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MAKING ALL  
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RESEARCH REPORT

A GRAND CHALLENGE  
FOR DEVELOPMENT

# Translating complex realities through technologies: lessons about participatory accountability from South Africa



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# Summary

Accountability is a complex issue in South Africa. The country has high levels of inequality, and marginalised groups – as in many countries – struggle to make themselves heard by those in power. Yet the issue is further complicated by an interacting set of factors, including the legacy of apartheid, gender and religious issues, and the lack of access to those in power.

Through a six-year research project, the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation (SLF) used a range of technology-enabled participatory processes to unpack this lack of government accountability. This report focuses on four case studies, which examined the lived realities of marginalised groups and the activists that campaign on their behalf: activists against gender-based violence and for community safety; community care workers and health committee members working for public health; informal traders and the informal economy; and traditional medicine, Rastafarian *bossie doktors* and indigenous rights.

Using a multi-method research process, SLF supported these groups to work together and identify the accountability issues that they felt were important, and then consider how they could raise their voice collectively to those in power and those who shape and implement policy. As well as providing valuable findings, which SLF fed into the policy dialogue, this process also strengthened the capacity of these groups to speak out – not least through the use of different participatory technologies including digital storytelling, filmmaking, PhotoVoice, geospatial mapping and infographics.

This report reflects on the different tools used, considering not just the effectiveness of the outputs generated but also how these tools can empower citizens and bring marginalised groups together. Lastly, the report reflects on SLF's role as an intermediary organisation, and how this role can influence the path that marginalised groups take in their efforts to make government more responsive to their needs.

## Key themes in this paper

- How do accountability issues play out in different contexts in South Africa, and among different marginalised groups?
- How can citizens from marginalised groups tell personal stories and articulate collective positions through participatory technologies?
- Which factors influence government responsiveness to the issues facing marginalised groups?
- Which combinations of participatory technologies are most effective in increasing accountability and helping marginalised groups tackle the inequalities they face in their everyday lives?

*The intended outcome, in terms of accountability, was to alter how particular groups and issues are seen within government. SLF's approach assumes that changing the framing of accountability issues and the perceptions of certain groups will help to improve accountability relationships.*

# 1. Introduction

South Africa is a country of extremes: high levels of inequality persist, giving rise to differing access to resources and opportunities, and profound forms of marginalisation along historically determined race categories. Democracy in South Africa is under strain from the pressures that come from the lack of progress in addressing these fundamental exclusions. At the same time, elite groups within the African National Congress (ANC), which has held power since 1994, are using their position as the governing party for personal enrichment and political power. There are many forms of protest against these problems, and yet support for the ANC is still strong because of its historical legacy in overcoming the apartheid government. In this context, questions of the government's accountability to its citizens become profound, rather than merely technical. South Africa is at the point of unravelling and, without improvements in accountability, it is unclear whether democracy will continue (Naidoo 2017).

This research is situated in this wider, highly dynamic context, but focuses on the daily experiences of people living with marginalisation in urban contexts in South Africa. Over the past six years, the Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation (SLF) has conducted research in townships and informal settlements on a range of issues. The approach has been to promote novel forms of engagement between citizens and the state, using participatory technology alongside other forms of research: for example, by combining storytelling with interactive maps and infographics generated through surveys. The intended outcome, in terms of accountability, was to alter how particular groups and issues are seen within government. SLF's approach assumes that changing the framing of accountability issues and the perceptions of certain groups will help to improve accountability relationships.

The findings show how diverse forms of knowledge on issues of social and economic exclusion are needed to shift the entrenched perspectives of government representatives and improve their responsiveness (Benequista and Wheeler 2012). Generating and using this knowledge through research is a process of translating complex realities. Here, technologies can play

an important, if unsettling, role. This includes translating, in multiple directions, between the lived experiences of marginalisation and injustice, and the micro-dynamics of government policies and programmes.

## 1.1 About this report

Drawing on in-depth empirical case studies, this report shows how accountability needs to be conceptualised at the intersection of participation and the experiences of marginality. Such a conceptualisation allows for a systemic understanding of accountability, giving attention to how accountability is instantiated in spaces, places and people. The overarching research questions include:

1. What conditions are necessary for participatory knowledge processes to use technology effectively to increase government responsiveness?
2. What are the different contributions (if any) that technology-enabled approaches make to fostering citizen engagement and shifting the perspectives of government actors at different levels?
  - Which combinations of processes and technologies are the most effective?
  - Which criteria can be identified for choosing the most appropriate combination of method and technology?
3. What can be learned about the role of intermediaries in using various technologies and processes to achieve the above aims?

Section 2 looks in more depth at our understanding of accountability and how we think it needs redefining, as well as the different contexts where accountability plays out and the issues around participatory accountability. Section 3 outlines the methodological approach taken in our research, while Section 4 considers the accountability issues in each of the four case studies reviewed in this report.

In Section 5, we draw from these case studies to consider which conditions allow for increased responsiveness from government, and in Section 6 we

consider where participatory technologies can and do play a role in this, alongside thoughts on which combinations of technologies work best and how these should be selected. In Section 7, we briefly consider our role as mediators of citizen-led knowledge, while Section 8 draws together the major findings and lessons from this research.

Lastly, we provide a more in-depth review of two of the case studies:<sup>1</sup> the health case study and the informal economy case study. These give a detailed explanation of the methods used, how these increased the buy-in from participants in the research process (as well as some of the challenges), and the impact of these research processes in influencing policy in South Africa.

## 2. Accountability, participation and intersecting inequalities

While there is much optimism about the prospects for using technology to improve accountability and government responsiveness, the existing literature recognises that access to information and citizen voice are often not enough to deliver accountability (Halloran 2015; Joshi 2014; Fox 2007). At the same time, there is a growing evidence base about how social accountability mechanisms specifically can improve access to and the quality of services (Aslam and Moore 2015). While there is evidence about how to make incremental improvements in service delivery through social accountability, the social accountability framing does not adequately address the interconnection between different issues and the political nature of making rights-based claims in a context of inequality. A recent World Bank report (Grandvoinet, Aslam and Raha 2015) questions the depoliticised 'social accountability' framing by making a strong case that the most promising transparency initiatives focus directly on bolstering political accountability specifically, by informing voters, sanctioning politicians and changing the incentives of non-elected public officials. Other scholars have gone further in critiquing the social accountability framing, calling for a 'conceptual reboot ... to inform a new generation of strategies that take entrenched institutional obstacles more fully into account' (Fox 2016).

In this report, we argue that the need for a conceptual reboot of accountability extends further: accountability needs to be conceptualised through the intersection of participation and marginality, in that accountability is about the active participation of citizens in demanding transformation, both at the institutional level and the everyday level at which their experience of marginality exists and is recreated daily through social and structural norms. By marginality, we refer to the

intersecting forms of inequality experienced by people living on the margins – spatially, socially and politically. The specific meanings of marginality in urban South Africa are explored in the context sections in this report.

There is a need to re-characterise accountability as a systemic issue, which is instantiated in particular moments, spaces and places. This definition goes beyond what Fox (2016) defines as 'tactical' and 'strategic' approaches to accountability, to include the social norms, and the political, economic and social context that leads to marginalisation and discrimination. It encompasses the systemic and structural aspects of inequalities and the ways that these wider systems and structures reinforce exclusions for certain groups and issues. Participatory accountability must engage with the modes of politics and participation at the local level, as well as the multiple faces of the state. The conceptualisation that we make here of accountability has emerged from a grounded theory approach (Glaser 1978), drawing on practical and engaged research over the past six years in South Africa.

Our definition of participatory accountability<sup>2</sup> includes both episodic forms of engagement (e.g. community policing forums, elections, ward committees, policy dialogues, participatory budgeting meetings, citizen-based monitoring of services), as well as everyday forms of engagement (e.g. everyday interaction with police and government officials). Central to participatory accountability is an opening up of the political space, better governance and increased responsiveness among governance actors; these reflect shifts in power towards marginalised groups across both episodic and everyday encounters with the state and other power-holders.

<sup>1</sup> For reasons of length, we have only included full cases for two of the research streams included in this analysis. For additional information about the *bossie doktor* case study, the Delft community safety case study and the gender-based violence case study, please visit: [www.livelihoods.org.za/resources](http://www.livelihoods.org.za/resources)

<sup>2</sup> This definition has been developed as part of participatory action research, through analysis of research in South Africa and a collective synthesis process with partners from Egypt, Ghana, India and Uganda. See: Howard, López-Franco and Wheeler (2017).

Further aspects of participatory accountability include:

- a focus on the holistic and positive outcomes for individuals and groups living on the margins, recognising the importance of the intersecting nature of issues in daily life
- concern for the recognition of people's identities and rights as well as meeting their basic needs, with attention to the importance of the intersectionality of inequalities (including gender, age, national origin, sexuality, historically constructed racial categories and geographic location)
- an articulation of accountability as both a right and a claim: it is a necessary process and also an outcome
- recognition of the importance of an enabling environment to achieve accountability (e.g. basic civil and economic rights, access to information, an open media environment).

Within this conceptualisation of accountability, the nature of influence on government responsiveness can be personal, in terms of shifts in how people see themselves and their situation. It can also be systemic, in terms of the 'rules of the game' that shape how knowledge and political agendas from more marginalised groups are given weight, or practically in terms of specific changes in procedures, policies and programmes. This report demonstrates how everyday and episodic forms of accountability interact and ultimately influence the outcomes of accountability processes for people on the margins.

## 2.1 Participatory accountability in context

This conceptualisation of participatory accountability builds on a relational understanding of accountability. A more relational approach to accountability is set out by Tembo's work, which is grounded in extensive experience in sub-Saharan Africa from an aid perspective:

"An alternative framework has to focus on actor incentives and interests and blur the 'state-citizen divide'. It needs to define the role of external interventions in existing local relations, bearing in mind that the actors involved include citizens (with various forms of authority and citizenship identities and expressions, marginality and power, expressed through local organisations, political-party representation, state bureaucracy, media, etc.). In order to frame interlocution of accountability relationships, we should move away from preoccupation with actors and actor categories, and start with defining the prevailing relationships that can enable particular actors to facilitate, or even enforce, changes to the rules of the game" (Tembo 2013: 37).

<sup>3</sup> These are 'bush doctors', or practitioners of traditional medicine.

Tembo's relational definition is useful in shifting the focus away from a binary citizen–state focus. Our definition of participatory accountability takes this further by examining how participatory technologies can uncover and shift relationships in situations characterised by extreme inequalities and multiple forms of exclusion.

Part of what emerges through a participatory approach to accountability is the slipperiness in defining what exactly constitutes the accountability issue in any specific case. Implicit in Tembo's definition, and explicit in our definition of participatory accountability, is the importance of rigorous contextual analysis to inform a relational conceptualisation of accountability. This contextual understanding is also what is needed to define and bound the nature of the accountability issue. The importance of context in determining the outcomes of accountability initiatives is well documented (Grandvoinet et al. 2015). We argue, however, that a deeper and more nuanced understanding of context is needed to identify how to translate complex realities of marginalisation and political power into prospects for social justice. In South Africa, there are multiple aspects of the context; it is necessary to bring these to the fore in order to help explain and understand the particular cases of accountability studied.

The following subsections consider how national policy and legislative environments, and the political, social, economic and spatial contexts, inform the micro-level dynamics explored in the case studies analysed in our research. These were all conducted with groups and individuals living in townships and informal settlements, including:

- activists against gender-based violence and for community safety
- community care workers and health committee members working for public health
- informal traders and the informal economy
- traditional medicine, Rastafarian *bossie doktors*<sup>3</sup> and indigenous rights.

### *Policy and legislative environment*

South Africa has a progressive legal framework for participatory and representative democracy, with many legal provisions to ensure accountability. This includes the Constitution, the National Development Plan 2030, and White Papers and other policy frameworks for specific sectors; combined, these support and extend to accountability and participatory democracy. South Africa is recognised globally for the design of progressive policies, particularly in the area of participatory democracy (cf. Piper and von Lieres 2015).

However, in practice there are significant challenges to the implementation of the policy framework

for participatory democracy. Existing forums and mechanisms for participation, such as ward committees, community policing forums and health committees, are very uneven in their performance. In some contexts, these legally mandated participatory spaces have collapsed entirely; in others, they have been captured by local political elites or criminal elements, particularly community policing forums.

The policy environments for each of the areas included in this study (see Annex 1) are marked by specific challenges:

- Gender-based violence was addressed as a primary national concern through a national plan of action, published in 2014 and intended to reduce the high incidence of violence. However, the plan contains no details on implementation, and no progress has been reported since its publication.
- In the case of primary health care, facilitators such as community care workers and community health committee members encounter significant gaps in policy. For example, there are no guidelines on how to hold to account government-contracted non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that employ community care workers for the working conditions they provide; nor are any resources allocated to health committee members to fulfil their responsibilities.
- In policy on informal economic activities in the townships, we see a lack of understanding of the context, as all data is obtained through large-scale surveys, which misses the qualitative detail necessary to create meaningful regulations.
- In conversations with the Rastafarian *bossie doktors*, a tension becomes apparent between the right “to secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development” (South African Constitution, Chapter 2, Section 24). While entitling citizens to both ecological development and social and economic development, it does not account for situations where these might be irreconcilable. When ecological development hinders social and economic development, or vice versa, legal and policy documents do not seem to offer guidance on how to resolve such tensions. However, the disposition in many such documents to talk of the growing population as ‘encroaching’ and putting ‘pressure’ on the environment appears to frame the issue in such a way that people, especially the economically disadvantaged, are viewed as a threat to the environment.

Overall, the biggest challenge in the policy landscape does not appear to be a lack of progressive policy per

se, although there are important gaps in some cases. Rather, implementation seems to be what is lacking most, with insufficient funding and poor coordination between different levels and departments of government hindering participatory processes.

### ***Political and social context***

The difficulty of constructing accountability in South Africa must be understood in relation to the historical legacy of a violent and oppressive apartheid state. The apartheid state systematically excluded and oppressed groups in South Africa, in terms of access to services and key resources, but also in terms of their inclusion in governance. In the past few years, service-delivery protests, anti-foreigner marches and riots, and the #FeesMustFall movement<sup>4</sup> all indicate the rising levels of dissatisfaction, anger and frustration among citizens. At the same time, the struggle for control of the future of the ANC, a series of high-profile corruption cases, and growing pressure at the municipal level from opposition parties have all contributed to what leading political commentators and politicians term ‘a constitutional crisis’ (Munusamy 2017; Ndlozi 2016).

Fundamentally, improving accountability in South Africa must confront the problem of a deep lack of trust in the government and a profound lack of social cohesion, compounded by ongoing corruption scandals, slow progress towards socio-economic rights, and persistent historical exclusions. These areas of exclusion have direct implications for how to strengthen accountability and government responsiveness. The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development convened a high-level panel and public hearings in 2016 to assess key post-1996 legislation in terms of the acceleration of fundamental change. These hearings, held across the country, pointed to the ways that areas of exclusion intersect (South African Parliament 2016).

Each aspect of exclusion is important not only on its own, but combined; the most marginalised people face intersecting inequalities that reinforce one another, leading to further barriers to accountability. The intersections and overlaps between these areas of exclusion are creating even larger barriers for socio-economic rights for the most marginalised (Collins 2015). For example, a young Coloured man living in an urban township is forced out of school by gang violence and cannot find an entry point into the formal labour market. He must contend with high levels of violence in his community, discriminatory social norms about the role of men, and expectations about his ability to provide for his family. His exclusion is compounded by a lack of access to social welfare and family structures that are under strain or eroded. Taken together, these different aspects of exclusion mean that the prospects for the

<sup>4</sup> This was a student-led movement that began in 2015 in response to a rise in university fees. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FeesMustFall>



young man to participate in accountability processes are very small. There are many other examples of intersecting inequalities: for women, for the elderly, for people who are HIV-positive, historically disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups, sexual minorities, disabled individuals and many others.

### ***Economic and spatial context***

It is important to bear in mind the historical context of spatial planning under apartheid and the Group Areas Act (of 1950), in terms of their implications for accountability (see Beinart 2001; Smith 1992). By the 1980s, the enforcement of the Group Areas Act was breaking down and from then, many people moved to formerly white urban areas in search of better opportunities in spaces that were previously denied to them. The majority had to live in slums on the peripheries of cities, such as Crossroads (near Cape Town), as formal housing and employment provision was slow, and certain areas remained inaccessible (Beavon 1992; Cook 1992). Thus, the massive influx of people from former homelands to urban peripheries, especially after 1990, brought massive informality as the state could not accommodate most people in its planning (Rogerson 1992).

From 1994, the ANC government's social contract with the previously disadvantaged black South African majority included the promise of the massive delivery of services in all areas, including housing, water and sanitation, education, health and employment opportunities, and support to poor people through social grants and state welfare (Bond 2005). In 1994, the new government adopted its first development plan, the Reconstruction and Development Programme. This was a social-democratic plan that sought to provide massive social infrastructure (e.g. housing, clinics, schools, jobs and skills development) to those previously denied this through apartheid. Within this new paradigm, informality was still viewed as a problem to solve through the provision of social infrastructure by the state.

Through the Reconstruction and Development Programme, the government sought to be accountable to the poor black majority by providing formal infrastructure (Ibid.). But by the late 1990s, the realities of the global neoliberal system had caught up with the socialist-leaning government. The era of state-led development had passed, and the neoliberal rhetoric of big business resulted in a push for private sector-led 'trickle down' development. South Africa's planners adopted the much more macro-economic Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy, which favoured business and large infrastructure projects at the expense of the poor. Policies from the Reconstruction and Development Programme continued in some areas through a 'lite' version, such as housing, the expanded public works programme and social grants, but not as the main thrust of economic policy.

South Africa's economy grew under the Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy and later macro-economic policies such as the Accelerated and Shared Growth initiative for South Africa, but this was very much jobless growth which favoured a light touch from the state with regard to social infrastructure, and support for historically excluded groups; Bond (2005) discusses this shift to neoliberal policies.

The shift in government policy from socialist to macro-economic was a partial abandonment of its social contract with citizens in favour of the interests of big business and foreign investment (Luiz 2016). This, one might argue, is the first layer of the accountability context, in which the state withdraws slowly from its former plans to implement large-scale pro-poor policies, and thus fails to remain accountable to the people. The state was much more concerned with keeping South Africa as a good destination for foreign investment and appeasing big business than running the radical kind of social programmes needed to address the legacy of apartheid.

### ***Accountability and intersecting inequalities***

When considered together, the implications of these different aspects of context are significant for a grounded approach to accountability in urban townships and informal settlements in South Africa. As Wacquant (2008: 237) notes:

"When these 'penalised spaces' are, or threaten to become, permanent fixtures of the urban landscape, discourses of vilification proliferate and agglomerate about them, 'from below', in the ordinary interactions of daily life, as well as 'from above', in the journalistic, political and bureaucratic (and even scientific) fields. A taint of place is thus superimposed on the already existing stigmata traditionally associated with poverty and ethnic origin."

The major challenge for building accountability and government responsiveness in South Africa is the need to take seriously the existing social, economic and historical context of exclusion, and the realistic possibilities for shifts within government branches and departments. Those working within government to promote accountability and participation have identified some of the key barriers (Timm and Masemola 2017). On the government side, the lack of incentives for participatory accountability is well documented, but there is also a lack of capability within government departments to effectively respond at key points. Government departments are under pressure from below (as evidenced by protests and riots), and from above (due to scarce resources and political pressures). Further, the bureaucratic culture, which is still heavily influenced by the apartheid state in many government departments, is hierarchical and not orientated towards hearing citizens (Ibid.).

### 3. Methodologies for participatory technologies

This research was based on an adaptive, learning-oriented methodology that incorporates diverse thematic case studies. These studies emerged from established themes and areas of work within SLF, and in a broad focus on inclusive, thriving urban communities. Across the different case studies, we used different combinations of technologies and participatory processes to work with specific groups, outlined in this section.

These participatory processes were accompanied by semi-structured interviews, focus groups and participant observations of the research process. By conducting in-depth research in and on each case study, while situating them within the wider conceptual framework of our research questions, we conducted rigorous cross-case analysis to generate grounded theory (Glaser 1978). This approach allows this research to speak to the wider questions relating to the conditions (if any) under which participatory technology processes can lead to shifts in power relations and improved government responsiveness.

At the same time, this approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the specificity of context. We critically examined our methodologies from both epistemological and ethical perspectives. We recognise that the technologies we describe, which mediate the process of engagement, have certain biases; we will consider the implications of this in each case study, and as a whole (see Annex 1).

We approached technologies as a type of mediation between different forms of knowledge. Our definition of technology combines processes and technical tools, drawing explicitly on the literature from cultural studies / critical theory and media studies on technologies (Haraway 2005; Latour and Weibel 2005). Technology includes the production, consumption and reproduction of knowledge. In this sense, technologies are relevant for accountability because, when defined in this way, they can be seen as enabling conversations, contestations and critique; and as repositioning, reshaping and articulating knowledge.

Our focus was the discourses or networks and technology that emerge through grounded research and engagement with government, and how these become closely intertwined. Within this, we looked at the articulation of local knowledges that are geographically specific, and resonate strongly with everyday life as a result. Participatory technologies, therefore, are a combination of methods, processes and technical equipment that intentionally mediate between different forms of knowledge to address underlying inequalities.

Specifically, we used participatory technologies to allow people living on the margins to draw attention to their own lived realities. In doing this, we encountered the importance of contrasting and conflicting narratives in accountability, and the role of political rhetoric, particularly in highly politicised environments. Through this research process, we explored how to adequately differentiate forms of narrative generated through technology, and use them strategically and ethically. SLF's overall approach is not to distribute technical equipment to groups, but to use technical equipment with groups over time to mediate knowledge and translate it into different aspects of the policy process, through engagement with people at all levels of government.

The participatory technology processes used included:

- personal storytelling for transformation
- collective narrative-based filmmaking
- collective image narration
- participatory geospatial mapping
- community-hosted exhibitions
- film screenings and policy dialogues
- social media campaigns.

Table 1 provides an explanation of the key methods, the technologies involved and the types of knowledge generated. These methods were not fixed to one case study or another, but rather adapted to the specific group, context and issue (as explained through the case studies), based on the principles set out in Section 1 relating to the importance of translating forms of knowledge. They were used in certain sequences (e.g. from personal story to collective film; from geospatial mapping and surveys to personal stories) to layer meaning / relationships. This layering and sequencing was important in terms of understanding how participatory technologies can contribute to accountability, and is analysed further in Section 6.

The analysis of the case studies critically examined the different approaches used. This offered some conclusions about the conditions and circumstances required for the best use of different technologies and associated processes, and these findings helped us to draw larger generalisations. It also included a critical interrogation of the way that SLF, as an intermediary, has used technologies and convened processes with citizens and government. In addition, it analysed the nature of government responses to identify implications for the role of intermediaries – for example as representatives, facilitators, advocates, etc.

**Table 1. Methods, technologies and types of knowledge generated through the research**

Participatory technology method	Technologies involved	Types of knowledge generated
<p><b>Personal storytelling for transformation</b> is a creative, participatory audio-visual process that helps people tell a personal story through a collective process – using digital technology to communicate and amplify this story. The final story can be produced digitally as a short film sequence (usually 2–3 minutes) made up of static images and a first-person narrative.</p> <p>It requires a strong relationship between the host organisation and participants, skilled facilitation and technical skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital photography</li> <li>• Digital audio recording</li> <li>• Tablet-based apps</li> <li>• Social media platforms</li> </ul>	Embodied knowledge of personal experiences in a particular context.
<p><b>Collaborative narrative-based video</b> is an approach in which individual experiences from personal stories are explored, analysed and translated into a collective narrative on how government should respond to a particular problem.</p> <p>This includes <b>CollectiveVoice</b>, a new combination of photo, voice, storytelling and collective filmmaking using still images and short audio and film clips; this was developed during our health case study.</p> <p>It requires a strong relationship between the host organisation and participants, and between the participants themselves, as well as skilled facilitation and technical ability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital video</li> <li>• Computer-based digital video editing</li> <li>• Social media platforms</li> </ul>	Collective analytical knowledge based on personal experiences of a similar core issue – framed by an explicit analysis of the policy audience.
<p><b>Technology-enabled design</b> is a method developed by SLF and its urban design partners to understand the local dynamics of township life and informal businesses. This is a highly participatory process in which in-depth observations of local dynamics (e.g. pedestrian flows, customer habits, business spatial layouts) are documented (e.g. sketched, tracked) by people living in these places. These are then developed, through technologies such as computer-aided design, into a range of products that illustrate the spatial and relational dynamics of the local context (e.g. the street, <i>shebeens</i>).<sup>5</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital photography and videography</li> <li>• Computer-aided design</li> <li>• Geographical information systems</li> <li>• Internet access</li> </ul>	<p>Locally grounded knowledge about the environment in which participants live.</p> <p>A range of design tools (e.g. web-based interactive three-dimensional design typologies and object inventories that illustrate <i>shebeen</i> life) which enable a deeper understanding of local issues and dynamics.</p>
<p><b>Participatory geospatial mapping</b> is a process used by SLF to understand local urban livelihood dynamics. SLF's mapping starts with detailed on-the-ground socio-economic research in a particular area to understand the local informal economy in great detail. This knowledge is then analysed and placed onto comparative multi-layered geospatial maps to illustrate the local dynamics in a way that captures both their social and economic attributes and their location. In other instances, mapping is used in participatory community workshops to understand specific issues (e.g. violence and crime) in more detail.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographical information systems and satellite data</li> <li>• Computer-aided design</li> <li>• Web-based hosting of maps and socio-economic data</li> </ul>	<p>Multi-layered and comparative geospatial maps illustrating a range of local socio-economic dynamics.</p> <p>Infographics which further analyse and illustrate local knowledge.</p>

<sup>5</sup> A *shebeen* is a type of bar or pub found in townships

*We are not informed in our community. Some people don't know about petitions. They say, 'What is that? What is that?' They just toyi-toyi ... they say we are tired and then they break everything.*

## 4. The nature of the accountability issues in each case study

Our research draws on a set of case studies with different characteristics and histories. In some, we refer to and analyse research processes that occurred over several years; in others, new strands of inquiry were initiated during this study. Rather than taking a narrow approach to a relevant government service or social accountability mechanism, we approached the accountability issues in each case as the intersection between the experiences of a marginalised group, or groups, within a specific local context. Approaching accountability from this starting point – the lived realities of marginality – shows how accountability is transversal and has multiple layers in each case.

It is important to note that our understanding and articulation of the accountability issues in each case study evolved during the research, with new aspects or focus points coming to light as the research deepened. This 'slipperiness' concerning the exact nature of the accountability issues is an important finding in itself, showing how the boundaries of an accountability issue shift through a participatory approach that engages with multiple aspects of inequality and marginality. This section describes the accountability issues in each case, and links these to the relevant policy contexts.

### 4.1 Activists against gender-based violence and for community safety

"If you need to be heard, you need to be violent. We are not informed in our community. Some people don't know about petitions. They say, 'What is that? What is that?' They just *toyi-toyi*<sup>6</sup> ... they say we are tired and then they break everything."

– Member, Delft Safety Group

Since 2014, SLF has been working with community activists who are addressing gender-based violence and community safety. The research processes focused on how lived experiences of violence, insecurity and local activism to address violence all intersect, and how they can be strengthened to influence government

responsiveness; Box 1 gives two examples from among the many we encountered during our research.

Violence is a pervasive and everyday occurrence in townships and informal settlements across Cape Town, leading to profound insecurity. This is connected to experiences of personal violation: of people's private spaces, and of their bodies. The instances of violence catalogued through the research process point to the high and increasing levels of brutality and severity of violence in the townships (Black, Derakhshani, Liedeman and Wheeler 2016). The pervasiveness and severity of violence is combined with a high level of unpredictability. Violence can happen at any time of the day or night, at home, on the street, in taxis, in schools, at the shops: there are no safe spaces. This unpredictability leads to a lack of trust in people and institutions.

#### Box 1. 'What we live with every day isn't right': stories of insecurity and calls for accountability

Manelisi, a young Xhosa man living in Delft, a township in Cape Town, describes his experience of being assaulted by the police on his way home from graduation. His story, 'Police Brutality', can be watched at: <https://vimeo.com/192617528>

'Being Young in Delft' is a short film made by younger members of the Delft Safety Group. It uses a composite story approach, based on the group's individual experiences, to explore themes affecting youth living in townships and disadvantaged communities, such as the lack of employment opportunities, public facilities or parental support. The film directly address how young people want the government to respond to them. It can be watched at: <https://vimeo.com/181156023>

<sup>6</sup> This is a South African term, broadly meaning protesting in the streets.

Violence and the lack of security affect groups in different ways. Gender and gendered norms play a central role in how violence unfolds in South Africa (Mills, Shahrokh, Wheeler, Black, Cornelius and van den Heever 2015; Wheeler and Shahrokh 2014). There are blurred lines around who is responsible for violence. This further exacerbates the unpredictability and resulting lack of trust and heightens the accountability issue.

The police play a central role in the dynamics of violence in Cape Town: in carrying out violence themselves, but also in being absent / failing to stop it. At the same time, people involved in the research process still look to the police and the justice system to respond to violence. The nature of the accountability issue in the case of gender-based violence and community safety includes the relationship between the police and urban communities, but it also includes the relationships with social development, education, health and economic development, and gendered norms that are implicated in the lack of security:

“[The government] needs to address the issues of sexism very seriously, and I don’t think that it’s being taken seriously enough. And it needs to be dealt with on a systemic level ... they have to start with the police, with the courts. Because it’s one thing to change people’s behaviour and people’s perceptions ... it’s really important. We also know that that takes a very long time. But if men in this country feel that they can get away with the violence, for me that’s the big thing. If they are not accountable, then violence is just going to flourish.”

– Stakeholder interview, gender-based violence case study

Within South Africa, the issue of safety and violence prevention is politically contentious. In 2014, there was a major episode of civil unrest and protest in multiple townships across Cape Town, specifically on the issue of police violence and corruption. This pressured the provincial government of Western Cape into creating a Commission of Inquiry into the breakdown of police–township relations in Khayelitsha, the largest township in Cape Town. The Commission’s findings pointed to: extremely low levels of trust between township citizens and the police; high levels of police corruption; and inadequate resources for effective policing. For example, police performance charts provide a perverse incentive for not recording, or downgrading, reported crimes – a practice reported all over the country. This can be associated with crime-reporting rates dropping in recent years. For sexual offences, Africa Check (2015) estimates that only one in thirteen cases is reported, while the national victims of crime survey shows that the proportion of rape victims who report their victimisation to the police decreased by 21% between 2011 and 2014 (Statistics South Africa 2015).

In summary, the Commission of Inquiry found that the police are often a source of insecurity within the context of the township. There is little to no citizen accountability over the police. This is despite oversight being constitutionally mandated: the South African National Action Plan for 2016 for the Open Government Partnership placed citizen-based monitoring of police as a key policy commitment. At the same time, the national government has reneged on a commitment to create a National Strategic Plan for gender-based violence. Despite a public commitment to create this, following a reshuffle of the cabinet after the national elections in 2015, the newly appointed minister for women refused to follow through on commitments to work with civil society organisations to develop this plan.

## 4.2 Community care workers and health committee members working for public health

“As community care workers, we feel like we are superheroes, because we are the helping hand to the people who cannot help themselves. You will find that we do not have enough equipment, so sometimes we have to wash gloves, aprons, etc. and use them again. This is not easy, but we keep on going. We are proud, but we are tired.”

– Quote from collective story of community care workers

Most people living in townships or informal settlements in South Africa rely on the public health-care system for their primary health needs. Public health services are offered free of charge, but the delivery of these faces several challenges – mainly a lack of skilled personnel and resources to serve underprivileged communities.

As mandated by the Constitution, each community elects a health committee to oversee the health-care services in a specific area. This process involves mediation between the community, health-care practitioners and the managers of clinics. The committee should function as the voice of the community and hold government-appointed health-care managers to account when service delivery falls short. However, the functioning of these committees has been systematically undermined since government financial support was withdrawn in 2010. This means that members, who are often from an impoverished background, need to bear the costs of running the committee; nor do they receive compensation for the time they spend on this task. In some cases, clinic managers actively withhold non-monetary support by refusing to let health committee members use their facilities’ phones or meeting rooms, further frustrating their efforts.

The health case study also explored accountability mechanisms through the provision of primary

*When we go to the Department [of Health], they say go to the NGO, when we go to the NGO, they say go to the Department. It's like a song. No one is taking responsibility.*

health care in townships and informal settlements by community care workers, and the surrounding processes of decision-making about how people access health care. This enquiry stems from the Provincial Government of the Western Cape's *Policy on the Funding of Non-Governmental Organizations for the Rendering of Social Welfare Services*, first published in 2011 and updated in 2013. This policy enables the formation of partnerships between the Department of Social Development and the NGO sector. Through these partnerships, and via transfer payment agreements, the Department of Social Development provides public funds for NGOs to employ and manage appropriately qualified people to render social welfare and community development services across the province. Also, this policy allows for the subcontracting of NGOs as providers of essential government social welfare and health-care services – practice that is widespread in South Africa.

Nationally, community care workers are contracted as volunteers by NGOs through service provision agreements with the provincial Department of Health. However, the processes that enable these partnerships – including the procedures for NGO funding – are largely unregulated, which brings serious accountability issues. Foremost among these is the status of community care workers within the government's national health-care system and in relation to the responsibilities they hold. Our research showed that community care workers employed by NGOs in townships in Cape Town are operating under extremely precarious conditions. They regularly encounter physical threats and assault, are provided with inadequate or no basic equipment, receive compensation which is below South Africa's minimum wage, and face corruption within some of the NGOs that contract them. The community care workers who participated in our health case study were trapped between the government and their NGO employers, both of which claim to not be responsible for their working conditions.

“When we go to the Department [of Health], they say go to the NGO, when we go to the NGO, they say go to the Department. It's like a song. No one is taking responsibility. So, they are playing games and we have to carry the pain. The sad thing is that we have to carry it home, to our children, to our families.”

– Quote from a focus group discussion with community care workers

Another fundamental accountability issue that emerged through our work with community care workers relates to the ways that care work, especially by women, is not valued or recognised by government or the economic system. In trying to address these problems, community care workers are confronted with a classic employment rights dilemma, one faced by many exploited workers who are not given adequate protection by legal frameworks. Although the carers who we worked with are members of the National Union of Care Workers of South Africa, they collectively agree that the union is currently not strong enough to adequately support them in their campaign for recognition and respect from the NGOs they work for and from government.

This is all occurring in a context where the neoliberal state claims to take responsibility for primary health care. Although the 2013 policy document from the Provincial Government of the Western Cape indicates that the South African Council for Social Service Professions developed the *Draft Code of Good Practice and Responsibilities of Employers of Social Service Practitioners* in 2012, this document, or any other of this nature, is not publicly available. This means that NGOs subcontracted by the Department of Health to provide the public with access to basic health care are not subject to the same rules as the state would be if it was providing these services directly.

### Box 2. ‘We are proud, but we are tired!’: CollectiveVoice stories from community care workers

Community care workers do important work, delivering primary health care to communities, but they are systematically underpaid and receive inadequate support from the Department of Health and the NGOs that they work for. As part of our health case study, we worked with 11 community care workers from Nyanga, Cape Town, who produced three short films through a CollectiveVoice process (see Table 1) to bring attention to their working conditions.

One of their films, ‘We are proud, but we are tired’, deals with corruption and nepotism in the NGOs they work for (see Annex 2). It can be watched at: <https://vimeo.com/213826385>

### 4.3 Informal traders and the informal economy

“I got harassed and arrested lots, and I had to pay lots of fines! They always came to arrest me so they could raise money for themselves. I never had to bribe them, but I had to part with a lot of money in fines. The police would arrest me two or three times a week, and I had to pay R1500<sup>7</sup> each time to be released. I was doing good business, but it was breaking me completely. So it was better to quit.”

– Interview with ex-*shebeener*, Delft (quoted in Hartnack and Liedeman 2016: 23)

The accountability issues explored in this case focused on the role of informal and illegal traders operating within the informal economy. This includes *shebeeners*, who operate informal / illegal bars and pubs, street traders, *spaza*-shop owners,<sup>8</sup> and other small businesses within townships. SLF has developed comprehensive infographics that provide an overview of township liquor trading and the township informal economy.<sup>9</sup> This large and diverse group of traders and business people face structural marginalisation and persecution within a regulatory framework that is often antagonistic. The accountability issues include how the spatial dynamics and macro-economic context shape the prospects of informal traders, and the lack of accountability in how the government treats the informal economy and traders.

As South Africa’s economy has moved away from mass employment in industries such as mining and agriculture, urban poverty and unemployment has grown. The informal economy grew as this took place, but government policy still looked to move informal traders to the formal sector. While encouraging people to be entrepreneurial on one hand, state laws and municipal laws still assumed that to help the informal economy, it must be formalised, and some activities must only happen in certain areas; in the eyes of officials, informality was still seen as a ‘problem’ to be solved. Residential neighbourhoods have never been viewed by the state as appropriate places for business activities, despite the fact that many people trade where they live, not in business zones or on the high street. Other aspects of the informal economy were criminalised, in the interests of public safety, public health, cleanliness, etc.; others held the view that cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town now compete on a global stage, and to be recognised as global cities must follow global norms and standards.

<sup>7</sup> South African Rand.

<sup>8</sup> A *spaza* is an informal convenience shop.

<sup>9</sup> These can be seen at: [http://livelihoods.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final\\_Township-Liquor-Trading-infographic.pdf](http://livelihoods.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final_Township-Liquor-Trading-infographic.pdf), and [http://livelihoods.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Fianl\\_To\\_Print\\_Infographic\\_2\\_17June.pdf](http://livelihoods.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Fianl_To_Print_Infographic_2_17June.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> A South African security company.

<sup>11</sup> The *bossie doktors* involved in this study used Rastafarian slang, including ‘I and I’ which means ‘we’.

The accountability context for the informal economy in cities has therefore been one of a lack of appropriate support for them to thrive in their own contexts (i.e. as survivalists and in residential areas rather than areas zoned for business), and of over-zealous policing of certain kinds of trade in areas deemed unsuitable. The lack of detailed knowledge about the informal economy among policy-makers translates into a failure to distinguish between small informal businesses and those that have grown large enough to comply with the requirements of formalisation. More nuance is needed in policy-making to ensure that entrepreneurship is not discouraged, while businesses that have grown beyond a certain size (i.e. those large enough to start negotiating price discounts and merchandising services from producers, to employ staff, to accumulate business assets) start to comply with the requirements of formalisation (Charman and Petersen 2015).

The context has been contradictory, with nominal support at the municipal level in some areas (e.g. the provision of market stalls and licences) but also the policing and prohibition of certain activities. A problem in current policy, especially at the city level, is that zoning schemes and land-use planning are used to restrict informal businesses. As Charman (2012) has shown, in accordance with the policy objectives defined in the City of Cape Town’s spatial development framework, the City uses land-use planning to determine the specific geographic localities in which businesses may operate, specifying enterprise restrictions on businesses operating in areas that are zoned as residential. As townships principally comprise residential land, the spatial development plan provides a neat opportunity for controlling informal businesses.

### 4.4 Traditional medicine, Rastafarian *bossie doktors* and indigenous rights

“As I was picking my herbs, I was thinking of everything that was happened during the day. From ADT<sup>10</sup> disturbing us, walking the trails [on the mountain] watching everyone else being free, and the man chopping down creation without any purpose. When I look at all of this, it makes I and I<sup>11</sup> think, where do I and I fit in? We hid our bags away to look like everybody else but it didn’t work. When all other people on the mountain look at I and I, I and I don’t know what picture they see, but I and I think they are afraid. How are we and them going to work this out?”

– Quote from personal story by Joseph, a Rastafarian *bossie doktor*

This case study involved working with grass-roots herbalists who practise traditional medicine through the harvest of wild plants and the preparation of herbal medicines. Some of the *bossie doktors* are involved in the Khoisan indigenous rights movement,<sup>12</sup> and they are part of a locally specific Rastafarian movement. The harvesting of wild plants is illegal and strongly opposed by conservationists concerned with the ecological heritage of the Cape Floral Kingdom. The types of quantification used in conservationists' understanding of harvesting contribute to the criminalisation of all forms of 'poaching'. In legal documents, for example, taking flora or fauna from a nature conservation area is categorised as poaching, but does not consider the varying ways of, and reasons for, conducting these activities. As a result, this does not consider different knowledges of conservation that may support practices differing from official conservation.

The *bossie doktors'* harvesting practices are also a direct challenge to issues of land ownership and tenure in the Western Cape, with increasing state resources being channelled into preventing the poaching of plants by *bossie doktors* from national parks and other protected areas, and from private farms. Our research process included working with *bossie doktors* to create narratives about their exclusion and discrimination, as well as their understanding of, and relationship to, nature.

Through the course of this research, additional layers of the accountability issue surfaced, including how

young Coloured men in townships find a sense of belonging with *bossie doktors* (some members of the research group were formerly involved with gangs), the religious persecution of Rastafarians by the police, and the racism of white landowners and wider society towards *bossie doktors*.

### Box 3. 'The mountain belongs to all of us ... How are we going to work this out?': Stories of ever-living and exclusion

Joseph and Gerald were part of a group of Rastafarian *bossie doktors* who created a collection of short stories about their daily experiences. Created through a process of personal storytelling, in which the storyteller crafts every aspect of the film, the stories show how they face police harassment, exclusionary conservation practices, lack of access to land and mistrust. The stories also explore the *bossie doktors'* identities as healers, fathers, sons and community elders, and their relationship with nature.

The stories were screened at an independent cinema in Cape Town in November 2016. Watch Joseph's story at: <https://vimeo.com/206378072>; and Gerald's story at: <https://vimeo.com/206546488>

## 5. Conditions for increased government responsiveness

Section 3 demonstrates that when approaching the question of increased government and state responsiveness to highly marginalised groups, it is necessary to consider the implications of political and social contexts and the role of history in shaping the current situation. For example, initiatives aiming to improve accountability must recognise the importance of first shifting the sense of helplessness and hopelessness among the most marginalised people that results from the wider context and histories. This is a necessity for moving towards greater accountability.

One approach that can work, demonstrated in the case studies on community safety, health and traditional healers, is to start by creating a sense of connection to a wider group, a sense of being heard / listened to, and recognising the importance of people's own experiences of insecurity. This allows for both self and

collective respect to be generated through a gradual, sustained process. Sources of resilience in communities relate to trust and respect between people. These relationships can form the basis of shared identity that enables action for change.

The development of respect and trust through this group process can also build confidence, and the belief that collective action can elicit accountability. But even within a group of activists who are extremely passionate about the need for change in government policy and practice, who have built up a robust collective trust, and have grown in confidence through working together to address an issue (such as the community care workers in our case studies), there is still a need for them to feel that they are ready to engage directly with government representatives. This can still be a big step to overcome and it is important to recognise this.

<sup>12</sup> The term 'Khoisan' refers to two groups from southern Africa: the foraging San and the pastoral Khoi. See: [www.sahistory.org.za/article/khoisan-identity](http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/khoisan-identity)



*The Ward Councillors we presented to blew up and denied what was happening on the ground. They said ‘shebeen and safety’ do not go together. They saw shebeens as filthy rich and just pretending to be poor and harassed, despite what we showed them.*

In terms of systems of governance, we found that contextual factors often determine the capacity within government to ‘hear’ the less politically powerful (Timm and Masemola 2017). The culture of ‘command and control’ is deeply embedded in the ANC. This was evident in the public positions of leading political figures, and in a call from organised civil society for marches and other forms of mobilisation against Jacob Zuma’s government in April 2017:

“Citing the new police minister, Fikile Mbalula, and his ‘misguided enthusiasm’ when he said police should ‘fight fire with fire’, and the Sassa debacle<sup>13</sup> as examples of government’s failure (in not willing to listen), Pityana said that it seemed as though government was saying ‘I am government, I will tell you what to do, and you will do as I tell you’” (Hussain 2017).

Within South Africa’s current political context, there are very real limits on the government’s capacity to ‘hear’ voices that come from outside political parties and organised civil society. Smaller, grass-roots groups struggle to get space within the policy discourse because they often stand outside the entrenched structures of political representation, or become co-opted by them. The issue in question and type of group also directly influence whether the government can ‘hear’. For example, when presenting SLF research with *shebeeners* to the Mayoral Committee on Health in the City of Cape Town, Nathi Tshabalala, an SLF researcher, relates the following:

“We did a presentation of the Safe Shebeens concept. The Ward Councillors we presented to blew up and denied what was happening on the ground. They said ‘*shebeen* and safety’ do not go together. They saw *shebeens* as filthy rich and just pretending to be poor and harassed, despite what we showed them. So we got a bad reception. We saw the Safe Shebeens campaign as about promoting *shebeen* safety, but the councillors just felt that the *shebeens* needed to be closed, full stop. They saw the 12% of the GDP [gross domestic product] going to alcohol [as harmful] and would not budge. Most of them belonged to the Democratic Alliance and were of Muslim faith, so we did not get anywhere.”

– Nathi Tshabalala, informal economy case study

By contrast, traditional healers make a deliberate choice not to acknowledge the legitimacy of government authority:

“Rasta don’t need permits as we are citizens and the herbs are our heritage and inheritance. We are not Xhosa people and *sangomas* [traditional healers] who *braai* [barbeque] meat on Heritage Day. They [the authorities] need to engage us and meet us freely because we are indigenous and civilisation comes from us.”

– Rastafarian *bossie doktor* at a public screening of stories

These examples show how vested political interests and powerful discourses about who can be heard, as well as strategic choices about the extent to which groups make themselves visible to the government, all influence whether the people within government can ‘hear’ marginalised groups.

In addition, processes that aim to foster participatory democracy and accountability often lack the mechanisms for dialogue needed to address the fundamental problem of ‘invisibility’. To increase the prospects of government hearing, and thus be able to respond to marginalised groups, there is a need for specifically targeted methods of dialogue and transition. Existing forums for accountability or social accountability tools (such as citizen score cards) do not allow for dialogue that shifts the discourse about how particular issues or groups are framed. For example, Rastafarian *bossie doktors* are invited to negotiate with government for permits to access land for harvesting. But in their view, they already have the right to that land and the government has no right to keep them from it. In encounters between conservationists in government and *bossie doktors*, little progress was made beyond reinforcing the sense of the Rastafarians as being ‘difficult to work with’.

With *shebeeners* and informal traders, the government is often trying to suppress or remove them, so entering into dialogue with the government exposes these groups to reprisals:

“The struggle to change conservative and hostile attitudes towards township enterprise is ongoing,

<sup>13</sup> This was a recent corruption scandal in South Africa involving the South African Social Security Agency (Sassa), which took over the distribution of social grants from a private operator.

despite some of the headway made ... between 2010 and 2016. Sharing accessible information – be it in the form of maps/infographics or participatory videos – does not necessarily lead to the right kind of government responsiveness. As Anna James (a former SLF staffer) points out, even showing the maps could have undesired results: ‘At one meeting us showing the maps of trading at transport interchanges to the subcouncil unearthed some anxiety about the informal economic activity in those areas. Based on the question and answer afterwards, this anxiety seems to outdo any sense of value in the informal economy.’”

– Participant, informal economy case study

In the case study of community safety and gender-based violence, there were a variety of responses to the issue. Although many people within the government acknowledge the importance and scale of the problems around violence and insecurity, they also abdicate full responsibility for addressing the problem. At public dialogue events organised by SLF in late 2016, Alderman JP Smith, who is responsible for safety for the City of Cape Town, gave this response after watching stories from people in Delft about their experiences of police violence:

“You have assembled a good collection [of stories] for a commission of inquiry. Grotesque police collusion is why we have many [of the] problems we have. The Social Justice Coalition collected enough evidence to allow the premier [of the province] to kick-start a commission of inquiry [in Khayelitsha, another township in Cape Town]. There is also civil legal action [that you can take]. There is no reason you should suffer this abuse. Civil legal action is not something they [the South African Police Service] can escape.”

– Alderman JP Smith, November 30, 2016

This shows how people in government *can* hear and acknowledge the importance of stories about experiences of injustice – while at the same time placing the responsibility for addressing them on the people experiencing the problem, even though the failure is one of government accountability.

In another example, several government officials were invited to attend a stakeholder engagement event run by community care workers; none of them attended, however. The event was covered by a journalist from a local human rights media organisation, who interviewed the community care workers and SLF staff. Before publishing the article, the journalist sent it to the Department of Health for a response, and to the NGO that was employing the participants. The Department of Health took two weeks to respond, and blamed the NGO for the problems. The NGO did not respond at all. This illustrates the lack of responsiveness, from both government and service delivery organisations, to citizens’ concerns and grievances. It also highlights how

a lack of accountability is caused by multiple relationship failures: between citizens and the state, but also between intermediary organisations, the state and citizens.

## 5.1 Setting the boundaries of an accountability issue

In many of the case studies, people within government call for data, which suggests that they see the accountability issue as one which is ‘fixed’ by the government. For example, there are strong calls for data on crime from different people in government, to be supplied by voluntary neighbourhood watches. But these do not address how this data will be used, and by whom, especially when the state is implicated in abuse and violence (for example in well-documented and worsening police corruption cases that go all the way up to the ministerial level, after two successive national police commissioners were removed for fraud) (Rademeyer and Wilkinson 2013).

As an intermediary organisation, SLF is often asked to use relationships with the groups involved, or those formed through research, to meet government requests for certain kinds of information. But while the generation of that information can feed into government apparatus and planning cycles, it does not necessarily lead to changes in government responsiveness or accountability – unless there is political pressure at key points, and government recognition of the fundamental nature of the accountability problem. For example, a neighbourhood watch group was asked to monitor crime using handheld global positioning system (GPS) units, but the information was then taken to be used by the South African Police Service – without addressing the absence of trust between the community and the police, or the extreme levels of police corruption and brutality (SLF and SafetyLab 2014).

Some groups and places are more visible and intelligible to the government than others. In these case studies, we worked with groups, issues and places that are largely invisible to government for a variety of reasons. These include vested political interests (e.g. *shebeeners* and street traders), discrimination (e.g. *bossie doktors*), and patriarchy (e.g. attitudes towards community care workers and gender-based violence). At a public dialogue event, a highly-placed official in the Western Cape Provincial premier’s office said in an informal interview:

“I’ve realised that there is very little we can actually do [to address violence] in places like Delft. All I can really offer is to save those who are trying to get out by giving them a chance.”

– Official, Western Cape Provincial premier’s office

This quote shows how spatial inequalities play directly into how people in government respond to

the presentations of accountability issues. In these situations, going beyond superficial and aggregate statistical data that describes the problems is essential – and yet difficult to achieve. There is a key role for intermediary organisations in some cases: to support the groups involved to ‘get through’ to potential allies in key government positions, so that there can be a dialogue about what is really at stake and how the underlying issues can be addressed.

Finding the right allies is also important, as people in government have a range of motivations and incentives. When individuals are swept up by or complicit in state corruption, groups seeking accountability must manoeuvre around them and find other allies. This kind of sustained engagement with people in different levels of government, over years, is difficult for community activists to sustain without external support. One aspect of our research process (which is still ongoing) was a detailed analysis of the behaviour of allies in government. This was done to support marginalised groups in developing and adjusting strategies for working with government. The case studies show that in areas of entrenched marginalisation, where there are structural exclusions as well as profound and deep problems, years of preparatory work are needed before the conditions are conducive for increased accountability. For example, in the informal economy case study, years of research and hundreds of encounters with government were required to achieve a degree of legitimacy for the issue itself, and then the possibility of direct interaction between the people most affected (e.g. *shebeeners* and street traders) and those in government.

In another example, SLF invested considerable resources in building relationships and conducting research with the Rastafarian and *bossie doktor* constituencies. This eventually led to the creation of urban medicinal gardens in townships. Government representatives and conservationists wanted to take part in a planting event with the Rastafarians at a township garden for Nelson Mandela Day.<sup>14</sup> This could

be considered a positive example of how research helped to mediate engagement between an excluded group and the government. However, the behaviour and attitudes of the government representatives during the event signalled something else: the state was primarily interested in controlling or co-opting the initiative, rather than any kind of openness to engaging with the Rastafarian *bossie doktors*.

#### Box 4. SLF’s impact on government responsiveness

It is difficult to assess the impact that SLF has had on government responsiveness. However, these case studies show how the research process led to shifts in how accountability issues are defined, increased awareness by some people in government of certain issues, and fostered a sense of rights among marginalised groups. Given our assumptions about how change will continue to happen, the lasting impact may be related to strong relationships with key individuals who internalise information or change their ways of thinking about an issue, and who then champion this knowledge or position at later stage, when power relations / opportunities allow. The challenge, therefore, is how to trace this process and assess the influence of SLF in research terms. There are also important limitations regarding the kind of claims can be made about our influence.

In terms of understanding the influence of our work as an intermediary for accountability, it is important to consider the non-linear and unpredictable policy context. Different types of policy change occur over different time frames (short, medium and long term), and positive policy changes are not always irreversible. Some changes therefore occur over a long period, and may not be measurable within the time frame of a given research project or programme.

## 6. Contributions of participatory technology

In this section, we consider different technology-enabled methods and their potential contributions to increasing accountability – which must be weighed against their potential risks. Table 2 provides a quick overview of what we see as the ‘entry-level’ opportunities and risks associated with each of the methods used in the case

studies featured in this report. We say ‘entry-level’ benefits and risks because these are inherent in the one-off use of these methods. However, it would also be interesting to consider the benefits that arise from the overlapping / intersecting use of several methods in a single research process with a citizen group.

<sup>14</sup> An annual international day, held on July 18, in honour of Nelson Mandela.

**Table 2. Potential contributions and risks of technology-enabled methods for increasing accountability**

Method	Intended value	Intended benefits	Potential risks
Personal storytelling for transformation	Participants create their own narrative based on the lived experience of an issue / context.	Complex content / situational information is easily digestible in narrative form.	Information / stories may be too sensitive to share with the wider community, and / or expose the storyteller to risk through retelling.  A single narrative can be too reductive and linear.  Outputs are very diverse and required additional rounds of work to develop coherent messages for policy / accountability spaces.
Collaborative narrative-based video	These generate a cohesive, collective perspective on an agreed theme.	It makes visible repeated patterns in community experience, relating the power of personal experience to wider structural issues.	Building consensus across a group can be challenging, especially without previous experience of working as a group.
Technology-enabled design / participatory geospatial mapping	The specificity of findings challenges conventional wisdom around government policy and action.	Many information sets / relationships can be integrated within one map / infographic.  Data can be used to help community groups.	Government and other organisations can use data from findings to hurt community groups that participate and reveal information about their lives / situations / vulnerabilities.
Community exhibitions	These bring actors at differing levels of status / accountability together in a face-to-face setting, especially government with community actors.  These events featured digital outputs from the research, such as digital stories, but also provided the opportunity for government actors to engage directly with research participants.	They immerse government actors in the contexts and realities of poverty and marginalisation.  They give a sense of legitimacy and power to the daily experiences represented in the exhibition.	People who most need to see the exhibition don't show up or participate.  Government actors turn up but take control of the event, framing it in their terms and suppressing intended messages and findings.
Film screenings	Puts actors from marginalised community visibly on stage to voice their perspectives.	Films prompt well-organised comments and stories.  Films raise awareness about hidden / invisible issues and experiences.	Live participant engagement with large audiences after the screenings can be unpredictable.  They do not necessarily lead to further action by community groups or government.
Social media campaigns	These allow for the wide distribution of key facts and research findings.	Findings can be picked up by governments and / or NGOs working on same issues.	It can be hard to sustain energy and respond to queries without a dedicated social media manager.

*I think a digital story ... personalises more and I think someone watching it can probably connect with it more, because it's so personal. And it can also be very emotional ... when you ... hear people telling their real stories of what happens ... it can definitely get people to respond.*

## 6.1 Supporting citizens to engage with government through participatory technologies

Drawing on the case studies, we identified examples of how participatory technologies can support citizens to engage within government on accountability issues. The following subsections explore some of these in more detail and our reflections are drawn together in Box 5 at the end of the section.

### ***Increase engagement, accessibility and responsiveness***

Participatory technologies can have a powerful effect in terms of reframing government understanding of issues, based on the lived experiences of the most marginalised groups. For example, in our work with gender-based violence activists, one stakeholder was interviewed about the effects of storytelling on government responsiveness:

“In the South African context for example, where lesbophobic rape is such a major issue, I think a story like that [told by a young lesbian woman from Khayelitsha] can hopefully get government to react. I think it can bring information to a government official who might not have had that information. I think a digital story ... personalises more and I think someone watching it can probably connect with it more, because it's so personal. And it can also be very emotional ... when you ... hear people telling their real stories of what happens ... it can definitely get people to respond.”

– Key informant interview 1

Where people in government are not persuaded of the importance of an issue, the stories, films, images and other products of participatory technology emphasise the powerful and embodied experiences of marginality in a way that is harder to ignore than conventional research outputs. For example, as community safety work has continued, some key government officials (e.g. elected politicians and bureaucrats) at the local, provincial and national levels have become allies of the group from Delft working for accountability. There are limitations to this approach, though; for example, it is more likely to convince a small number of people to engage than to have a wide impact.

### ***Make invisible knowledge visible***

Presenting experiences and knowledge in creative ways through participatory technology can make messages more digestible and accessible to people in government, capturing the attention of politicians in a crowded policy landscape. This is partly because participatory technology is often perceived as innovative and cutting-edge in methodological terms. As a City of Cape Town Economic Development official noted regarding SLF's informal economy research:

“The infographics and spatial representations are good. They reach new audiences and go further than other forms of information. Lots of information on the informal sector is in journal articles, so mapping is very powerful. And representations like your One Rand study – having the information all on one picture – was very powerful.”

– City of Cape Town Economic Development official

People in government often struggle to connect to the experiences of the most marginalised, precisely because these experiences are hidden by the wider system in which they exist. The use of technology and knowledge for accountability is generally more powerful when local people can interpret data as part of the process of engagement with government representatives. Allowing them the scope for their own interpretation – and providing support to enable this – helps to validate the information, and gives it a greater level of credibility in interactions with policy-makers. Presenting compelling and ‘authentic’ experiences can thus increase the credibility of research findings.

### ***Further citizens' capacity***

The use of participatory technology can make important contributions to building the capacity of citizens and community groups. This is a necessary part of the accountability process and this aspect of participatory technology methods is well documented (see Shaw 2016).

The actual process of using participatory technologies to create products builds groups' capacity for civic democratic engagement. In most of the case studies in which a sustained participatory process was used, relationships and social capital within groups were created or strengthened. The participatory

*I'm not a public-speaking person, but this process enabled me to share. I shocked myself to be able to do that. It enabled me. Makes me think I could even stand in front of people and share too, sometime.*

technology process became a 'what if' space, where new possibilities could be imagined and rehearsed – literally in the case of drama and symbolically through images. This process led to shifts in the perceptions of participants about their roles and the relationships between their experiences and wider structural issues. However, the case studies also showed how difficult it can be to build trust between SLF and groups in terms of a shared agenda. In working with the Gugulethu Health Committee, for example, there was a strong distrust of SLF as 'researchers' from the beginning, which frustrated the process and ultimately led to a breakdown in relationships between the group and the facilitators.

### **Connect individual narratives to structural power**

The power to tell their own stories belongs to participants in this research process. But how to connect these stories to deep structural issues, such as those that perpetuate a lack of accountability, is not straightforward. Facilitating analysis and reflection to help participants draw connections between their own stories and experiences, and these wider issues, is important. The difficulties that highly marginalised groups face in articulating their positions, and low levels of understanding of structural issues of accountability, both reflect deeply embedded inequalities of power. To change these power imbalances requires an analysis of the structural dimensions – the capacity to see the power structures and engage with them.

An important aspect of connecting personal stories to structural issues is considering what links different types of knowledge together. The role – and the power – of the intermediary organisation is to position different knowledges (e.g. the implicit knowledge of racism and religious intolerance experienced daily by *bossie doktors*) in relation to wider meta-narratives, such as the historical legacy of apartheid.

For example, in the community safety case study, we positioned the knowledge generated in relation to the debate on monitoring and accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals, and the implementation of the South African *White Paper on Safety and Security*. Although the links between the stories, the research and these policy areas were not

immediately clear, there were strategic reasons to make connections, including opportunities for wider alliances and networks outside South Africa, greater visibility for the groups and issues involved, and increased potential to apply pressure to local government officials through leveraging international agreements in line with national policies. This process was also opened up to the participant group involved, rather than decided by the researchers alone, to enable them to make connections as well. By working with groups to find these narrative / structural connections, their understanding of power and the institutionalisation of power inequalities became clearer.

### **Build hope**

We noticed how the process of working with participatory technologies can renew hope and invigorate local actors and participants. This exchange is taken from a focus group discussion, held in May 2016, with storytellers from the gender-based violence activist group that worked with SLF in 2014, as part of a collaborative project with Sonke Gender Justice<sup>15</sup> and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS):

*SLF staff:* How did the story process impact your lives?

*Storyteller 1:* It's a big question. I can say the process made a big difference with me. It was easier to discuss things because of the story. It was easier to emphasise certain things when I showed the story. It even made a difference within Sonke, it sparked discussion. How can we use the stories, educating other people? I wish we had been able to continue the process.

*Storyteller 2:* It helped me to tell my story. It helped me to learn to use the iPad, and that helped my confidence. I was glad to hear about this meeting. I want there to maybe be some next steps for the process. It did make a difference for me.

*Storyteller 3:* I'm not a public-speaking person, but this process enabled me to share. I shocked myself to be able to do that. It enabled me. Makes me think I could even stand in front of people and share too, sometime.

*SLF staff:* What's it like to see other people's stories?

*Storyteller 3:* Hearing someone's story, you feel what they experienced. You worry about yourself or your

<sup>15</sup> [www.genderjustice.org.za](http://www.genderjustice.org.za)

children experiencing these things, so you feel fear. So how can you strive for safety in life? There is fear and trauma that comes with it.

*Storyteller 2:* I have had a male child since the workshop. I think about what will happen to him. Will thugs be after him for doing something wrong? Will I have to go to court dates? Will I have to identify his body? It makes me think about how to teach my boy to keep away from the violence and the fighting.

*Storyteller 1:* These stories give a bigger picture. It touches into the heart of what is going on. Maybe it can also clean away that painful experience. I'm in the shoes of those telling the story even now. Like it's happening now. It takes you beyond the claim when people say, "I'm fine".

This example shows that participatory technologies like the storytelling process can make some important contributions to accountability. When used in an appropriate context and a politically relevant way, they can bring citizen knowledge into typically closed spaces. This process may take a long time, but the potential is there. Because knowledge is represented through technologies, it can also make it easier for marginalised groups to use that knowledge to get the government's attention on the need for change at the local level.

The process of using participatory technology as part of a process of accountability is, however, inherently risky, unpredictable and highly political. This means that extra attention is needed to identify the combinations of methods and processes most suitable to each case and context. The next section addresses this issue in more detail.

## 6.2 Which combinations of participatory methods and processes are most effective?

Participatory approaches embrace a wide, "pluralistic" range of activities and methods (Chambers 2010). A strength of participatory processes is their bespoke nature: no two are alike. To say a project is rooted in participation or participatory action research provides little information as to what actual activities might be involved. The increasing inclusion of technological tools by practitioners only expands the potential permutations. The combination of technologies that are used unfolds during a project; it is not predetermined, and depends on a variety of interacting factors.

One significant factor is who the key actors are; who will the research facilitators engage with and support over the course of the project? Because of the multiple research strands involved in this project, there was no single answer to this question. Our participants included Rastafarian *bossie doktors*, community safety

volunteers, community care workers, and government representatives. Therefore, how our engagements started, how the work developed and the methods selected were very much dependent on the context and participants; we did not aim to homogenise processes across these groups. We saw our role as researchers as surfacing thematic parallels and seeking coherence across the diversity of the projects, rather than forcing the different groups down identical methodological pathways.

For example, the community safety group launched immediately into a complex collaborative narrative film project. They could do so because the participants had previously worked together with SLF. They had a clear sense of how to work together and what issues they wanted to address first and foremost. Likewise, the Rastafarians could jump into a process of digital storytelling because they had worked together for several years and had a very clear idea of their goals as a group. By contrast, the community care workers, who were working with SLF for the first time, had a less clear idea of how collaborating with us would benefit their agenda. They wrestled with how to frame their work, as there were diverging points of view within the group.

Each of these three groups had varying levels of clarity about how to use participatory processes to move their agendas forward. We did not force the groups to begin at a similar point and move together through a sequence of activities. Rather, we met them 'where they were' and used methods appropriate to their levels of experience and clarity of purpose.

Meeting the core participant group 'where they are' is essential for effective participatory work, and we recognise that there is a spectrum of preparedness among individuals and groups to engage in participatory work. That is not to say that some groups are unprepared, rather that some groups can move more quickly than others based on their social positionality and previous experiences. We explicitly note two levels of skills, experience and positionality that participants bring to a process:

1. The first level is comprised of grass-roots citizen actors. These are often individuals with limited education, little experience in organised research activities, and minimal confidence in speaking publicly and sharing their personal stories.
2. The second level includes professionals, civil society actors and / or governmental actors. While of course still citizens, they hold additional roles within larger professional associations. They often have completed higher education, are knowledgeable about research in their own areas of work, and are comfortable with speaking in meetings and in public to promote and defend their professional agendas.

The *bossie doktors* and community safety volunteers are clear examples of the first category. For them, processes started slowly and moved slowly. Communication was continual and the agenda advanced incrementally so that the next steps were always clear and concrete. Establishing trust was imperative, as was articulating very clear common expectations. Pre-process meetings were necessary with all participants to establish personal relationships, norms and expectations. Initial participatory processes were about supporting participants to find confidence in themselves, to recognise the significance of their own knowledge and experiences, and to help them to discover a voice to articulate this knowledge – most often in the form of a story or a local action within their community.

The health committee and gender-based violence activists represent the second category. For them, this work can be useful but may not be essential. Processes may be truncated and move directly to strategic action rather than working to build basic capacities for citizen engagement.

This typology, while instructive, does not determine how a process will proceed, however. Other factors and issues interact with these initial skills and experiences to influence the speed of the overall process. For our first-level grass-roots participants, we found that their activities were enhanced by previous activities with SLF. Interestingly, these previous engagements were in a traditional research mode, with no or minimal participatory aspects. Nonetheless, the participants found these projects useful for raising the profile of their agendas and concerns, and so viewed SLF as a trustworthy collaborator. These previous engagements had established relationships at an institutional level and had familiarised participants with research in a general way. As such, when these groups were invited to participate in new projects, momentum existed from the previous work.

The shift from conventional to participatory processes was still a notable one for the participants. In the *bossie doktors'* personal storytelling for transformation workshop, there was a distinct change in energy and tone when the group recognised that they did not have to construct a story that focused narrowly on their political agenda of accessing medicinal plants within conservation areas. This agenda, though important, did not always speak to the identity of the participants. When freed to speak about their own values and identities, rather than exclusively of conflicts, different and more diverse stories emerged. Had this been their first encounter with SLF, the *bossie doktors* might have

focused exclusively on their strategic goals. But their understanding of using storytelling as part of a longer sequence of processes allowed them to focus more on themselves, building their capacity to communicate what they found important to achieve their political goals. A similar pattern was found with the Delft community safety participants, who had a history and role in SLF's informal economy research going back to 2011.

Conversely, the knowledge and experiences of the second-level, professional actors did not always mean their processes moved more smoothly or quickly. For both the Gugulethu Health Committee and the conservationists, their ability to work with SLF was constrained for a variety of reasons. Working with SLF offered the first-level groups an opportunity to express their concerns, raise their visibility, and articulate these clearly as a political agenda, but the health committee and conservationists were already part of the power structures of government and had, albeit in a limited way, the ear of government policy-makers. While these groups understood that SLF could help them move forward with issues that concerned them, they had to navigate more complex power relations and weigh the benefits from SLF's assistance against the possibility of being penalised for speaking directly against the government. As such, these actors brought their own nuanced agendas to the processes, often hiding what their motivations were. This made the work extremely challenging for the SLF researchers.

This point highlights the importance of time frames in the learning trajectory of a participatory process. In most research, more time typically facilitates better research. For conventional research, it allows for additional data collection and more robust analysis. In participatory research, additional time can be valuable because of the ongoing relationships between participants and because of the ongoing growth and built capacity of participants. The more time that intermediaries and participants have to work together, the stronger their relationships become and the more the participants come into their own, as co-researchers and as the front-line advocates of their agendas.

The approach should not take a 'one and done' attitude, but instead a 'scaffolded', evolutionary approach.<sup>16</sup> When another opportunity to collaborate presents itself, the new process can take up where the old process ended and support the development of additional skills, because the participants are experienced based on their previous work. With each sequential process, the participants increasingly become the leaders of their project. Researchers may

<sup>16</sup> We say 'scaffolded' in the sense that each participatory research project provides an opportunity for participants to develop a new set of skills. By 'evolutionary', we mean that the skills developed in each sequential process enable the participants to evolve into more independently active citizen advocates, community organisers, participatory researchers and media / communications strategists.



initially support participants in fulfilling their articulated goals, but as the processes and relationships evolve, they take a more secondary role, helping participants to think through implications rather than guiding them through the 'nuts and bolts' of the process.

Sequential, scaffolded processes also enable an increasingly clear articulation of a group or community's agenda. In the personal storytelling process, the initial focus is on the individual participant, enabling them to find a voice and articulate the meaning and challenges they find in their experiences. As processes build on one another, the group turns the corner from speaking in multiple individual voices to speaking with a single collective voice, which can be then be articulated actively through processes like the collaborative narrative films. This collective voice, emerging out of months, even years, of collaboration, is more authentic and balanced than if it had been forced to emerge from a few days of meetings.

The Delft community safety group is a strong example of this. The participants have collaborated with SLF for years as ongoing community researchers for our informal economy research. They were invited to participate in a storytelling process regarding daily forms of violence in townships. A year after completing these stories and showing them in their communities, the group reassembled as part of this project to

develop a film collectively that spoke to the challenges associated with policing in the townships. Participants' familiarity with the process grew: they became clearer and more articulate about their problems and the changes they wished to see. Moreover, while the storytelling and films initially spoke for the participants, by the end of this current research process, they were drafting press releases and speaking with the news media directly about their concerns. This great enhancement in capacity and increased clarity of agenda could not have been achieved in a single research cycle, but occurred because of the scaffolded, evolutionary processes that SLF facilitated over the years. This same group is already positioned for another project with SLF, which will develop their skills even further.

### **6.3 Which criteria should be used to select methods?**

Following on from these conditions, some logical criteria follow for how to decide which methods are most appropriate for a particular group.

#### ***Previous research experience of participants***

As noted, the amount of research experience a group has is a significant factor in determining where a participatory process begins, which methods should

## **Box 5. Reflections on using participatory technologies**

During our research, the concepts of 'translation' and 'co-production' emerged as central to how participatory technologies contribute to accountability.

By 'translation', we refer to the translation between forms of knowledge, and between different perspectives and positions. What may be very relevant and important to a person within the government may be totally irrelevant to someone living on the streets of a township; the reverse is also true. Participatory technologies, and the methods of engagement SLF used, brought these different points of view into the conversation in different ways.

For example, in the informal economy case study and the Rastafarian *bossie doktors* case study, we produced outputs for reinterpretation and invited policy-makers to engage with this content to draw their own conclusions. In other case studies, such as the gender-based violence and community safety work, we combined short, defined recommendations with powerful personal and group stories. The results of these different approaches are still ongoing, but this translation process helps to validate or enable higher levels of credibility of knowledge being translated, in part due to the perceived position of SLF as a research organisation.

We also identified the 'co-production of knowledge', with people from the townships, and with people in positions of power in government, the private sector and civil society. This was central to how researchers and participants contribute to accountability. By 'co-production', we mean a negotiated process of delimiting and articulating forms of information and knowledge, in which there is a shared responsibility for generating knowledge and in deciding how it will be used.

We noted that using technology does not reduce the need for skilled researchers, facilitators and other practitioners. The reverse is often true: considerable skill and expertise is required to translate data into forms that can have an impact (rather than just contribute to the prevailing 'noise'): skills including interpretation, (re)presentation and filtering.

Ultimately, translation involves using our ability to move between and understand this situation, to make different forms of knowledge understandable to different actors in different contexts. Section 7 considers the role of SLF as an intermediary in this context.

be used, and how quickly the process can unfold. Research experience is derived in two ways. One is from participants' own academic and professional training in research. This is typical with profession actors who have some higher education training, and who often carry out data collection and analysis in their professional roles. Research experience can also be gained from participation in community-based research activities carried out by NGOs and other civil society groups like SLF. Where long-term, evolutionary relationships exist between research organisations and community groups, such groups can accumulate significant research experience over time.

### *Is the participant group newly formed? Do they have an identity / experience as a group?*

The outward-facing relationship of the participant group towards the research institution is an important criterion, but so are the internal dynamics of the

group. Pulling together a collection of individuals who do not know each other, even if they live near each other and experience similar issues, is challenging. Our experience suggests that working with groups with an established history and group identity will facilitate the completion of a project. In our research, the Rastafarians and the community safety volunteers were extant groups that had been active in their own community spaces for many years. So, when they began to collaborate with SLF, there was much mutual understanding and trust among them.

While this may be accompanied by entrenched power dynamics within the group, this is often easily addressed. Because the lines of authority are clear, power dynamics can be addressed directly through conversations with the group leaders to encourage space for all participants to grow and build their capacity.

## 7. Organisational reflection on ethics and our role as knowledge mediators

A central concern for SLF in this research process was to critically consider our ethical responsibilities as an intermediary organisation. We consider our role to be in articulating, communicating with, and providing spaces for perspectives and knowledge from people at the local level – who do not usually have access to decision-makers and enforcers of policies – to be heard. As such, we see our role as that of a mediator rather than an intermediary in the conventional sense.

SLF is an actor, with its own interests and agendas, positioned between different groups and interested in prompting shifts in how issues and groups are represented and represent themselves. By mediation, we do not suggest that a 'pure' and virtuous form of local knowledge among local citizens exists, or that our role is to tap into it and become a conduit to take that knowledge to policy-makers. In fact, the relationships between knowledge formation, generation and exchange in our work are complex. In some cases, we are co-producing knowledge with the people we work with through a process involving various technologies. In other cases, we direct a knowledge-generation process through mixed and layered research methods, to represent issues and groups differently from dominant policy framings. In other cases, we may use a combination of both these forms of mediation.

One role of SLF is in interpreting, or creating the space for others to interpret, multiple forms of knowledge refracted through technologies: maps, stories, images, infographics, transcripts. Our role is also to mediate

the interactions, relationships and data-gathering processes and negotiations / conflicts with people at the local level and within government. Thus, the role of the mediator poses both ethical and epistemological questions. The mediators' role is a powerful one: on what basis do we have legitimacy in deciding what is important and what is not regarding the concerns of more democratic and equitable governance? We make many micro-decisions that inform the inclusions / exclusions of what knowledge and which perspectives are represented. Between 'hard' data and 'interpretative' data, there is a large range, and at the heart of this is the question of how SLF and other intermediaries make sense of complex realities, either on behalf of or with others.

This question is relevant not just to SLF but to any kind of intermediary or power-holder in the accountability process. SLF, and others operating with similar approaches, face a challenge in how to ethically mediate both aspects of this process – the generation of knowledge, and engagement with those outside the generation process – especially in a context of vested interests in maintaining power within parts of government.

Beyond delving into these ethical considerations, this research enabled a space for facilitated reflective practice and reflexive organisational analysis. We were interested to analyse our ways of working: to improve our practices from a functional perspective, not only from an ethical perspective. Drawing from the analysis generated through

a series of critical, self-reflective workshops, we have distilled several important lessons for SLF:

- Ours is consistently a ‘dirty boots’ approach, meaning we are in the community, engaged with the everyday realities of people in the townships.
- Our deepest impacts on participants are created through sequential research activities which progressively build capacity for citizen engagement in a variety of forms and at different levels.
- There are difficult tensions in operating in both a conventional research mode and a participatory manner for certain projects.
- Our value for partners is often strategic, providing community partners with tools and contacts to disseminate research findings with maximised impact to media, as well as local and national government actors.

## 8. Conclusions and lessons to inform practice

The key conclusions emerging from this research reframe accountability and responsiveness, not as only macro/systems issues, but as micro/relational issues which need to be understood in terms of their structural links. Specifically, we argue:

- accountability must become participatory and relational
- responsiveness must happen through government engagement with people’s everyday lives
- accountability requires giving attention to developing the most marginalised peoples’ ability to articulate experiences and positions
- everyday experiences can recast accountability issues, and are a necessary element to meaningful dialogue with those in political power

Having considered our multiple case studies – the four discussed here and others – through both individual and cross-case analysis, we argue for accountability and government responsiveness to be reconceptualised and expanded. Citizens and the state are not a discontinuous binary composed of rigid hierarchies of spaces, roles and interactions, wherein intermediaries are needed to bridge the gap. Rather, citizens and the state exist in the same spaces, where interactions between them are nuanced, fluid and capillary.

There is not just a ‘macro’ state of institutions and elected officials. The state exists in small, everyday forms in people’s lives: as the police, as government-funded community care workers, as political youth leagues, as access to spaces, as freedoms and boundaries. This research shows how the state is perpetuated through relational dynamics and micro interactions. As such, citizens actively engage with the state in numerous ways, both informal and formal, on a daily, even hourly, basis. This point is articulated most powerfully by people living with marginalisation, such as this extract from a focus group discussion held on

May 4, 2016, with community activists against gender-based violence:

*SLF researcher:* We are asking how government can be made more accountable on safety.

*Storyteller 1:* I don’t think there is a way. There is too much corruption. It’s a corrupt community. People sign things and say they will do things, but then it doesn’t happen.

*SLF researcher:* There is no one?

*Storyteller 3:* There are people who are doing things, in churches, etc., but not in a wider, coordinated way.

*Storyteller 2:* Those people who are in the structure already, they can’t do anything differently.

*Storyteller 3:* There are things that make a difference. But there is corruption everywhere. You can create community plans or memorandums. Independent activists, social justice leagues. I take what I know and try to manoeuvre things. There is a policeman who resides next to me. And on the other side a pastor. Two of them. I make use of them. They are influential. They can talk to people. And they have ideas too, that I may not have thought of. Through [my story], I am exposing them to a vision of what is possible. They haven’t been exposed to these things. I try to reach out to others about what is important. We try to intervene when people want to use violence as a way of dealing with issues, as a way of dealing with problems.

What is missing is a lens to notice and analyse these micro interactions as forms of citizen–state engagement and to leverage these intentionally as mechanisms for increasing accountability. Drawing upon the findings of this research, we argue for accountability and responsiveness to open up and include these small, everyday, relational interactions between citizens and the state, that take place in many forms, and with many roles, spaces and actors.

## 8.1 Making accountability participatory

Based on our research, we argue for extending the concept of accountability to include a focus on participatory accountability (see Box 6). This incorporates social accountability processes, but goes beyond these to include the more everyday forms of accountability embedded in the relationships, dynamics and interactions that inform the ways that marginalised groups are seen and treated by those in power, especially those in government.

The concept of participatory accountability begins with the process of bringing people together to combat a profound sense of isolation and marginalisation, and to build recognition, belief in one's self and power at a personal level, alongside a sense of dignity and rights. Giving attention to this personal dimension is the

starting point for building the foundations for collective action towards accountability.

In South Africa, with its deep and multiple forms of exclusion, approaches to accountability cannot assume that marginalised individuals have a sense of citizenship or rights. Further, the ability to analyse one's situation to understand the wider issues at work is crucial, but often missing in approaches to accountability in South Africa. In an influential speech made at Ahmed Kathrada's<sup>17</sup> memorial service in Cape Town, days after being removed by President Zuma as finance minister, Pravin Gordhan set out how accountability and democracy need to be built. He argued that "people need to understand the environment they find themselves in to be agents of change" (personal documentation 2017). An underlying sense not just of an awareness of rights, but also recognition of the validity and importance of one's experiences and positionality in relation to pressing social issues, is fundamental to building accountability.

Within the concept of participation, we include how people change their world views, or how they shift long-standing ideological positions. In terms of the engagement that we have pursued, this kind of shift is often part of what can lead to other, more practical changes in policies and actions within government. We are concerned with how people within government engage with us and with people in the townships, as much as we are concerned with how people from the townships can articulate their views. Within this process, many different intermediaries intervene. As a research organisation focused on the community level, we are most often able to spend time working with people living in townships to develop the quality of their participation and engagement. But it is more difficult (though no less important) to do the same with government representatives.

The findings of this research further challenge the assumption of a 'verticalisation' of citizen relationships, between state authority and citizen engagement. Our research also suggests that there is no easy binary relationship between citizens and the state. Instead, in the South African context, there are often overlapping and parallel positions of power at the local level, involving local (and non-formal, non-state) rules, which surpass or take precedence over the formal state.

For example, with the issue of violence in urban areas, there are constitutionally mandated citizen oversight committees (known as community policing forums) which are responsible for ensuring accountability at the local level on the issue of safety. At the same time, ward councillors, who are elected at the local level, may have different agendas from the community policing forums. The decision-making structures of the police force also

### Box 6. What defines participatory accountability?

Participatory accountability involves:

- small daily interactions with government
- everyday relationships with government actors at local and neighbourhood levels
- the experiential knowledge of how government authority asserts itself on marginal groups, including how groups and issues are perceived and portrayed by government
- citizen-led assertion of power and rights
- citizen mobilisation to engage directly with government
- active citizen engagement to claim rights, in part by defining accountability issues for themselves.

Technologies can support participatory accountability by:

- making visible the knowledge of marginal groups
- illuminating small interactions / relations with government through storytelling and / or spatial visualisation
- providing a platform to share concerns and solutions
- mediating between different forms of knowledge and experience.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmed Mohamed Kathrada was a South African politician, political prisoner and anti-apartheid activist.

operate largely in parallel to both. Political forces at the local level, such as the ANC Youth League, operate within a corporatist model based on the exchange of favours and access to state resources in exchange for the guarantee of popular support (Piper and Wheeler 2016). Our research demonstrates how these different groups, all of which have political power at a local level, may coalesce around particular interests and agendas. These loose and shifting alliances and enmities play out in nuanced but powerful ways, distorting official institutional arrangements and anticipated relationships of accountability (Wheeler 2014).

In contrast to a common assumption in the social accountability literature, there is not necessarily a large distance between people living with extreme marginalisation and the state. On the contrary, our research found that in many cases the groups and individuals involved have had several interactions with government, in what could be considered formal accountability processes. Particularly at the local level, the key players within government (both elected and bureaucrats) are well known. However, there are major obstacles that prevent groups from effectively addressing the fundamental accountability issues, despite their engagement with the state. This holds true for the health committee, the community care workers, the Rastafarian *bossie doktors*, informal trader organisations and the neighbourhood watch / community safety activists.

A second category of groups and individuals are those with little or no direct experience with government, who also seem to have less awareness of how their situations relate to wider issues and accountability problems. One of the main contributions of SLF's participatory and technology-based approach to research has been to change this sense of awareness among people from the margins. Shifts in how people living with multiple forms of marginalisation see themselves lead to possibilities for working towards accountability.

## 8.2 Building government responsiveness through engagement with everyday life

Government responsiveness in the context of this research includes responses from politicians and technocrats within all levels of government in relation to, and as a reaction to, grass-roots knowledge represented through a grounded and engaged research process. This research process is only a (small) part of what the groups involved are doing to address accountability and engage the government. Research of this nature, then, must be analysed as a contributing

factor to the overall trajectory of the group and the issue at hand.

Government responsiveness can be enhanced or deterred through the actions of civil society organisations and other non-government entities, including corporations. Currently, in national politics, the realities of 'state capture' through backroom deals with a wealthy family, the Guptas,<sup>18</sup> have become apparent. Supporters of President Zuma's faction of the ANC attempted to suppress an independent report on the extent of this state capture, which shows that the Guptas' influence extends into many aspects of the state, including energy, media and social grants.

Despite the pervasiveness of state capture and corruption, our research has shown how people working within distinct levels of government respond differently to varied forms of communication. There are also variations in responsiveness between local and national government, and between technocrats and politicians. Our research considers responsiveness as an issue of what influences people's lives on a daily basis, as well as how overarching political, economic and social institutions change (and how the two are linked).

We have found that it is crucial to recognise the need for an incremental approach to government responsiveness. We understand participatory accountability as a process that, over time, results in people in key positions at all levels seeing situations differently due to their exposure to new knowledge from citizens, and recognising the potential of approaches and solutions proposed by citizens themselves. SLF's approach to engagement does not simply target the top levels of government in the hope that it will lead to a 'trickle down' of responsiveness and accountability. Rather, our approach is to stimulate a process which will change the perspectives and relationships of government representatives in daily interaction with citizens, through city departments and other arms of local and provincial government. Our approach is therefore trying to change the micro-dynamics of local responsiveness and citizen-government relationships, while simultaneously using participatory technology to access spaces with high-level policy-makers, which are often closed to marginalised groups.

There is significant fluidity and insecurity, if not confusion and contradiction, in government policy and practice over time. Yet government and NGOs often operate on the assumption of a teleological and evolutionist development from 'primitive' to 'advanced', simple to complex, poor to rich, bad to good, etc. Our research shows examples of how marginalised groups and individuals can intervene in this messy

<sup>18</sup> The Guptas are an Indian-born family who many accuse of having influence over key government officials, including President Zuma. See: [www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22513410](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22513410)

and unpredictable reality, that is not necessarily on a progression towards 'enlightened' governance. Instead, it is a process of translation between complex realities.

### ***Key learnings for practice***

If, as we have argued here, state accountability is heightened by translation across realities and forms of knowledge, then SLF finds several lessons which can potentially inform and contribute to the work of other intermediaries, especially those positioning themselves as knowledge mediators:

- The state does not exist apart from communities, but is present and woven throughout the everyday experience of marginalised people.
- Accountability is relational as well as structural: the state exists and administers power through known individuals present in people's everyday lives.
- Participatory accountability is founded on improved understanding, communication and engagement with government actors at the local level, rather than at executive levels of government.

- The capacity of marginalised citizens to engage directly in claiming rights increases through successive engagements with intermediaries, particularly when such engagements are intentionally 'scaffolded' to build new capacities at each iteration.
- In processes to heighten government accountability, the use of technology is neither inherently positive or negative; the impact is a matter of amplification, rather than change in quality.
- Technology provides diverse media through which citizen knowledge can be distilled, curated and disseminated so that it can become more visible, accessible and catalytic to government actors.

Although technologies can play a supporting role, knowledge mediation requires substantive relationships and accumulated social capital at multiples levels, in the community and with government actors.

## Annexes

# Annex 1. Summary of cases, methods and analytical approaches used

**Table A1.** Methods used, data generated and analytical approach used in the case studies

Case study	Proposed methods	Data generated	Analytical approach
Retrospective cases: informal traders and the informal economy; activists against gender-based violence and for community safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literature review</li> <li>Key informant interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Literature review report</li> <li>Interview transcripts</li> </ul>	Case-based analysis using triangulation between data sources; cross-cutting analysis informs the design and approach of action research.
Action research case 1: community care workers and health committee members working for public health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus groups</li> <li>Digital storytelling</li> <li>Collaborative video</li> <li>Key informant interviews</li> <li>Engagement events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transcripts</li> <li>Stories</li> <li>Films</li> </ul>	Collective visual analysis by participants; qualitative case-based analysis using triangulation; comparison with other cases.
Action research case 2: traditional medicine, Rastafarian <i>bossie doktors</i> and indigenous rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital storytelling</li> <li>Key informant interviews</li> <li>Engagement events</li> <li>Participant observation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stories</li> <li>Transcripts</li> </ul>	Qualitative case-based analysis using triangulation; comparison with other cases.
Action research case 3: informal traders and the informal economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participatory geo-spatial mapping</li> <li>Infographic tools</li> <li>Key informant interviews</li> <li>Engagement events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maps</li> <li>Transcripts</li> <li>Documented observations</li> </ul>	Qualitative analysis of key informant interviews and observations.
Cross-cutting learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collective analysis and peer review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transcripts</li> </ul>	Text-based analysis

# Annex 2. Case study: using technology-enabled research processes to influence accountability in the South African health system

## A2.1 Introduction

“We clock in and out under a tree, whether it rains or is hot ... we are like goats or dogs,” says Nozuko Fos, a community care worker in Nyanga, a township in Cape Town. “They are playing games with us,” she adds, referring to the Department of Health. Community care workers provide a vital service to South African communities, delivering door-to-door primary health care. But they are systematically underpaid and receive inadequate support from the Department of Health, which funds them, and the NGOs that they work for directly.

National policy in South Africa states that all government clinics are required to work in partnership with the health committees that mediate between communities and clinics, and oversee clinic boards (Department of Health 2004). But changes to this policy over the past ten years have forced health committee members to rely on their personal funds to sustain their activities. In many cases, this has led to the committees disbanding. According to Masindi, a member of the Gugulethu Health Committee, a township in Cape Town: “In South Africa, there are many problems. To get to [president] Zuma you must go through a ladder of 15 people. This government is munch-munching people’s money.”

We initiated this health case study in October 2016, as part of our wider Making All Voices Count research. We focused on the health system in South Africa and examined accountability mechanisms through two distinct research processes, both of which followed a participatory visual methods approach:

- a combination of photography and collective filmmaking with a group of community care workers from Nyanga
- personal storytelling for transformation with the Gugulethu Health Committee.

Investigating health participation through these two cases gave us a deeper understanding of different strategies of accountability in the South African health system, and where channels to accountability are congested or blocked. In this annex, we: summarise health policy in South Africa; describe the two health case studies; reflect on the roles of intermediaries,

accountability and technologies in the health system; and discuss the key findings from our work.

## A2.2 Health policy and governance in South Africa

### *National policy*

The 2003 National Health Act makes provisions for national health, provincial health, and district health systems (Department of Health 2004). The national Department of Health is responsible for coordinating health services at the national and provincial levels, and providing additional health services as necessary, to establish a comprehensive national health system (Department of Health 2011). The National Health Act also established a national consultative health forum, intended to promote and facilitate interaction, communication and the sharing of information on national health issues between representatives of the Department of Health, national organisations identified by the Minister for Health, and provincial consultative bodies.

Provincial health services are responsible for implementing national health policy within each province. They are also tasked with providing specialised hospital services, facilitating and promoting the provision of comprehensive primary health services and community hospital services. Additional responsibilities lie in planning the development of public and private hospitals, other health establishments and health agencies.

There are also district health systems, whose boundaries coincide with district and metropolitan municipalities. District health councils consist of a member of the municipal or district council, a person representing the executive council, and a member of each local municipality in the health district (Dennill and Rendall-Mkosi 2012).

### *Provincial policy*

First published in 2011 and updated in 2013, the *Western Cape Provincial Government Policy on the Funding of Non-Governmental Organizations for the Rendering of Social Welfare Services* followed the National Department of Social Development’s *Policy on Financial Awards to Service Providers*, published 2004.



These guide health policy in the Western Cape Province, where our health case study was situated.

According to the Western Cape Government, “social decay and the subsequent demand for social welfare services have increased to the point where they outstrip supply” (Department of Social Development 2011). To fill the gap, services should be rendered by the Department of Health’s partners. The 2011/2013 policy thus enabled the formation of partnerships with the Department of Social Development and the NGO sector. These partners are seen as essential, because the social welfare needs are so “immense and diverse that government alone cannot adequately address the challenges faced by vulnerable families daily” (Ibid.).

Through these partnerships, which operate via transfer payment agreements, the Department of Social Development provides public funds for NGOs to identify and manage appropriately qualified people to render social welfare and community development services across the province. There are numerous large NGOs, operating in both urban and rural areas, that offer primary health care through the door-to-door services provided by community care workers. The South African national health system has relied heavily on NGOs for decades.

NGO partners are currently involved in many areas of service delivery, such as services for the elderly, youth, HIV/AIDS patients and poverty-stricken communities. However, the processes that enable these partnerships – including the procedures for NGO funding – are largely unregulated, which brings about several serious accountability issues. In addition, the 2011/2013 policy makes no requirement for the Department of Social Development to monitor, evaluate or oversee the working conditions provided by the partner NGOs for those they ‘employ’ through these partnerships. Although it indicates that the South African Council for Social Service Professions developed a *Draft Code of Good Practice and Responsibilities of Employers of Social Service Practitioners* in 2012, this document is not publicly available, and nor are any similar documents.

## A2.3 The two health case studies: participants and methodology

### A2.3.1 Community care workers

Community care workers provide a range of services. Among their responsibilities within the national health system, they “assist in the development and implementation of nationwide home-based and community-based care programmes” (Western Cape

Government 2011). Tasks include supplying regular statistics about rates of disease, treatment adherence, cure, drug resistance, morbidity and mortality, besides offering primary care such as dressing wounds, bathing patients and supervising treatment adherence.

The line management, working conditions and payment schedules of community care workers are determined by the NGOs they work for, as outlined in the 2009 *Community Care Worker Management Policy Framework*. But among the partnership formation and funding processes described earlier, there is no specific Department of Health policy that covers for the scope of these agreements, which gives rise to significant accountability loopholes. Foremost among these is the status of community care workers within the national health system in relation to the responsibilities they hold.

Because government ‘responsibility’ falls between the Department of Social Development and the Department of Health, there is much ambiguity around the formal position of community care workers as social servants (Fakier 2014). They are cast by these NGOs as ‘volunteers’ rather than ‘employees’ and they work for a nominal stipend. The provision of these stipends is considered by the state as a ‘livelihood strategy’ rather than a wage. The stipend value is defined by Department of Health policy, and differs from province to province – but falls below the nationally decreed minimum wage in all nine provinces of South Africa. Community care workers are usually women who have limited alternative employment opportunities. Many rely on these payments as a solitary source of income, and they are often the only earners in single-parent families.

The vagueness surrounding community care workers’ employment relationship with the state has led to poor coordination, regulation and management. Neither of the two government departments, nor the NGO contractors, have any real obligation to define the roles, responsibilities and rights of community care workers more explicitly. As such, they are left with little recourse to legal action and continue to be marginalised within the health system. And with no pension schemes or retirement plans, they are left with nothing when they retire, despite often providing many years of dedicated community service (Schneider and Lehmann 2010).

When we met the community care workers for this case study, the all-female group were organising themselves to protest against their working conditions and were actively trying to engage their NGO employer, the South African Christian Leadership Association (SACLA),<sup>19</sup> and representatives from the provincial Department of

<sup>19</sup> SACLA was established in 1980. It was co-founded by Dr Ivan Tomms, who went on to become the Head of Health for the City of Cape Town. SACLA’s aim is to provide primary health care to poor and under-served squatter communities by involving individuals and communities in their own health care. The first community health worker project was developed in Cape Town to empower the community and to demystify health. It was one of the earliest projects of its kind to be set up in a peri-urban slum setting in South Africa.

Health about these issues. However, they were unsure where to focus their efforts; they felt trapped in the intersection between government structures and the NGO. They also described how they were acting in fear: “We have our group meetings at night because we are afraid of being seen by our bosses or other care workers who might report us.”

During our engagement with the community care workers, SACLA was under government scrutiny due to escalating reports of mismanagement and growing unrest among the community care workers who volunteered for it. In December 2016, the SACLA headquarters in New Crossroads, Cape Town, was heavily vandalised and could no longer be used.

In our case study, the 11 community care workers (ten from SACLA and one from St John’s) engaged in a collective filmmaking process, which involved personal storytelling and photography. As the first step, we asked each community care worker to recall a time when they had tried to get the NGO they worked for, or the government, to help them with a problem, and what happened. Over five days, they shared recent challenges that they had faced in their daily work. These personal reflections were then refined through iterative story circles and group work. The 11 stories that emerged were all different, but each told of an important and painful experience.

Collective analysis of the stories revealed that their experiences were couched in wider themes of corruption, perseverance, challenging working environments, a lack of safety and security, hardship, unsupportive employers, and an absence of rights. From these, the participants identified four main themes: corruption; workers’ rights; safety and security; and working conditions. These were taken forward in the collective filmmaking process. The participants organised themselves into three small groups to develop films (safety and security and working conditions were brought together to frame one film).

Photography training was integrated into the development of the individual stories and wider themes. Each filmmaking group took a camera into their communities, where they took pictures to illustrate the personal stories that resonated most closely with their theme. Finally, the photographs and story narratives were brought together to create three short films (see Box A1).

When we started working with the community care workers, they were looking for opportunities to directly challenge their NGO contractors and senior representatives in the Department of Health. However, when the time came for them to plan a policy engagement with support from SLF, they agreed that the next step – before head-on interactions with

## Box A1. Three films from the health case study

### **Workers’ rights: ‘Use your rights, lose your job’**

Lumka fractured her left arm while moving a broken table as she prepared for work in a clinic. The film explains how she went for X-rays, sat an exam, and was then given time off work to recover from her injuries. At the end of her approved sick leave, she was still experiencing significant discomfort and considered herself unfit to do her job. However, she was afraid of approaching her employers, believing that she may be fired if she asked for more time off. Lumka stayed at home in a state of anxiety until her colleagues visited her and persuaded her to go back to work.

### **Corruption: ‘We are proud, but we are tired’**

The issue of corruption was shown through the experience of a community care worker who had been approached by the University of the Western Cape with an offer of employment on a medical research study. Nadia was overjoyed; she had done similar work for the university before and found the experience valuable and enjoyable. The offer came with a salary that was considerably higher than her stipend. Nadia’s story explains how her clinic manager, through whom the university reached her, refused to let her take up the opportunity, ripping up the offer in front of her and then offering the position to somebody else.

### **Safety and security / working conditions: ‘The everyday life of community care workers’**

A lack of safety and security, and poor working conditions were described in one film through the experiences of three care workers. The first story describes Nozuko’s terror when she was mugged at knife point and had her cell phone stolen on the street during a morning visit to a patient’s home. We hear how distraught Nozuko was when she reported the incident to her manager, only to be told: “These things happen, use another road and get back to work.”

This is linked to a second story that provides an example of the distressing situations often faced by community care workers in patients’ homes, often without any support or appreciation from family members who are present during the home visits. The third story describes the eviction of a community care worker from her shack as she arrives home from work one evening. She tries to explain to her landlord that she has not been paid, but he is unsympathetic and puts her out on the street – even though she has nowhere else to go.

.government – should be a stakeholder mobilisation event. They decided to hold a gathering in a community hall in New Crossroads that would focus on building support from their colleagues at SACLA, other local NGOs providing health services, their union, and local government representatives such as the ward councillor and area committees. Their event, held on April 4, 2017, was attended by 38 invited guests from 17 organisations.<sup>20</sup> Although invitations were sent to several senior government officials and SACLA management, none of them attended.

### A2.3.2 The Gugulethu Health Committee

Health committees are community-based, constitutionally mandated bodies in South Africa. Most health committees have come into existence since the 2003 National Health Act. Committee members are nominated and elected by their communities to oversee health-care services in a particular area. This involves mediation between the community, clinic facility managers and other structures within the Department of Health. As such, each committee should function as the voice of the community, reviewing norms and standards of government clinic services and holding government-appointed health managers to account when service delivery falls short. However, they are reported to be failing at the national level (Padarath and Friedman 2008).

The 2003 National Health Act stated that health committees should be supported financially by the Department of Health, with funds distributed via sub-district government structures (Department of Health 2004). This funding was gradually reduced due to reported financial mismanagement by an increasing number of health committees (Haricharan 2012), and in 2011, all health committee funding by the state was withdrawn (Kiewiets 2016). Despite this, health committees continue to be part of the South African constitution. Committee members, regardless of their financial status, were forced to bear the costs of running committees while receiving no compensation.

The 2003 National Health Act also states that the primary health-care facility or facilities for which a health committee is established must provide a venue for the committee and, as far as possible, secretarial, administrative and financial accounting support as required (Department of Health 2004). However, as most primary health-care facilities have very limited resources, there is little scope for them to provide any type of support.

In July 2016, the Western Cape Government released the Western Cape Health Facility Boards and

Committees Act, which updated policy objectives for the establishment, functioning and procedures of committees for primary health-care facilities (Western Cape Government 2016). It reiterated that the provincial health minister must establish a committee for every primary health-care facility. Committees' tasks under this new Act include: providing the facility with feedback; facilitating interactions between management and the community; conducting surveys; disseminating information; and advising the provincial minister.

The Act also states that procedures for health committee meetings should be outlined by the committee itself, and that these meetings should be open to the public. However, it makes no provision for the financial support of health committees. Within this policy context, our case study provided an opportunity for SLF to explore how health committees function in their role as elected citizens participating in the accountability of the South African health system.

During our initial inquiries early in 2016, we received vague information from the Head of Health for the City of Cape Town that "health committees are in transition". An established public health researcher at the University of Cape Town told us that "health committees are just figureheads, they have no real power to do anything, and they don't include community care workers". We were eventually informed that several health committees are still operating in the city, and were introduced to a representative of the Gugulethu Health Committee. This was the committee that we went on to work with.

The Gugulethu Health Committee consists of 11 members, including a chairman, secretary and vice-secretary. During our early meetings, the committee explained that they have regular engagements with senior officials at the Department of Health. These include interactions with the provincial health minister Nomafrench Mbombo, either in Gugulethu or other locations, including Johannesburg. They also told us that they had often taken opportunities to express their dissatisfaction with their status and resources as long-standing health committee members.

The Gugulethu Health Committee took part in a personal storytelling for transformation process, in which they were asked to tell a story about a time, within the past five years, when they had felt able or unable to change a problem in their community, and what happened. Their individual narratives described intimate experiences of navigating the health-care system as a patient or a health-care worker, and the challenges and motivations for activism and community development; only one of the participants chose to

<sup>20</sup> Gugulethu Area Committee, In The Public Interest, Early Childhood Development, Baptist Church, University of Cape Town, Youth Centre, ANC Youth League, Endlovini Community Hall, SANCO, People's Health Movement, SACLA, St John's, Etafeni, TB HIV Care, Treatment Action Campaign, NUCWOSA, The Wellness Foundation.

tell a story that related directly to her work as a health committee member.

All of the stories conveyed deep personal reflections, including experiences of a son's suicide, HIV stigmatisation, the effects of drugs on family life, and the brutal murder of a sibling during apartheid. These stories revealed profound challenges and underlined their strength and resilience as community representatives and leaders. Their stories developed over five consecutive days, and were illustrated and digitised using tablet computers.

When the process was complete, the project moved into a phase of policy engagement planning. One idea was a policy engagement event, to bring recognition to the Gugulethu Health Committee as community members, and to foster support for their role as community representatives. In the end, however, the research process did not include such an event, or the sharing of their digital stories on any level that we are aware of. Within the time frame of this project, the participants could not come to an agreement regarding what kind of platform they wanted or needed to gain better recognition and responsiveness from the Department of Health.

## **A2.4 The roles of intermediaries, accountability and technologies in the health system**

### ***Intermediaries in participatory research for accountability***

This case study gave us ample opportunity to reflect on the role of intermediaries, such as NGOs, in accountability processes. It became clear that SLF did not function simply as a static channel through which citizens could voice their concerns to government, as many interpretations of participatory research processes hold. Rather, SLF actively mediated the messages and approaches that were chosen by the groups, by offering our experience and expertise as facilitators.

Yet while many key decisions were left to the participants, the options that were presented to them were influenced by the resources and goals of SLF. As part of a wider programme of research, SLF is answerable to third parties and is required to realise certain outputs. These pressures inspire a series of big and small choices that shape the group processes, such as a facilitator's availability or where to hold meetings with the groups. Our interactions with the Gugulethu Health Committee also demonstrated how veteran activists can have strong concerns and hesitations about their involvement in accountability research processes, especially when previous encounters with academic researchers have been disappointing. In this way, they in turn influence the decisions made.

Methodological decisions are often made based on external factors, and these decisions can influence the research process. For example, because the community care workers had to attend to their community duties during the mornings, they could only work with us in the afternoons. This limited our time with them significantly, but inspired a new, collective filmmaking methodology that combined personal storytelling and photography. Several decisions like these, made by the facilitation team at key points, inevitably impacted on the group process. This demonstrates that in participatory processes, the intermediary organisation is not merely a facilitator, but an active participant in its own right, and a powerful one at that. Although researcher intervention may be unavoidable at some moments, it inevitably shapes outputs and outcomes by setting the parameters of intermediary support.

In many participatory research endeavours, the position of a project on the spectrum of participation depends largely on the availability of key resources, and these in turn are heavily influenced by the amount of external funding. For example, in this case study, budgetary constraints restricted us to working with certain types of equipment, which led to rushed decision-making and meant less room for prolonged participatory engagement. In addition, external funding comes with particular goals and targets that frame the research process, to some extent, from the start.

The personal characteristics of the facilitators are another significant factor in a context as charged with identity politics as South Africa. The fact that the facilitators were predominantly white led to tensions with the Gugulethu Health Committee on some occasions, where members alluded throughout the process to a fundamental lack of understanding from the facilitation team for "our people" (i.e. black South Africans), and in one incident referred to apartheid. Given the persistent inequality in post-apartheid South Africa, along not only class but also racial lines, and the recently increased tensions around race in service delivery and free education protest movements, it is not surprising that the lack of diversity in the facilitation team was pointed out. Furthermore, their previous experiences with white foreign NGO workers made them hesitant to engage in a process for which they questioned the outcomes. As one group member said: "We are not interested in your fancy reports. We want to know what you are going to do to help us."

The group of community care workers seemed less concerned by these factors. This may be due to their younger age (they were mostly around 30, with a few older women), but also to the fact that many of them did not identify as activists to the same degree as the Gugulethu Health Committee – most of whom had a long history of activism, going back to the anti-apartheid struggle, which informed their understanding of current development work.

The experience that we have gained as intermediaries highlights that civil society cannot be conceptualised as a monolith, or as an intermediary without internal politics (Roy 2008; Millstein, Oldfield and Stokke 2003). While many conceptualisations of accountability see civil society as a singular entity with singular objectives, our research shows that civil society is not simply an intermediary between citizens and government, but rather a mediator. Through the methodologies that are employed, relationships between NGOs and interactions between research participants and facilitators, the accountability process is actively shaped and reoriented.

### ***Accountability on the ground***

Many conceptualisations of accountability work on the premise that marginalised or disempowered citizens experience a lack of voice or are not 'heard'. Our research indicates that there are many other factors at play that result in a lack of government responsiveness. In particular, our experience of working with the community care workers and the Gugulethu Health Committee challenged the idea of 'voiceless' people. The community care workers had very clear messages regarding a number of issues, and they were in regular contact with several government officials. The GHC committee had a close but strained relationship with the clinic management, who are Department of Health employees. They also had many contacts in different layers of government, up to the provincial minister of health, who they met on a regular basis.

But although they had access to government, this was erratic and, more importantly, rarely led to any tangible changes. The agendas of the government officials with whom they interacted did not line up with those of the citizens who the activist groups were representing. An example of this is clinic staff who are, by law, required to support health committees. In some cases, clinic facility managers actively withheld non-monetary support for the Gugulethu Health Committee, for example refusing them use of the clinic's phones or meeting rooms. Both the Gugulethu Health Committee and the community care workers expressed regular frustrations about being sent 'from pillar to post' when interacting with government structures. And because there was no clear channel through which to express these frustrations with the Department of Health, they often chose to exercise non-linear avenues of power, such as engaging local community members and other groups experiencing similar difficulties.

Attempts to hold government to account that are 'up close and personal' come with the risk of being identified and targeted, and this can hinder groups like those we worked with from participating in accountability processes. After much deliberation, one of the community care workers only decided at the last minute that the film based on her personal story

should be shown at the New Crossroads stakeholder engagement event. She was the narrator and was afraid of what her employer might do if she spoke out about the lack of support she received when injured at work. The film 'Use your rights, lose your job' was shown at the event, and provoked emotional and supportive responses from several audience members, but the narrator was not there to witness this reaction. Although the audience were clearly familiar with the scenarios addressed by all the films, the visual engagement presented their struggle in a new light and moved those watching to publicly speak out about the urgent need for further action.

### ***Working with technologies***

The role of technologies in participatory accountability processes was a major focus of our research, and indeed of the whole Making All Voices Count programme. The use of digital technology played a large role in the health case study. Our work with the community care workers demonstrated that combining audio recording, digital photography and video can foster citizen engagement by reviewing and presenting familiar issues in new ways. The collective processes of storytelling, photography, sharpening and recording story narratives, and finalising the films, also helped to build a group mentality in which the women willingly came together around shared concerns.

The technologies used in both case studies needed to be used carefully to articulate the issues being faced by the participants. To convey well-defined messages in digital stories or short films, group members had to consider the issues they were grappling with in new ways. The methodological approaches used required them to identify the key themes of their activism, and gain new perspectives about how these are related and how they could or should be addressed. In this way, a technology-enabled approach fostered a deeper understanding of the structural nature of accountability issues, especially among the community care workers. This is therefore a very effective way to communicate such issues to an audience of those directly affected by the same issues, and others.

## **A2.5 Conclusions**

The Western Cape Provincial Government of South Africa has policies in place that enable NGOs to contract community care workers for the provision of door-to-door public health services across the province. But wide gaps in these policies leave community care workers oscillating between the NGOs that they work for and the Department of Health in their attempts to call for accountability around their working conditions. Good employment practice guidelines, which should provide an accountability mechanism for all social service providers, have been promised but have never materialised.

At the same time, constitutionally mandated health committees, nominated to act on behalf of their communities in monitoring government clinic health services, are floundering. Their inability to function as prescribed by current policy is, in large part, due to the complete absence of governmental resources to support the many duties they are expected to perform. The 'training' approach that the government takes to building health committee capacity is misguided; it does not provide adequate guidelines for implementing committee systems or foster a sense of teamwork.

Although there are frequent opportunities for community care workers and health committee members to meet with government representatives, the issues they raise are essentially ignored. There is no consequence for government inaction, which brings about a futile state of impunity and a sense of desperation among those who try to engage. In the case of the Gugulethu Health Committee, the anger and resentment that the members feel towards the government has turned inward and become damaging and destructive for the committee itself.

The health case study has reinforced previous claims that the path to accountability is far from linear

(Kosack and Fung 2014). For example, in their role as facilitators of participatory accountability processes, intermediaries like SLF become unavoidably entwined in complex civil society networks. Reflexivity in the face of internal group politics or external organisational dynamics results in intermediaries becoming unintentional participants in the accountability process.

The personal, digital stories and collective films produced by the Gugulethu Health Committee and the community care workers were not seen by government representatives within the time frame of their engagement with SLF. Thus, we cannot draw conclusions about the ability of these technology-enabled outputs to improve government responsiveness. However, especially in the case of the community care workers, the participatory methods that they engaged with, and the production of their visual outputs, created what they perceived to be an important part of a long-term accountability process. Through making their three films, these disheartened but determined women articulated their arguments, sharpened their calls for change and renewed their sense of hope that these calls would finally be answered.

# Annex 3: Case study: using technology-enabled research processes for positive change in South Africa's informal economy

## A3.1 Introduction

South Africa's informal sector accounts for 5–6% of the country's GDP, and contributes almost 16% of the total employment.<sup>21</sup> Although the informal economy is clearly important, and becoming steadily more so as the economy contracts and formal jobs in key sectors are lost, government policy on the sector is contradictory and often ineffective – if not ill-conceived.

On one hand, the government recognises the role and value of the informal economy, especially in poverty-stricken, marginalised neighbourhoods and townships on the fringes of urban areas. Such settlements are the legacy of colonial and apartheid urban planning, but have continued to proliferate after democracy was achieved in 1994. There has also been an increasing valorisation, by policy-makers, of the notion of entrepreneurship and self-reliance, as the state and the private sector have failed to provide enough formal working opportunities.

On the other hand, the idea of 'informality' and its associated 'ills' – the lack of regulation; random locations; not paying tax; not complying with health and safety standards or by-laws; selling dangerous products – are seen as deeply problematic, especially by local government. While there has been rhetoric from the national government encouraging the growth of the informal economy, local traders often experience a lack of enabling regulations and mechanisms, limited support, harsh law enforcement, and police / council harassment.

The government has expressed a desire to formalise these businesses, but with very little understanding of the feasibility or appropriateness of this. Much policy at the national and local levels has been based on a very weak understanding of the real spatial, social and economic dynamics of the informal sector in different

places. While national surveys, such as Statistics South Africa's national census and quarterly labour force surveys, provide valuable data, they do not provide a real sense of the dynamics of informal trade at the local level. It was into this gap that SLF's 'Formalising Informal Micro-enterprises' project came in 2010.

The overarching aim of the project was to establish an evidence platform from which to encourage entrepreneurial investment in informal businesses, shape enterprise strategies to enhance their competitiveness, and influence government policies to best support the growth of micro-enterprises for their incorporation into South Africa's formal economy. The project sought to influence government policy at national, provincial and local levels to respond practically to the situation of informal micro-enterprises, through creating a policy framework that advances their formalisation and inclusive growth. In this case study, we examined the extent to which the project achieved these aims.<sup>22</sup>

## A3.2 Findings

One of the Formalising Informal Micro-enterprises project's long-term objectives was to acquire state-of-the-art knowledge and develop 'evidence tools' which could influence policy about the informal sector. Achieving this was fundamentally reliant on the use of specific technologies within a multi-faceted research process. In this section, we trace the evolution of this process and the significance of the various technologies used in the research process between 2010 and 2016. We also assess how successful the resulting knowledge tools were in producing grounded local knowledge relevant to the policy sphere, and thereby having a positive impact on the policy environment and the practice of those implementing policy.

<sup>21</sup> Speech by Lindiwe Zulu, Minister of Small Business Development, May 20, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> In this case study, we adopted a qualitative approach which looked retrospectively at SLF's previous work, and provided a prospective analysis of real-time events and engagements with government officials and policy-makers during 2015/16. Interviews with nine key informants (current and former SLF staff, government employees and civil society representatives) were conducted, along with a desk study of published and unpublished reports, articles and other published material. The prospective element of the study involved the attendance at four engagement events at which SLF presented its work to government officials and policy-makers; at these, we also made observations, held conversations with participants, etc. This annex an abridged version of a full case study, which can be found at: <http://livelihoods.org.za/resources/literature/slf-publications>. The methodological approach is described in full in this document.

***Pioneering the ‘small area census approach’***

The South African government, and indeed most policy-makers and academic policy advisors, rely on regular large-scale surveys, for example of households and labour markets, for the data on which they base policy decisions. Much as these quantitative surveys provide rich national-level metadata, they are lacking in terms of the spatial, social and economic dynamics of local informal economies, and the specific dynamics of enterprises (Charman, Petersen, Piper, Liedeman and Legg 2015). Where qualitative studies on the informal economy have been conducted, for example by local government authorities, they have focused on the major retail areas (e.g. the high street) and on street trade, neglecting enterprises which operate from homes in residential areas (Ibid.). The City of Cape Town, for example, estimated in the late 2000s that there were only around 100 informal enterprises operating in Delft South, while subsequent research by SLF found over 800 enterprises.

Government policy and practice on the township informal economy has therefore not been properly evidence-based or relevant to the needs of informal traders trying to make a livelihood in townships. It is into this methodological gap that the Formalising Informal Micro-enterprises project stepped, applying its multi-method ‘small area census approach’ which was designed “to generate knowledge relevant to understanding site-specific informal economic activities” (Ibid.: 2).

The project deliberately focused on understanding the informal economy in townships of roughly 10,000 households. These were small enough to allow the intensive, multi-faceted research process to take place, yet large enough for the findings to be significant at the policy level. We selected five sites in greater Cape Town (Delft South, Browns Farm, Vrygrond, Imizamo Yethu and Sweet Home Farm), two in Gauteng (Ivory Park and Tembisa), one in KwaZulu-Natal (KwaMashu), and one in the Free State (Thabong) (SLF 2016).

***Technology-enabled geospatial mapping***

From the outset, we sought to utilise “a mixture of established quantitative, qualitative, and participatory methods, while drawing on recent methodological advances in the use of mobile computing, GPS and geographical information systems” (Ibid.: 6). Teams of local researchers, recruited from each site and led by experienced SLF researchers, traversed every street in each site, identifying enterprises and recording their locations on a GPS device. In most cases, team

members used bicycles to move about, talking to people and recording information about their enterprises.

Although high-tech tools such as GPS devices were used to geotag<sup>23</sup> each business, the simple technology of bicycles also proved to be important. Not only did this allow researchers to move around informal settlements and township backstreets easily, but as Charman et al. (2015) note, the OV-Fiets bicycles used (donated after use in the Netherlands) were such an unusual sight in these contexts that they often attracted positive attention and curiosity from local residents – downplaying the power relations that are tied up in the research process.<sup>24</sup> Different forms of technology, both simple and complex, were therefore crucial for conducting the business censuses.

Apart from geotagging and photographing each business and gleaning basic trading information, the researchers also sought more in-depth information on business dynamics in key sectors such as groceries, liquor, traditional medicine, hairdressing and informal childcare services. This enterprise-level data, on issues such as pricing, employment, ownership, registration, and procurement of goods, provided an invaluable set of data not normally covered in national-level surveys.

But it was in the geospatial mapping that really made a unique impact.<sup>25</sup> As noted by Charman et al. (2015: 13), “because the enterprise data was geotagged, the researcher has been able to develop a suite of geospatial products for each site, examining both the spatial distribution of micro-enterprises and focusing on particular variables of enterprise characteristics”. This resource, they continue, “offers significant analytical scope”, with the mapping allowing “important knowledge advances in respect of: (a) the nature of the informal economy in the South African township context in terms of its scale; (b) the relative business composition; (c) the relationship between enterprises and settlement in spatial terms; and (d) the influences of urban planning” (Ibid.: 13). Along with a range of striking infographics which specifically highlight key dynamics faced by township traders, the geospatial maps were used to convert a local reality, one that was previously obscured from policy-makers into a form that revealed to policy-makers and other experts – for the first time – what the actual dynamics of the township informal economy were.

While this initial research phase of the Formalising Informal Micro-enterprises project was not particularly participatory, it did gain legitimacy with policy-makers. The use of technologies to make maps and represent geospatial and other data got the attention of policy-makers and built an important foundation on which

<sup>23</sup> A geotag is an electronic tag that assigns a precise geographic location (e.g. a grid reference) to, for example, a photograph, video or social media post.

<sup>24</sup> People often commented, “We can see you are not from the government, as they would never come here riding bicycles.”

<sup>25</sup> Unique in the context of the production of knowledge on township informal economies in South Africa.



other, more qualitative research methods could be added. Small-scale qualitative studies have often failed to gain policy traction on their own, because they are not seen as representative of broader trends. The approach used in this project, where statistically significant samples (over multiple sites) were chosen, and ‘modern’, cutting-edge and technological approaches were used, was crucial in allowing government officials and other experts to recognise the legitimacy and value of the data produced by SLF. The way the data about the dynamics of informal enterprises were then packaged – in punchy, easy to understand infographics – also had immediate traction with everyone who saw them (this is discussed further in Section A3.3).

### Undertaking comparative studies

Another important approach adopted by the project was to return to Delft South, a site first surveyed in 2010, for a comparative study in 2015. While the approach taken was similar to the first round of surveys, researchers used new technologies to gather data, in the form of Android notebooks, a type of tablet device, with questionnaires loaded onto them. Once a survey was completed, it was automatically uploaded to an online data cloud owned by the USA-based Compcare system. Using tablets was not only easier and quicker than paper questionnaires, it also ensured that the data was safely uploaded and was almost immediately available (the devices connected through 3G data) for cleaning and analysis in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, without the tedious process of data entry.

This second study gave the research additional legitimacy with policy-makers and key informal economy experts, by demonstrating the change in the scope and scale of the informal economy over a five-year period. While large-scale quarterly labour force surveys by Statistics South Africa suggested that the informal economy was stagnating or even shrinking – a finding with direct policy implications – the second survey in Delft South showed that informal economic activity had doubled over five years, becoming an even more important source of livelihoods and employment than before.

SLF was therefore able to make a crucial intervention in the debate, showing that ‘big data’ – on which policy is most often based – is not always correct or able to show local-level dynamics which impact people’s lived realities. Having gained the attention of important policy-makers and influencers, the Formalising Informal Micro-enterprises project was then able to go further and bring more qualitative insight to the debate, which might otherwise have been ignored or discounted.

### Technology-enabled participatory research processes: digital storytelling and PhotoVoice

During the next phase of the Formalising Informal Micro-enterprises project, a range of qualitative and participatory research processes were used at the survey sites – mostly after the initial census and mapping phase had been completed. These aimed to gauge deeper community or interest-group perspectives on the themes which emerged from the initial phase. They thus had the advantage of being evidence-led and informed by the grounded, current knowledge produced through the first phase.

The themes explored included business violence, ethnic tension in the *spaza* sector, the policing of liquor retailers, and street trade dynamics (Charman et al. 2015). The methods used included focus group discussions and participatory action research methods including collective problem analysis, digital storytelling and PhotoVoice.<sup>26</sup> Researchers who specialise in participatory action research were brought in to lead these processes. In addition, the project partnered with an urbanist / architecture firm to conduct participatory mapping of the dynamics of township streets and *shebeens*, producing outputs which provided a new understanding of the use of space and the built environment by township entrepreneurs and their customers.

Two sites were selected for specific participatory action research processes: Sweet Home Farm in Cape Town and Ivory Park in Gauteng. In Sweet Home Farm, *shebeeners* were invited to attend action learning workshops to discuss the impact of liquor policy and associated police raids on their enterprises. Growing out of this learning process, eight participants went on to make digital stories, a technology-enabled participatory research process, which narrated “his or her own experience dealing with law enforcement, while providing them with a useful and empowering tool to confront the policy domain” (Ibid.: 12).

Building on this work, a spin-off participatory project, ‘Safe Shebeens’, was initiated to work with these and seven other *shebeeners* in Sweet Home Farm to understand the different social and spatial contexts of alcohol consumption and safety. Through participatory processes, this larger group designed a *shebeen* safety code, which was adopted by the *shebeeners* to reduce alcohol-related violence and other harms at their venues.<sup>27</sup>

The spatial and social dynamics of township drinking and leisure were also analysed, and illustrated through a range of creative and innovative three-dimensional design tools and infographics. These were then made available on the Emergent City website.<sup>28</sup> The various types of *shebeen* found in the townships clearly show

<sup>26</sup> PhotoVoice is a participatory research technique in which participants are trained to use photography to tell their stories.

<sup>27</sup> See SLF (2015a) for more information on the Safe Shebeens project.

<sup>28</sup> See: <http://emergentcity.co.za>

that different *shebeens* play a variety of roles, which go beyond merely drinking and the harmful behaviour associated with drinking. For example, there is scope for *shebeeners* to play a very active role not only in ensuring safe leisure / drinking practices in their venues, but also as community leaders and role models. This is contrary to the mono-dimensional negative image of *shebeens*, *shebeeners* and *shebeening* often found in the media, some academic literature and in policy, and is therefore a crucial insight that policy on alcohol retailing in townships must consider.

In Ivory Park, the participatory action research method used was PhotoVoice. Street photographers identified during the census process were invited to be part of this project. The aim was for them to record images of street trade and street life over the course of one month. These images were posted on a Facebook page, which was widely advertised among local residents.<sup>29</sup> Members of the page commented on the photos, adding broader local perspectives on street life and the informal economy. Through this process, the photographers were able “to frame street trade as ‘business in the community interest’, highlighting the cultural context and value to the community of informal businesses” (Charman et al. 2015: 12).<sup>30</sup>

These two participatory action research processes both used technologies to produce local perspectives that could be shared with particular audiences. Digital storytelling produced stories which allowed the *shebeeners* to articulate their struggles to make a living in the face of heavy police harassment. This helped to humanise and contextualise them and their struggles, which are often glossed over in debates around community safety and public health. Along with the mapping data, the voices and stories of *shebeeners* – recorded through the use of video and computer technology – provided a much richer, more grounded perspective that was readily available to a range of audiences, including policy-makers and policy-implementers. Having gained high-level traction through the technical mapping and presentation of ‘hard’ data, SLF was then able to act as a kind of Trojan Horse, and bring grounded discourses around safety, livelihoods and state repression to policy-makers and other important stakeholders.

The same can be said for the PhotoVoice process in Ivory Park, in which local entrepreneurs used simple technologies to produce images that illustrate important dynamics of the local informal economy. As in Sweet Home Farm, these images were combined with the metadata and geospatial mapping data on Ivory Park to provide a way for local residents to articulate their issues.

The power of these participatory methods was not only in getting the story or issue to powerful stakeholders; it was in building the confidence and capacity of the participants. This in turn has the potential to enable people to voice their issues and needs more clearly to those who can make a difference in the future.

### A3.3 Impacts of the research and engagements with policy-makers

As well as making every effort to publish our work and get into the public sphere, SLF also sought to use its research findings to inform and influence policy. In other words, rather than producing knowledge only for our direct peers, we performed, to some extent, an activist role, deliberately targeting findings and key lessons at influential stakeholders through a variety of media and platforms. In adopting this activist role, we took great care not to adopt an aggressive or adversarial approach, as is often done by civil society activists. As Andrew Charman, an SLF director and the project leader, explains:

“In the informal economy work, we [chose] not to pursue the activist route in a conventional sense. Government is already hostile to civil society actors. We saw there was a lack of knowledge, which was the key challenge, so our stance was to involve government with learning processes, as opposed to saying, ‘your policies are wrong, do it like this’. We also tried to avoid binary positions as some of the work, for example *spaza* trading, is in politically sensitive areas.”<sup>31</sup>

The stakeholders targeted by this soft, or diplomatic, activism included policy-makers, technocrats, academics, civil society organisations and the general public. Here, we reflect on our policy engagements and dissemination approaches.

#### *Sharing our findings: presentations, academic papers and media outputs*

SLF gave over 50 presentations about our research results. These included: on broadcast media (radio in particular); at academic seminars and conferences; and in face-to-face meetings with civil society, industry and government role-players (SLF 2015b: 28–30). Key government departments to which we presented directly included the Office of the Premier (Western Cape), the City of Cape Town, the National Liquor Authority, the National Steering Committee on Township Economic Development, the National Department of Economic Development, and the Gauteng Provincial Government. Through these presentations, SLF’s informality findings and associated messaging were taken to the very top levels of government and civil society.

<sup>29</sup> Mobile phones are widely used in South Africa, and while data costs are high, many people use social media on mobile devices.

<sup>30</sup> See SLF (2013).

<sup>31</sup> Interview, February 15, 2016.

During this time, SLF produced over 15 peer-reviewed academic publications (journal articles and a Master's thesis) on its informality work (Ibid: 31). These allowed us to enter the academic debates around informality, urban spaces, livelihoods and safety, and gain respect from peers in these fields. Ultimately, it enabled us to influence the debate and offer new grounded evidence that suggested government policy on the informal economy needed an urgent rethink.

Mindful, however, that academic articles do not enjoy wide circulation, and are seldom read by either the general public or policy-makers, we also produced ten colourful information booklets that provided an overview of research findings in a number of areas. These were handed out at meetings, presentations and events, proving very popular and influential.<sup>32</sup>

The print media and online news platforms were also used to share key findings and messages with a wider audience. Op-ed pieces in the local media mentioned SLF's work 52 times, illustrating the extent to which we were able to become part of the debate on important issues relating to the informal economy.

### ***Sharing our findings: knowledge-sharing events***

Another strategy SLF used specifically to influence policy on the informal economy was to hold knowledge-sharing events and invite key policy-makers, technocrats and other civil society and government stakeholders. Four such events were held, at Sweet Home Farm (in September 2012 and a 'Safe Shebeens' event in October 2014), Ivory Park (June 2013) and Delft South (November 2015). Andrew Charman explains why these were important:

"Lots of policy thinking is at an abstract level, so we wanted to bring people to the township and bring them to this learning process, making it rapidly available to people so they could absorb large amounts of information in a short period via the use of tools such as maps, infographics and so on."<sup>33</sup>

These events not only aimed to get key government stakeholders, at all levels, into the township space, but also aimed to enable them to meet and hear first-hand the perspectives of local community members who had been involved in the research.

The events also helped to build the relationships between SLF, as intermediaries, and the local groups involved in the research. They demonstrated to the participants that SLF could get their views heard to the highest level. This added confidence to the relationship, which translated into an ongoing relationship and led, in the case of Sweet Home Farm *shebeens*, to more participatory work around *shebeen* safety.

Although it is difficult to gauge the direct impact of these events on policy, they were well attended by individuals from government, academia and civil society in particular. Many of those who attended were very enthusiastic in their praise of the events and what they had learnt, at the time of the events and in later conversations. However, in the case of the 'Street Life in Ivory Park' exhibition, the local political dynamics caused problems, which detracted from the key messages getting through to the right power-holders. Thus, as several of those interviewed pointed out, while holding such events in marginalised areas is good, if you want the key messages to get to the right people, it may be better to hold exhibitions, meetings and events in central places that are closer to the centres of power, rather than in townships.

## **A3.4 Conclusions**

SLF's experience clearly shows that technologies of various types can play an invaluable role in fostering citizen engagement and shifting the perspectives of government actors in the area of informality – but only in carefully designed and managed processes that are relevant to the specific sphere in which engagement and change is sought. The role of a locally grounded and trusted (by research participants) intermediary – such as SLF – is indispensable, not only for choosing the types and combinations of technology, but in choosing the processes, and combinations of technology and process, to use for maximum effect. However, while careful and strategic planning by a trusted intermediary is important, it is equally important for the intermediary to allow some processes to develop more iteratively and in partnership with local citizens.

Informality in South Africa is complex. The state is remarkably responsive to some issues and some citizen voices, but not to others. For example, the strong voices of citizens who are against liquor trading of any kind, especially in poor communities, are heard very clearly by policy-makers and government agents. Backed by public health discourse and the influence of conservative and puritanical religious interests, not to mention large formal liquor retail chains, the case for a prohibitionist approach to informal liquor trading has been widely adopted by the state. The police and municipal authorities have also been particularly responsive to this viewpoint, harassing and attempting to shut down informal liquor traders in townships, regardless of the livelihood implications for the numerous traders and the many associated enterprises. Thus, getting the state to understand the perspectives and needs of one set of citizens can be at odds with the perspectives and needs of other citizens. There is not

<sup>32</sup> See: <http://livelihoods.org.za/resources/literature/slf-publications>

<sup>33</sup> Interview, February 15, 2016.

one, unified 'citizen voice' on issues such as informal liquor trading (and many other aspects of informality), and government responsiveness may be more of a problem for some (such as *shebeeners*) than a welcome change.

As illustrated in this study, locally grounded knowledge about specific localities, in combination with knowledge which humanises the debate with stories of and from real people, are key in getting the state to pay attention to marginalised voices and respond in the best possible manner. It may not be possible for the state to respond in a way that pleases, or is fair to, all parties. But providing convincing alternative perspectives can lead to fairer policies and better, more productive responses.

Through its work on informality over six years, SLF has discovered that producing 'big data' and hard 'scientific' facts, including statistics and geospatial maps, matters to policy-makers and government agents. We therefore developed a three-pronged process. This started with a technology-heavy research process that was not particularly participatory, but gained the attention and respect of policy-makers. This allowed us to conduct much more participatory and citizen-led processes of technologically enabled knowledge generation, such as digital storytelling, PhotoVoice, collective problem-solving and collective videos, to produce a much less mediated citizen voice. This 'voice' was then used to gain access to the areas of government and policy-making that were opened up by SLF's first round of data-heavy research.

Further, in the process of participatory research, local citizen groups that worked with SLF were empowered to develop their own voice and advocate for their own issues, without needing SLF as a mediator. Generally, it would appear the SLF's work has slowly begun to influence key policy-makers in provincial and local government, if not quite at the national level yet.

Having gained recognition and authority, the final step in the process was for SLF to be invited to make inputs into government policy on the informal sector. This happened in the case of the City of Cape Town's informal trading strategy, and the Ivory Park Township Revitalisation project.<sup>34</sup> However, while the Formalising Informal Micro-enterprises project was widely seen as valuable by all three layers of government, translating it into a solid change in policy and practice has not yet yielded the results we hoped for. The complex politics around informality are very difficult to overcome, especially where issues may be linked to populist voting concerns for political parties and their representatives. The links that *shebeens* have – in the popular and official imagination – to crime, health and safety outweigh the fact that a more productive and just approach than prohibition is possible and advisable.

The struggle to change conservative and hostile attitudes towards township enterprise is ongoing, despite some of the headway made by the project. Sharing accessible information – in the form of maps and infographics or participatory videos – does not necessarily lead to the right kind of government response. This case study has demonstrated that while the use of specific technologies in research and engagement processes can shift the debate and change the perspectives of (some) policy-makers and government stakeholders, changing the way government actually responds is much more difficult, at least in the short term.

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<sup>34</sup> See the main case study at: <http://livelihoods.org.za/resources/literature/slf-publications>

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## About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. It focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

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## Research, Evidence and Learning component

The programme's Research, Evidence and Learning component, managed by IDS, contributes to improving performance and practice, and builds an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and technology for T&A (Tech4T&A).

## The Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation

The Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation (SLF) is a South African non-profit research and advocacy organisation, based in Cape Town. Founded in 2010, SLF works primarily with disadvantaged communities in South Africa on issues relating to the informal economy, health, urban ecology, citizen rights, and opportunities for young people. SLF has published widely and has become one of South Africa's leading thinktanks on issues related to poverty, livelihoods and the upliftment of marginalised people.

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