievances and complaints about the service delivery in social grants and to then resolve them. The aim is also to use the data for systematic changes in the system. As the Manager of the National Call Centre for SASSA said:

> *The call centre is the eyes and the ears of the agency.*

There are many uptake channels. A telephone hotline is one of the most prominent ones. In addition, complaints are also received verbally and in-person at pay-points and SASSA local offices. A register and complaints and suggestion box is also available for beneficiaries to file their complaints. During ICROP events, SASSA staff also register complaints. In addition, beneficiaries can send complaints through email and fax. However, these complaints need to be logged into a centralised system. Once a complaint is logged in the system, the process of resolution begins at the national call centre of SASSA.[14]

Anyone can call into the call centre to enquire about the social grants. Enquiries are often about which documentation is required, the eligibility criteria or the appeal process. Citizens can use the customer care centre to raise any issues regarding the delivery of any type of social grant. We were unable to obtain the categorisation that the call centre uses to document their calls. In his interview, the manager suggested that the usual complaints they receive include: confusion about the amount of grant paid, complaints about being short-

[12] Information about DPME's CBM programme is taken from the interview with the Chief Director of CBM at DPME.

[13] Summaries of the feedback collected from various SASSA offices are available on the website of Black Sash (https://cbm.blacksash.org.za/). Currently this programme is being implemented by Black Sash in cooperation with Making All Voices Count.

[14] Information in the following paragraphs about the procedures that call centre should follow in uptake and resolution of grievances is derived from an interview with the Manager of the National Call Center in Pretoria.

changed at the ATM, enquiries about eligibility criteria, and complaints about service waiting times at pay-points and local offices.

One complaint that the call centre often received in the months leading up to the field work was regarding deductions. As we referred to earlier in the report, this is when beneficiaries receive less than the amount promised as other payments for electricity, phone, insurance etc. have been deducted out of the social grant – sometimes without beneficiaries' knowledge. The Manager explained that in response to these complaints, they had worked out a way to resolve disputes over illegal deductions. Once a beneficiary complains about deductions, he/she can sign an affidavit to allow a SASSA official to represent him/her in the court proceedings.

The standard turn-around time is set from one to five days. If the complaint is not resolved within five days, the customer is kept updated on the process of the resolution. Cases which require referrals to other entities can take seven to 21 days. A customer care charter that lists the rights of the beneficiaries is also supposed to be prominently displayed in all SASSA local offices.

We visited the national call centre in Pretoria, as well as a mini call centre in Limpopo. Both call centres are well equipped and seemed to be working efficiently. It was evident that the centre had a streamlined system of receiving, referring and following up on complaints. However, we were not able to verify the timeline of the complaint resolution.

The National Call Centre also publishes monthly and quarterly reports that include important statistics about the numbers and categories of complaints received, as well as the status of resolution of the complaints. Call centre reporting is linked to the strategy unit for service delivery improvement planning.[15]

[15] Despite our consistent efforts, we were not able to get the data on response rates or the number of complaints received by the call centre. The reports were not available publicly.

Chapter 4: Findings - Components of social accountability

In this section, we review the findings of our fieldwork. We examine how the social accountability interventions, which we discussed above, have been able to provide information, mobilisation and interface. In other words, we review social accountability interventions implemented in South Africa's social grant system against the benchmarks we presented in our analytical framework in Section 4. We review: a) whether information is accessible and available, and if citizens are aware of their entitlements; b) if interventions have created channels or interfaces between citizens and states, if these interfaces are accessible and legitimate, and if citizens have information about these channels; and c) whether social accountability interventions have provided opportunities, capacities and incentives to mobilise.

After having examined the three levers of social accountability, we examine if these levers have had any impact on stimulating citizen and state action.

Before we start, we should note the saliency of issues related to the social protection programmes in South Africa. Almost all recipients expressed that social grants are a lifeline. Given the high level of unemployment, social grants are sometimes the only source of income for poor households. This is not only true for rural areas but also in urban townships. There was also a general sense that social grants help households escape extreme poverty. Some of the quotes below make this clear.

> *The households with social grants don't experience utter poverty anymore but [for] those with no social grants, it is bad (Samora,* focus group discussions *with the community).*

Social grants are almost the only guaranteed source of income as most people are unemployed.

The children can even have a lunch box for school as a result [of the social grant] (Bugersfort, focus group discussions*).*

It was also observed that grants are not used only by the recipients, but also by other members of the family. A grandmother may use her Old Age Grant to support the adults or grandchildren living in her household, or siblings may share the Child Support Grant .

4.1 Information

In this section, we discuss which are the key sources of information about social grants that are available to the communities. We also assess the level of awareness regarding entitlements, required documentation, and application processes. We will also examine if social accountability mechanisms have been able to raise this level of awareness.

As we discussed above, SASSA has implemented a number of social accountability interventions with the aim of improving the availability of information for its potential beneficiaries. ICROP and Mikondzo are the primary interventions through which SASSA reaches out to people in remote areas. In addition, SASSA's local offices also regularly provide information sessions (as described by the local managers of the offices we visited) to its clients about the eligibility criteria etc.

We found that the level of information about the availability of grants is quite high. For example, almost everyone we met in the communities was aware of the Old Age Grant. Many individuals told us that they applied for the Old Age Grant on their 60th birthday. This was found to be the case with almost every individual we talked to in urban and rural neighbourhoods, as well as among the most vulnerable groups (except for refugees, as we note below). This was the case for all types of grants, apart from the Foster Care Grant which makes up only a small portion of the social protection system).

One woman in Mitchell's Plain told us that:

> *I am waiting for August, when I turn 60, to apply for Old Age Grant*.

Similarly, people are fully aware that the Child Support Grant is available to individuals living in poverty who are caring for children below the age of 18.

The most common source of information is word of mouth. The majority of people we talked to suggested that they had heard about the grants from their neighbours, or even implied that the availability of grants is common knowledge. Some individuals cited radio and other media forums. Some interviews and focus group participants said that informal leaders, such as church pastors, tell people about grants and how to access them. Some Disability Grant beneficiaries learnt about the grant from their doctor, or from social workers they met in the hospitals. One focus group participant also mentioned announcements made with loudspeakers in the streets as her source of information.

> *We are aware of the social grants as the people in the communities are talking about them* (Polokanwe, focus group discussions).

> *Most of the information on social grants is from the conversations with the community members* (focus group discussions, Mitchells Plain).

However, when it comes to more substantive questions about the grants — eligibility criteria, documents required to apply, where to receive the documents — these remain unanswered, especially as they relate to the Disability Grant and FSG. The eligibility criteria for the Old Age Grant and the Child Support Grant are simple and require minimal documentation. We met with two women in the Samora local office, one of whom had come to apply for Child Support Grant with her baby. It was reported that the process was simple and she got her approval letter in one visit.

However, in the case of the Disability Grant, participants reported that they felt they did not possess sufficiently clear information prior to going to the SASSA office to apply for the grant. This meant that, after what was often a long wait in a queue, people were often turned away and told to return with additional information, sometimes on multiple occasions, making the application process much costlier in terms of time and travel. Disability Grant beneficiaries in Samora did not know that SASSA can send doctors to visit their homes to do medical assessments. They also sometimes did not know about the schedule of pay-points and service points.

Most people we talked to did not know about the information sessions that SASSA local offices hold regularly. They also suggested that written materials such as pamphlets and posters are not helpful as they sometimes are not in the local language or some people may not be literate. The participants were asked if they take the SASSA booklets to read on the provisions. They said:

> *It is very difficult to read when you are hungry* (Mitchell's Plain, focus group discussions).

> *You can say people understand [the eligibility requirements, and how and where to apply for grants] but people don't understand* (Interview with CBO member, Mbekweni).

In at least two service points (one in Samora and one in Polokwane), focus group discussion participants and interviewees suggested that they had mixed up days on when a service point would be available and had to make multiple trips. They also said that they were unsure of which office they should visit (according to where they live) to submit an application. Sometimes, local offices dedicated different days to different grants (e.g. in Mitchell's Plain). Even though the schedule was published, beneficiaries during our focus group discussions reiterated that they are confused about the days. This confusion requires them to make multiple visits, which is inconvenient and very expensive for some beneficiaries.

One possible avenue of information is SASSA local offices and service points and pay-points. Even if formal or informal sessions are not held, the staff are available through local offices and service points to answer their questions. When asked if they approach the staff to ask questions, one of the participants said:

> *There is no information desk at the service point and the officials are busy with their duties to even answer you if you are coming to inquire about anything* (Samora, focus group discussion).

They also raised concerns that if they continued to ask questions, the staff might become irritated and rude, and not answer the questions properly. We did not find any difference in the attitude between men and women. One woman in Samora, during an informal conversation as she stood in line to process her Child Support Grant , suggested that that it is not really the fault of the staff when they are rude to citizens as they have a high workload. She said: 'Look at the number of people here and the few SASSA staff members. They will be here till evening.'

Many participants of the focus groups suggested that SASSA needs to do more to disseminate information about the requirements for documents. They suggested that SASSA should hold public meetings where they share information and attend to concerns and questions that citizens have on grants.

Local office managers also understand that the level of information that beneficiaries receive is not adequate.

> *Lack of knowledge make the clients come to the office more than once e.g. for the bank statements* (Local Office Manager, Paarle).

There is also some confusion about who qualifies for the grant according to the means test. The understanding in the community is that people who are unemployed are eligible for social grants such as the Child Support Grant and the Old Age Grant. One individual in Samora, for example, did not bother to apply for the Old Age Grant because his wife was working and he thought that he would not qualify for the grant. However, her salary was low enough for them to pass the means test and he was eventually awarded the grant. Another instance in which wrong information led to the exclusion of a rightful beneficiary was observed in Paarle. Here, an applicant was given wrong information by her community and thought she could not apply for a Child Support Grant for her baby since she was already receiving the grant herself. Whilst we observed only two cases in the field of how a misunderstanding of eligibility criteria may lead to exclusion, this is a topic that deserves further exploration.

Another gap in information is that which pertains to excluded groups — in particular the Somali refugees. In this case, language is a serious barrier. These groups are isolated (and live in different areas), therefore word-of-mouth methods of information dissemination are not effective. We were able to hold one focus group with Somali refugees in Paarle, which included one refugee who wanted to apply for the Disability Grant. He came with his nephew, who understood English to some extent. They told us that they had heard of the social grants but did not know that Somali refugees were also eligible, and thought that grants were meant for South Africans only. They found out from a friend about the eligibility, but have already made a few unsuccessful trips to the SASSA office (he is having trouble receiving identity documents from the Home Affairs Office). The prospective Disability Grant recipient's nephew explained the following:

> *No idea how the SASSA system goes, heard from a friend who is getting grant and didn't realise that the process takes so long … I didn't know how much and the documents; only knew the amount from the friend.*

In summary, regarding *information*: SASSA has made attempts to provide information about the grants as well as opportunities for citizens to communicate with the government officials. People are aware of the grants that are available to them. However, there is still confusion on some aspects of eligibility criteria and the documentation required, especially for the Disability Grant. Misunderstandings around these aspects sometimes lead to multiple visits or even the exclusion of rightful beneficiaries. Regular contact through programmes like Mkiondzo, ICROP and an in-person process of SASSA local offices has not alleviated this information gap for two reasons: firstly, people generally do not know that these platforms are available; and secondly, people are afraid to ask for information from the staff for fear of being treated rudely. The gaps are most significant for the refugee groups.

4.2 Interface

A number of provisions in social accountability initiatives provide for an avenue in which citizens and government officials can communicate with each other. ICROP, Mikondzo and SASSA local offices are some such avenues that allow interface between government officials and citizens and provide a space for communication. Another substantial and prominent interface is the GRM system – what SASSA calls Customer Care. The GRM system provides various mechanisms that allow citizens to communicate with the government. These include hotlines and suggestion boxes.

As we discussed above, most beneficiaries – especially in rural areas and townships – do not feel comfortable going to SASSA officials to ask for information. The same remains true for raising concerns or communicating issues with service delivery. People come to SASSA offices, stand in lines, are told what to do and are happy if they go home with their application approved. They expect to need to pay multiple visits to the office.

> *I didn't know that I could complain about the service* (Interview with an Old Age Grant beneficiary, Paarle). The beneficiary needed to get a replacement card made after the original one was stolen from him.

Another woman who was applying for the Child Support Grant expressed the same view. A community development worker (CDW) in Limpopo's Burgersfort community expressed this issue as follows:

> *The people are scared to complain … I also advise people to also call the toll-free line but they just don't use it.*
>
> *He is a Somali refugee. He is ready to go approach SASSA for the Disability Grant but needs someone to accompany him as he is scared to go to the offices and cannot speak the language.* (nephew of an old man trying to apply for Disability Grant, Samora, focus group discussion).

These observations are also in concurrence with beneficiaries' perceptions of whether grants are entitlements or gifts. Since beneficiaries think of social grants (especially the Child Support Grant and Disability Grants) as gifts, they think they are not entitled to raise issues with the service. We discuss this issue in more detail in a later section.

Although more research is needed, the issues seemed to be more severe in cases which involve Black communities. This issue was especially observed in communities in Paarle, where the local office Manager was White and the beneficiaries were predominantly Black.[16]

> *As Black people, it is generally difficult to complain* (Samora, focus group discussion).

As we discussed above, SASSA has an impressive and streamlined GRM system. The problem is that very few people we talked to used it or even knew it existed. In every focus group, a small fraction (one or two) of participants knew about the SASSA hotline. They also tended to be younger people. Some who did know could not use it as the call is not free from mobile phones. And the ones who did try 'heard only music'.

[16] In South Africa, a hierarchy still exists between the White and the Black South African population, with 'coloureds' (people of mixed or Asian ancestry) occupying a middle position.

> *We are aware of the SASSA toll free number but it is not free with cell phone users. There are no phones in the area. The Councillor allows people who come to him to seek assistance to use his office telephone but when we try it, it is not usually answered*. (Samora, focus group discussion).

It should be noted that many beneficiaries said that they do not have any complaints with SASSA and that they are happy with the services they are receiving. At every local office we visited, we met people who had come to apply for grants (usually Child Support Grants or Old Age Grants) and their applications had been approved. However, some beneficiaries before expressing their total satisfaction with SASSA had just told us that they have had to make expensive multiple trips to SASSA offices because of lack of clear information about required documents. We will discuss the challenges in service delivery and complaints raised by beneficiaries in a later section.

SASSA has done a good job in increasing physical access of beneficiaries to social grants but in terms of communications, but it is still lacking. This example suggests that regular contact does not lead to communication and engagement if further steps are not taken.

Having said that, it is important to mention that we did come across cases where beneficiaries, having faced severe issues such as disruption in their payments, had contacted the SASSA local office. In some cases, the contact and launching of concerns led to the resolution of complaints after the beneficiary persisted. However, in other cases the situation remained unchanged. We will discuss this in more detail in the later section on 'Citizen Action.'

In addition to these interfaces, CBM/CMPA provides another opportunity for citizens to communicate their concerns about service delivery with the government. As we discussed above, these programmes collect and compile citizens' feedback on services provided and then use the information for advocacy purposes. The programmes have been effective in highlighting service delivery issues. According to the Director of Black Sash, their citizen monitoring efforts through CMAP had been able to capture the issue of deductions (as we discussed earlier in the document) before it caught the attention of the national government in early 2017.

In addition, the CMAP/CBM model also provides for an interface meeting after the information has been collected and compiled among various stakeholders. We met with the CBO members who had arranged and participated in these meetings. None of the beneficiaries we talked to had participated (or could recall participating) in the interface meetings. Therefore, we could not assess how these meetings could have an impact on citizens' or state's action, or on service delivery. This could be because our sample size was small or that these meetings were not widely attended or the coverage was low.

At least in South Africa's case, where social hierarchies remain strong, proactive forms of feedback (such as CMAP and CBM) in which citizens are asked to voice their opinion may be more efficient compared to a GRM system, in which they are required to take the initiative themselves to contact the government officials.

In terms of interface, informal intermediaries may still be the most efficient way of communicating with the state. They present citizens' demands to SASSA officials. In Mitchell's Plain, all members of the focus group discussion agreed that:

> *The councillors, community leaders and church leaders can effectively assist with interacting with SASSA*.

In Mitchell's Plain, one of the participants of our focus group suggested:

> *In cases where [the Councillor] talks himself and exerts pressure on the officials, the results are usually favourable.*

In Samora, a participant of the focus group discussion said:

> *We complain to ANC [majority political party] about services and grants; in response, they organise SASSA to come and assist us*.

Similarly, a CBO in Paarl also suggested that they act as intermediaries between the citizens and organisations they are experiencing problems with.

Polokwane's local office Manager also referred to the importance of traditional leaders:

> *The officials are called to the community meetings led by the traditional leaders to address the needs of their communities.*

In summary, regarding *interface*: Social accountability interventions have established interfaces. These include meetings during ICROP and the Mikondzo project. SASSA local offices with regular office hours, scheduled pay-points, and service points can also act as effective interfaces. Most of these interfaces are geographically quite close to the communities they serve. SASSA also has a well-structured GRM system. Yet, our research did not find a particularly strong interaction between state officials and citizens. Citizens are unaware of these interfaces, or are unable to access it due to costs. They also do not feel confident in engaging with the government officials, as sometimes they think that they do not have the right to complain about service delivery.

The interfaces established by SASSA fit the definition of 'invited spaces' – the ones created by various kinds of authorities including the government (Cornwall, 2002). While these spaces are a good starting point, the ultimate aim is that they follow the trajectory to 'claimed spaces' – organic spaces that are created by mobilised citizens who share a set of common concerns or a common identity (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015). Aiyar (2010), after reviewing invited spaces in India, argues that even though the progress of invited spaces to become effective for citizen participation is slow and uneven, they do contain within them the potential to strengthen accountability.

4.3 Mobilisation

Interestingly, none of the social accountability interventions implemented by SASSA had strong provisions for mobilisation. We enquired about informal mechanisms of mobilisation and found that there are a number of local associations, including luncheon clubs and street committees, that have been organised at the local level. We explored whether these associations have fulfilled the function of social mobilisation.

Luncheon clubs are established for older persons and vary in size and scope across South Africa. Some provide lunch and companionship, whilst others provide a broader range of services such as education and skills training for income generation, promotion of healthy lifestyles and cultural activities. By offering a hub in which older people can meet to discuss problems, these clubs could potentially assist older persons to mobilise for issues related to service delivery of social grants. In some communities, e.g. in Samoro, the club was quite active. However, the members of the club (we met two members of the club) implied that they do not discuss the issue of the Old Age Grant in the club.

Similarly, street committees or ward committees assist with peace and stability and provide resolution to small conflicts in the communities. The participants, however, suggested that they do not use these committees to talk about social grants. In some communities, other local informal groups exist such as recreational and church groups. However, the community members we talked to suggested that none of these groups discuss social grants.

> *They [church groups] are more engaged in churches and don't discuss any grants related matters* (Polokwane, focus group discussion).

> *There are no community groups we heard of that assist with social grants* (Bugersfort, focus group discussion).

One of the reasons that participants suggested that they do not talk about their issues with other community members is that it is not easy to talk about difficult personal circumstances.

> *Social grants are personal and people have been dealing with them like that [by themselves]* (Samora, focus group discussion).

Other people also commented that they have never thought about discussing these issues amongst themselves. Other than the issues of security in their neighbourhood (which they think is their responsibility), they do not talk about any issues that affect them as a community, e.g. about other services.

In summary, regarding *mobilisation*: Social accountability approaches implemented in South Africa for the delivery of social grants do not provide a strong mobilisation effort. Even though there are local associations that perform other functions in the community (e.g. luncheon clubs), they are not able to provide for mobilisation on social grant issues. One of the reasons for the hesitancy of beneficiaries to discuss these issues with other community members is that they feel that these matters are personal, and that it is hard to talk to others about a difficult economic situation. However, it was observed that people also do not take the initiative to talk about other issues that impact them collectively (other than about neighbourhood security). This issue is also related to the fact that even though there are spaces for citizens to interface with the government, citizens do not participate in these forums. Since there has been no effort to mobilise the citizens to take collective action, the non-participation of citizens in these spaces is not very surprising.

4.4 Citizen action

Our findings suggest that citizens are not prone to taking action. Long lines, long waiting times, having to collect documents and make multiple expensive visits seemed like a routine to them — a necessary cost to access these benefits. As we discussed above, very often, once they are approved for the grants, they seemed to dismiss these earlier concerns as trivial.

We came across several beneficiaries who despite having faced serious issues — disruption in payments, receiving smaller payments, procedural hurdles in the Foster Care Grant — did not complain. This observation is surprising as there are a few venues available to them where they can complain to state officials. For example, we interviewed a grandmother in Mitchell's Plain who applied for grants in 2013 for her grandchildren. She was not approved as she was told her files were lost. At that time, she did not register a formal complaint. She reapplied in 2015 and managed to receive the grants but by then, two of her five grandchildren had turned 18 and no longer qualified for the grant.

During another focus group discussion, a woman relayed her concern about the role of the social worker in supervising her foster child for her Foster Care Grant. When asked if she had complained anywhere, she said 'no'. Only when pressured further by the facilitator of the focus group did she say: 'If the month passes, I will go to establish at the offices why didn't she/he visit.'

Another recipient of the Child Support Grant in Mbekweni told us during an interview that she is currently receiving the Child Support Grant for her grandchild since her mother passed away. She applied for the Foster Care Grant four years ago, but the grant has still not been approved. She has been to the local office to enquire but did not lodge a formal complaint.

Consider also the story of a woman in Bugersfort:

> The beneficiary was getting the social grant on time every month, when one day she could not collect her payment at the pay-point. She was told that the payment had been collected already. She went to the local SASSA office and was told that she is sharing the ID with someone she doesn't know. They advised her that she must go to Department of Home Affairs to be assisted with the duplicate ID. She went to the Department of Home Affairs and was told to bring this and that. She then decided that she would try to resolve the issue herself with the person who is using her ID. Her solution was that she ould try every payday to rush early in the morning to withdraw the payment. Some months, she was successful, while other months the other person succeeded in withdrawing her payment. She was fine with the arrangement of sharing the payments as she did not know what else to do.
>
> One time, she went to the pay-point, and was told that there was no payment as she had been documented in the system as being deceased. She then went back to the SASSA offices to clarify what to do now as she had been advised that she was deceased. She was then referred to the Manager who asked for all her details and the receipts of her payments. The Manager then took the beneficiary to the Department of Home Affairs herself to advise them of what had been happening. The process of rectifying the ID took three years with the Department of Home Affairs, with a few documents, processes and visits required from the lady.
>
> SASSA, in the meantime assisted her with food parcels as she stayed alone and didn't have anything to live on. They conducted a home visit from the day she went to the office and saw the circumstances themselves.
>
> The problem was finally resolved last year and she received the back payments for all the monthly amounts that she missed. 'I am so grateful to the Manager; I have come to see her today to check if all my things are still okay'.

There is also no motivation for communities as a collective to take any action or demand accountability from the government officials. In Samora, for example, focus group discussion participants shared a concern that there is no pay-point in the community, only a service point, and people have to travel a distance to withdraw money. Sometimes they are robbed in the process. They had not discussed the pay-point issue with SASSA. When pressed by the facilitator of the focus group discussion as to why they have not done so, or would they consider communicating this need to SASSA in the future, they said:

> *They need to write to SASSA, as citizens, if there are any issues they want addressed, so that there is a record of the interaction. They need to send a delegation with the citizen's mandate to SASSA.*

The fact that beneficiaries did not demand better service standards, and that they are happy with the service as long as they have access to the grant, could mean that citizens do not think of these grants as their rights. Surprisingly, however, many beneficiaries considered the grants as their right, especially with regard to the Old Age Grant and Disability Grant. The Child Support Grant, however, was considered a gift. For example, when talking about her Old Age Grant, a woman in Polokwane stated:

> *This is the money that her late husband left her.*
>
> *Grant money is our right. It was deducted for a long time from our parents*.
> (Mbekweni, focus group discussion).

Differences in this perception could come from how the rest of the society perceives the recipients. On the one hand, the old age grant is positively regarded by society, as we mentioned above. On the other hand, there is negative stigma attached with Child Support Grant . As we mentioned above, women who are receiving the grant are perceived as lazy. There is also a narrative (that we also encountered in our informal conversations) that women sometimes have children only to access the Child Support Grant. While this narrative has been debunked by several studies, it still prevails in society. A related reason could be that the Old Age Grant has a straightforward eligibility criterion and is not prone to fraud, while it is possible to commit fraud with the Child Support Grant . Therefore, it could be that recipients of the Old Age Grant are considered to be rightful beneficiaries while recipients of the Child Support Grant are perceived as individuals taking benefits from others unjustly.

The lack of citizen action and the perception by citizens that social grants are their right are two contradictory things. It is expected that if citizens think of grants as their right, they should feel more empowered to raise their voice if their rights are not being fulfilled or if there is a disruption in service. Therefore, the lack of citizen action in this case is even more curious.

One can always make the argument that citizens do not take action through available interfaces because these are not accessible or effective enough. This is arguably the case in South Africa. Citizens do not know about the hotline and when they do, it is not free. They also fear the rude attitude from staff. All this is compounded by social hierarchies, the irresponsiveness of the state, travel, and the other costs required for people to take action. A crucial constraint that can be added to the list above, in our estimation, is the lack of agency on the citizens' part. For citizens to take action, they need to trust the efficacy of their own action. Most people have never thought about taking action, despite having faced disruptions in services or wanting a closer pay-point and shorter waiting times. When it was suggested to them by the facilitator during focus group discussions, they agreed that they needed to collectively think about these issues and present them to authority holders. During our focus group discussions, we also noted that communities did not provide any examples of coordinating collective action for the welfare of the community.

It is interesting to note, however, that it is not that these communities do not have formal and informal associations. There are knitting groups, old age clubs, a club for people with disabilities – and many participants of focus group and interviewees we talked to participated in these clubs. The important point is that they do not discuss collective action in these associations. Citizens' perception of their own efficacy can be impacted by the efforts to mobilise them. However, there are no provisions in the social accountability interventions that would focus on promoting this capability and willingness of the community to take action. The constraints that exist for these communities to coordinate collective action should be explored in more detail, with specific attention to the lack of agency and citizens' perception of their own efficacy.

In summary, regarding citizen action: We found that citizen action is not strong – citizens do not demand better services both individually or collectively nor do they access any of the available interfaces. Even though citizens deem social grants (especially the Old Age Grant and the Child Support Grant) to be their entitlement rather than a gift, citizens are hesitant to take individual or collective action. A number of constraints including lack of information of how to take action, the high costs required to take the action, and fear of rude behaviour from the staff contribute to this situation. In our estimation, the lack of mobilisation opportunities and the socio-political environment with high inequality and social hierarchies is also a contributing factor. Even when there are informal and formal associations at local level, citizens do not use them to discuss issues regarding social grants or to coordinate action to demand better services. It is important that social accountability activities, in addition to providing better interfaces and information, also ensure that they are mobilising citizens to use these interfaces and to act on this information.

4.5 State action

Most of the social accountability interventions that we have discussed have been initiatives by the state.[17] This is a clear signal from the state about their intent to promote citizen participation. They have taken initiatives to provide information to the citizens and created avenues for citizen engagement. These interventions have the potential to increase the quality and quantity of citizen-state interactions, and in doing so subject themselves to more scrutiny.

However, one of the biggest constraints that the state experiences when providing services is the lack of manpower. When we visited a service point, the need to provide a service to hundreds of people in a matter of a few hours was daunting. It was clear that they needed more staff and more time to finish their work. Acting General Manager of Polokwane region also highlighted another challenge:

> *The distances to be travelled in the province [to go to service points and pay-points] are also very long and strains the process of delivery … and puts a lot of burden on the staff.*

Even in regular local SASSA offices, the burden on staff is significant. The day we visited the SASSA local office in Mbekweni, the Manager informed us that two staff members were away: one on sick leave and the other on suspension. The Manager admitted that the office only had the capacity to provide a service to about 70 people every day. If more people showed up, they would have to 'leave and come back the following day'. He also mentioned that resources like computers, printers and space were limited. This further hindered their work.

Nonetheless, staff did seem enthusiastic about their jobs. We also observed some innovative solutions that they had worked out in response to citizens' demand. As we mentioned earlier, one of the issues that citizens raised regarding the Disability Grant was the access to doctors for medical assessment, as these visits were cumbersome and required multiple visits. To make this process less cumbersome, in Praktiseer local office, the Manager decided to turn the boardroom into a medical assessment room so that the Disability Grant applicant could be assessed by the doctor on SASSA premises. As a result, Disability Grant applicants could get the outcome letter (if their application had been approved or not), on the same day and could then be enrolled to receive payments.

Another issue of the Disability Grant is its coverage and the fact that disabled people are not able to travel to the offices multiple times to apply for it. To solve this issue, the local office manager in Parkitseer worked with the home-based care workers of people who might qualify for Disability Grant, but were unable to travel to the office. The Manager arranged it so that

[17] Since social grants are managed by SASSA – a government agency when we talk about state in reference to social grants we refer to SASSA and other associated government agencies and departments (such as DPME).

the home-based care workers and the relatives of the prospective beneficiaries could apply at the offices on their behalf and receive the referral letters. This practice has assisted people who might be potentially excluded to have an opportunity to access the grants.

Another citizen complaint regarding social grants is the issue of documentation. To solve this issue, in Mitchell's Plain, the Manager arranged for the Commissioners of Oath to be present at the service point so that applicants could get their letters certified there without having to leave the SASSA facility. This ensured that all processes could be completed in one day. Some volunteers and church pastors were also trained to provide certification and are now doing that job at the local SASSA office.

In addition to solving collective problems, as we have discussed above, many managers and staff also take initiative when attending to an individual's complaint. This, however, is not systematic and depends on the time availability and willingness of the staff.

The internal accountability mechanism is strong. Local office managers are accountable to regional managers, who are then accountable to the staff at the national level. In addition, there are reporting and monitoring systems. SASSA has its own monitoring and evaluation unit that regularly monitors various aspects of service delivery (including waiting times, number of visits for application approval etc.). SASSA is also monitored by the Presidential Department of Monitoring and Evaluation and DSD. The internal monitoring provides an additional incentive for staff to improve service delivery. There is no specific reward for the staff for responsiveness to citizen concerns.

In summary, regarding *state action*: The state has established various mechanisms for providing information to the citizens about social grants. It has also established interfaces to communicate with the citizens. In fact, most of the social accountability initiatives have been initiated by the state. We came across several staff members who have used innovative ways to solve service delivery problems in their areas in response to citizens. However, it is important to note the constraints. Despite these actions, state officials' responsiveness to citizens' concerns and problems is lacking.

Chapter 5: Impact on service delivery and state-society relationship

In the previous sections we have reviewed how, and if, social accountability mechanisms have improved different components of social accountability – information, interface and mobilisation – and how these impact citizen and state action. Our research suggests that social accountability interventions have increased the amount of information available to citizens but that gaps still remain. In terms of availability of interfaces, we found that several of these channels are available to the citizens, but they are not known to the public, or are not deemed accessible. We also found that there are not many opportunities available to citizens where they can mobilise and coordinate action in order to demand accountability from the government. As a result, we found that citizen action is not very strong. Citizens are hesitant to take individual or collective action. The state has taken initiatives to encourage citizen participation by providing information as well as by establishing avenues for citizens to interact with the state officials. While we observed that state officials have the incentives and authority to deal with service delivery issues and found that they have done so in different contexts, the response is still lacking.

Now we turn our attention to the two outcomes we are interested in — service delivery and state-society relationship.

5.1 Impact on service delivery

Overall, SASSA is a well-functioning social grant system. For most beneficiaries, payments are made regularly, on time, and the full amount is paid. In many cases, the application process is straightforward and turnaround times are short.

Accessibility

By introducing interventions like ICROP, and increasing the presence of SASSA through local offices and service and pay-points, SASSA has become accessible to more people who were otherwise excluded from the services. Some participants of focus group discussions and interviewees suggested that SASSA's services have become much more accessible in the last few years. Many beneficiaries also do not have to travel far to withdraw money.

> *Before, you had to go to the offices in Mitchell's Plain to access SASSA services. Now they have responded to our demands [made through the councillors to SASSA officials] and opened a service point for us* (Samora, focus group discussion).

And yet for others it remains difficult to access SASSA's services. A woman who had come to apply for the Child Support Grant with her sister explained:

> *It is expensive to visit the office; R44 return and the two of us will cost R88, with today's visit (Burgersfort).*

The problem gets compounded when one considers the need for multiple visits. As we discussed, citizens still do not have complete information of what is required for them to apply for the grant. In addition, there is a problem of excessive documentation, which is not always easy to obtain.

Documentation

Applications for SASSA require some documentation. Even if the applicant does not have an ID card, they can apply if they receive an affidavit. They can also apply for the proper ID at the same time. The lack of ID is a serious problem and many prospective applicants we talked to recounted their stories of trying to provide documentation for the application. A participant explained the situation as follows.

> *We are being sent up and down to get the affidavits and also to get the copies of our documents. SASSA is supposed to have such provisions. The heat is also making it unbearable. It must be worse for the elderly clients.* (Burgersfort, focus group discussion).

A woman in Polokwane recounted to us her story.

> She had come to apply for the Child Support Grant for her four-month old baby earlier in the month. She could not come earlier as she did not have the birth certificate. When she gave birth at the hospital, the Department of Home Affairs was offline and could not issue her with the birth certificate. She struggled to get the money for transport back to the hospital to get the birth certificate. When she eventually did, she also came to SASSA and was advised to come back the following day to get the card. Her grant was approved the day she came but with no payment card and enrollment. She did not return as she struggled to find money for transport. Eventually, she borrowed some money from a friend and managed to come. She was enrolled and received her payment card. Payments were to start soon.

She later said:

> *I wish Home Affairs and SASSA can attend to you when you are still at the hospital. The R40 for the return [trip to SASSA office] is too much.*

While less prevalent, Old Age Grant applicants also sometimes face challenges in producing documentation. The problem is even more serious for farm workers and refugees, as they generally do not have IDs.

SASSA has tried to solve this problem firstly, by providing more information to citizens about the requirements and secondly, by integrating the Home Affairs services to provide required IDs with SASSA services (e.g. through ICROP). However, gaps remain.

Disability Grant

The most crucial issue, perhaps, was observed with the Disability Grant. First, there is an issue of exclusion. People with a disability have to travel to offices and it is not always easy. As one of the interviewees from Samora explained:

> *It is difficult for Disability Grant applicants and recipients to go to the offices as there is a need to hire transport.*

This becomes especially cumbersome as applicants only get a temporary Disability Grant and have to re-do assessments every six months until they are granted a permanent Disability Grant.

In addition, the criteria for disability remain vague. One of the participants in a focus group at Mbekweni told us that the doctor assessing her said: '*Ufresh wena,umcinci, umhle*', meaning you are fresh, young and beautiful, and that you should not, therefore be applying for Disability Grant. This participant added that when she gets a job, she loses it because of her sickness.

We observed a few instances like this. Individuals try multiple times in the hope of getting a doctor who would give them a favourable assessment. Some patients viewed providers as cooperative and facilitating access to the Disability Grant, while others viewed them with suspicion and as gatekeepers obstructing access. Many times, patients perceived providers as being unhelpful and even discriminatory.

There is also a sense that applicants for the Disability Grant are defrauding the system and that they want the Disability Grant, even when they are able to work. Unemployment was blamed for this behaviour. For example, the Office Manager of SASSA in Paarle said:

> *People hunt for Disability Grant across provinces. They just wait for the three month window period and they come to apply again and again and even move between the provinces in the hope of finding a lenient doctor. This is mainly due to the high unemployment rates. Any unemployed and retrenched person sees the grant as a solution to their failure to obtain income … as it sometimes serves as the provision while waiting to qualify for the Old Age Grant.*

There has not been much movement in terms of improving the administration and medical assessment criteria for disability, despite it being a widespread issue. Clarifying the criteria will not only make it easy for the applicant but will also deter the fraudulent cases. It is essential that such criteria are defined and are well-communicated to the potential beneficiaries.

Deductions

Another serious issue that has recently received a lot of attention is that of deductions made from grants. When SASSA introduced payments through bank accounts, it became easier for recipients to withdraw money without having to travel long distances. The system also increased financial inclusion. However, it also brought with it new concerns. A particular concern is the increase in the 'deductions' from grant recipients' accounts. Deductions is a catch-all term to describe deductions of money – for airtime, electricity, insurance and loans – from beneficiaries' bank accounts. Sometimes, these are authorised by the grant recipients, at other times these are unauthorised. Many times, recipients may have formally authorised the deductions but did not understand the process, or did so unwittingly.

One of the focus group participants in Samora described the vendors who try to sign grant recipients up for different services as below:

> *There are people who walk around the communities claiming to the grant recipients that they are selling the SASSA funeral scheme and insurance. When one goes to the SASSA offices to ask about these, they are not known.*

Many beneficiaries we talked to had faced this issue. Some had gone to SASSA offices and were able to get the issue resolved after a lengthy delay. In other cases, beneficiaries did not complain if their deductions stopped after a few months. SASSA has worked out a process of how to handle these complaints. It connects the beneficiary to the private provider that has initiated the deduction, and mediates between the two. In some cases, beneficiaries sign an affidavit allowing SASSA to negotiate with the private provider on their behalf.

Citizens, as well as civil society, advocated on behalf of the beneficiaries to the extent that the issue of deductions sparked a court case against Cash Paymaster Services (CPS) – the private company contracted by SASSA to make the payments. The Constitutional Court earlier this year barred CPS and its subsidiary partners from making deductions. Apart from deductions, the court ruling also ordered CPS to refrain from passing on the personal data of grant recipients to companies interested in marketing services such as airtime and loan offers.

Summing up: Many gaps remain in the service delivery of social grants. However, there have been several changes implemented by in recent years that have attempted to address these gaps. ICROP and Mikondzo have helped improve accessibility. SASSA offices, service points and pay-points bring services to remote areas, which improve coverage and reduce people's travel costs. While there are complaints, there are also a lot of happy customers who receive their payments on time every month as expected and do not have grievances. While it is difficult to directly attribute these changes to citizens' demand and to social accountability interventions, it can be surmised that since these are the issues that have been raised by citizens and beneficiaries, these changes respond to their demand.

5.2 State-society relationship

Social grants – as they operate in South Africa – can strengthen the state-society relationship. When an individual is able to successfully access a social grant, he/she does so on the basis of a claim to citizenship. This is further strengthened and affirmed even through the process of accessing it e.g. by getting an ID card. We observed during our field work that citizens did connect social grants to the fact that the state cares about its citizens' rights. This is expected to lead to a better state-society relationship. For example, one of the recipients of the Child Support Grant in Mbekweni said:

> *The government cares: it provides houses, creches for the children, baby feed, clothes and the grant.*

Another recipient in Polekwane suggested:

> *The government cares [as she is getting the grant]… She can't wait to get the* Child Support Grant *and get things for the baby.*
>
> *Government indeed cares and is helpful with the social grants, if it were not for the grants, we will be nothing* (Mitchell's Plain, focus group discussion).

This also means that when individuals are unhappy with the service, they would tend to have more negative feelings about the government, which we found to be the case in some situations. Sometimes the interactions between applicants and officials created tensions (especially in the case of the Disability Grant). This eroded the state-citizen relationship.

An important finding was that many grant recipients that we talked to did not know that they were receiving the money from the government. Many of them thought it was coming from SASSA, which they did not know was part of the government. Others thought that it was coming from CPS 'as a gift since they are unemployed'.

> *SASSA is not the government. The money is from Mandela* (Interview with a grant recipient, Paarle).

Summing up: It is difficult to attribute any change in the state-society relationship between citizens and the government to social accountability interventions around social grants. One of the reasons for this lack of impact is the issues of attribution, which also points to the gap in social accountability interventions that the government has not been able to convey this information. Many beneficiaries we met simply did not know that social grants were coming from the government. They mistook these grants as coming from a private company contracted out to make payments, or they did not know that SASSA was part of the government.

The other constraint is that even though the state has invited citizens to participate in the service delivery process (which is eventually expected to lead to a stronger state-society relationship), they have not created conditions in which citizens feel safe to participate. If citizens are not able to participate and engage with government officials, it is very difficult to see how these interventions can help improve the state-society relationship.

Chapter Six: Conclusion and policy recommendations

In this case study, using qualitative data collected from communities in two provinces, we reviewed how and if social accountability mechanisms improved different components of social accountability – information, interface and mobilisation – and how these impacted citizen and state action. Our research suggests that social accountability interventions that are largely initiated by the state have attempted to improve the quantity and quality of information available to citizens, but gaps remain. In terms of the availability of interfaces, we found that several of these channels are available to citizens, but they are either not widely known, or beneficiaries do not participate in them. This observation could point to deficiencies in the interfaces but could also point either to citizens' lack of agency or to their perceptions of their own efficacy. This observation is also supported by the fact that social accountability interventions do not provide opportunities to the citizens to mobilise and to coordinate action. While local associations exist, citizens do not use these associations for collective action regarding a public purpose (or for public services). These constraints, including the burden imposed by documentation and travel costs, have hampered citizen action. Citizens are hesitant, unwilling and unable to take individual or collective action. State officials have initiated social accountability mechanisms. In fact, most social accountability interventions in the social protection sector in South Africa have been established by the state, which could indicate that the state is willing, at least to some extent, to increase the quality and intensity of citizen-state interaction, and in doing so to subject itself to more scrutiny. While the state's response remains insufficient, state officials at all levels have found innovative solutions for the problems highlighted by the citizens.

6.1 Social mobilisation to encourage citizen action

One of the over-arching recommendations is that for further social accountability interventions, social mobilisation should take centre stage. In addition, more information should be made available to citizens about the avenues that are available to them to take action. Citizens overwhelmingly think that social grants are their right and yet they do not take action to demand accountability from the government. They are complacent and tolerant of whatever service is available to them, as long as they can take the grants home.

While there are many possible constraints to citizen action originating from a deficient service delivery and a subpar state response, it could also stem from a lack of agency. The ability of individuals to engage in social accountability activities is notably influenced by their income, education, gender and more broadly, their political capabilities (Hickey, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that social accountability interventions include provisions to mobilise individuals at the local level and that they have both the organisational and leadership capacity to come together and take collective action. The lack of citizen action and their limited agency could also be a product of the socio-political context. The social and political exclusions during

the apartheid era could have eroded the ability of the society to take unified action.Hierarchies solidified in the apartheid era still exist today and seem to act as a barrier in encouraging citizens to take collective action. The reasons for the lack of citizen agency should be further explored.

Another possible constraint to citizen action relates to the individual nature of grants. Since grants impact only individuals, there is less incentive for people to coordinate collective action to solve the problem, as compared, for example, to water and sanitation issues in which everybody in the community is affected (Ayliffe et al., 2017).

CSOs should able to play a vital role in improving the delivery and accessibility of social grants, as they have done historically. However, it is important that their efforts are harnessed to improve the mobilising capacity of individuals so that they are capable and willing to take action. While civil society can act on behalf of the beneficiaries, (e.g. on the issue of deductions, in which civil society was able to bring it forward for national debate and seek a solution) it is also important to empower local community based organisations to represent citizens and mobilise citizen action when necessary. It seems that in South Africa, large CSOs have crowded out local level civil society and community based organisations. Local power holders, including traditional leaders, can also play the role of intermediaries and community mobilisers.

6.2 Attribution of benefits to the state

There is also a crucial need for SASSA to ensure that beneficiaries are aware of where the grants are coming from. Without attribution, grants will not strengthen the state-society relationship (Sacks, 2012; Batley and Mcloughlin, 2010). SASSA has recently worked hard to improve its brand, but the link between SASSA and the government should also be made evident. The downside of this could potentially be that people would then be fearful that a change in government would lead to a suspension of their grant. However, without this attribution there is unlikely to be a strengthening of the state-society relationship. In addition, it is expected that greater accessibility to the state – through the delivery of social grants – should improve the state-society relationship.

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