

CHEC – CCT RESEARCH PROGRAMME

REPORT

Improving Communication to Improve Services: Strengthening Sanitation Servicing in Informal Settlements



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1. ABSTRACT

This project was motivated by the overarching theme of building 'local responsiveness for a better future'. The work focussed on how the City of Cape Town (CCT) can better understand, engage, and respond to the needs and imaginaries of residents in informal settlements in relation to sanitation provision. Specifically we looked at the servicing and maintenance of Container Based Sanitation (CBS). The City works in this area to provide alternate sanitation technologies such as CBS in areas where the provision of waterborne sanitation is not possible or feasible. The research secondly supported the City in enhancing approaches to working with and for citizens of Cape Town in the areas of active citizenship and citizen generated data. The research explored what type of resident-state engagement residents of informal settlements desire and how this relates to current CCT communication platforms. The research focussed on BM Section in Khayelitsha and employed several methods including: a) focus groups with residents; b) workshops with residents of BM Section and CCT; c) tracking of servicing requests by residents and d) a survey. We found that residents would strongly prefer to report service requests to a person rather than through digital channels. Most digital channels are not know about or user friendly to residents, due to poor information sharing and high data costs/lack of access to WIFI. The most promising digital channel for logging requests is WhatsApp. Even when provided with data residents were inactive in using digital channels to report faults. Residents would however like to be more involved in the servicing chain, by for example, being trained to provide repairs. There was a strong desire for a more engaged form of communication, beyond information sharing and towards co-creation of solutions.

2. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT AIMS / QUESTIONS

The City of Cape Town (CCT) provides CBS on a large scale to informal settlements for free. Yet research has shown residents are often unhappy with CBS.¹ At face value CBS in Cape Town is an acceptable and successful form of sanitation for informal settlements. The CCT, for example,

¹ Dube, M., Anciano, F. and Mdee, A. Forthcoming (under review). The Illusion of container based sanitation: Lessons from Khayelitsha, South Africa.

is a global leader in providing free portable flush toilets for individual homes, at scale. However, our previous research (Dube et al 2023) shows that residents do not feel they have a dignified or sustainable sanitation solution. There is thus a pressing need to better understand how to align informal settlement residents' sanitation needs and imaginaries with the City's capabilities.

The UWC's Politics and Urban Governance Research Group (PUG) has conducted research on sanitation in BM section Khayelitsha, Cape Town over the past three years, including transect walks, participant observation, engagement with community leaders and civil society activists and in-depth interviews with and a 12-month quantitative resident survey. The findings revealed conflicted views in relation to the use of CBS, which are deeply entwined in frustration at the unmet promises of the post-apartheid state. Given this background two interlinked questions drove this project:

1. How can residents in informal settlements more effectively engage with the City to improve the servicing of Container Based Sanitation?
2. How can the City communicate more effectively with residents in informal settlements to deepen both residents' knowledge of City capabilities in regards to sanitation provision, and the City's knowledge of residents' needs and expectations?

a) Objective One

The first objective, linked to question one, is to improve the experience of residents' use of CBS. PUG's existing research has shown that there are accountability gaps in the servicing of Portable Flush Toilets (PFTs) and other forms of CBS.

Thus objective one will investigate **how** residents in BM Section, Khayelitsha, can form part of the servicing chain, through better, direct, engagement with the City. Can they be part of the monitoring of assets in a sustainable and effective way?

b) Objective Two

The second, and linked objective of the project is to think through - *with residents* - improved communication strategies around sanitation planning, provision, and servicing. We investigated *who* residents contact if they have a sanitation problem (including the CCT, private service provider, a local leader, their ward councillor) and *how* they engage. Which channel(s) do they find most effective and which ones are least effective and why? As a focus of this objective we investigated how digital channels are used to improve reporting and monitoring, specifically: what channel/s are available; what is the most affordable way to deploy said channels; what are

potential adoption challenges, and how can they be mitigated in the design of the solution? Specifically here we are interested in how residents in BM Section *currently* engage with the City regarding servicing complaints or requests. Do they use the C3 system, WhatsApp, social media, call lines or email, for example? What constraints do they face in using the existing methods? What are the enablers or blockers to using current City engagement platforms? Through doing this research we will evaluate the effectiveness of the current means of communication provided by the City.

As part of this project we also interrogated what residents *want* from City engagement platforms. Do they want to only share and receive information, or is there a desire for sustained partnerships in planning and servicing? Answers to these questions have been used to further engage with residents with the aim of improving city-residents cooperation with regards to the delivery of sanitation. We provided feedback on what works for the citizen - i.e. what constitutes a citizen-centric digital engagement platform.

3. RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

The project embraced a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods. PUG has a good working relationship with over 70 residents who participated in a year long survey between May 2022 and June 2023 in BM Section, Khayelitsha. These residents indicated a willingness to engage in ongoing research. This was a unique context as engagement with residents was not mediated by third parties, and thus we learnt directly from residents, without concerns regarding potential organisational agendas. The residents were chosen through random sampling and represent a selection of different genders and ages. They are also residents who use a wide range of sanitation types (from ablution blocks to PFTs) in BM Section. Four methods were employed to answer the two research questions:

a) Focus Groups

To assess how residents *currently* engage with the CCT regarding basic services, and how they would *prefer* to engage (as well as what underpins this preference) we conducted two focus groups in BM Section, Khayelitsha. The questions were co-constructed with staff from several departments in the CCT. The first focus group meeting was on the 30th of November 2023, the size of the first group was 11 people. Some of the participants in the group are part of the leadership committee in the community, elders in the community and residents we had not previously engaged with before. This was a good mixture of different voices in the community and

gave us wide range of responses to each question. The second focus group was conducted on 15th February 2024 with a smaller group of six participants, mainly those not previously engaged. The responses varied from the initial group, providing additional perspectives on community-CCT interactions. Both focus groups were conducted in IsiXhosa, for participants to be able to articulate and express themselves freely.

b) Project workshop with residents

A workshop was held on 25 April 2024 with 30 residents from BM section, to share information on current City provided reporting channels, and to prepare them to report servicing requests using one of these channels. This was held at BM Section community hall, Japhta K Masemola Rd (M9), Khayelitsha. The UWC team were: Fiona Anciano, Mmeli Dube, Yanga Dubula and Mfundo Majola. The City of Cape Town team were: Kelly Dingwall, Meagan Donnelly, Mthabiseni Makapek, Thabang Motsoahse, Mzwandile Mkhize, Zuzeka Tyakume, Mark van der Heever and Anele Viti. Participants from BM Section were selected through snowball sampling, with the added strategy that they must have a phone or access to a phone. This biases the sampling however is necessary to track how residents can use technology to report service requests.

The workshop started with an overview of the project and why UWC is working with the City of Cape Town, presented by Fiona Anciano. She explained that although the City provides numerous types of free serviced sanitation, research with residents has highlighted that sanitation infrastructure and servicing are not always well maintained or executed. The City does however have a range of channels through which residents can report service requests. This research will investigate whether and how residents use these channels, or what the blockers may be. The City introduced their team and outlined their role in the project (Meagan Donnelly). Translation from English to isiXhosa was done by Mfundo Majola as needed.

There were 30 participants who were divided into five groups. Each group had a facilitator from the City who explained to them the different service reporting channels. The facilitators also asked residents how they would normally report a service delivery issue and they attempted to work with participants to log a current service request. The workshop concluded with the City reminding the group as a whole about the different reporting channels. There was a Q&A with the City. The UWC team explained the next steps in the project where participants would log requests through whichever channels they choose. City staff were then taken by some of the residents to visit the nearby ablution block. After City staff had left, while having lunch, the UWC team assisted some participants to download the City of Cape Town reporting app and shared with all participants the WhatsApp reporting number.

c) Service Request Reporting

30 residents engaged in weekly reporting of sanitation services directly to CCT for a period of 3 months (April – June 2024). Residents could choose their own method of communication. Residents were paid a weekly data stipend and some used smartphones distributed as part of a previous PUG project. A feedback workshop was held with the CCT and UWC staff on 8 August to reflect on lessons from the assessment monitoring initiative.

d) Survey questionnaire

30 new participants were surveyed in BM Section to ascertain their use of service reporting channels. Interviews were done face to face in the settlement, rather than via WhatsApp. The method was changed as we decided to widen our sample base from previous responds and could not confirm new responds would have phones. We also wanted to ensure we engaged with all community members, not just those with phones. Random sampling was used, based on locations of households (selecting a point in the settlement to start and then approaching every third household). Questions focused on the channel of communication used, constraints in using each of the channels, the turnaround time for the resolution of their complaint/request and their preferred method.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOLLOW-UP

The following section provides the findings from the research and address: a) existing and preferred channels of communication for reporting service requests; b) the type of communication and engagement residents would like with CCT; c) analysis of the combined findings and d) recommendations for the way forward.

a) Channels of Communication for reporting service requests

First we will address *who* residents contact if they have a sanitation problem, which channel(s) they find most effective and which ones are least effective and why. We will focus on how, and whether, digital channels are used to improve reporting and monitoring. Focus group research, the participant workshop and surveys highlighted the following findings:

1. *Strong desire to report services through face to face engagement.*

The research demonstrated that one of the most common ways of reporting service delivery faults was to engage the ward councillor, or speak to an employee of the CCT if one was in the area (i.e. a janitor or ‘puller’). Residents primarily report issues to local leaders, especially the ward councillor, whom they feel they can see face to face and thus have some ability to hold accountable. Engaging the ward councillor was also deemed somewhat effective due to the councillor’s landline access, which mitigates data and airtime costs. Direct calls by the councillor to relevant departments were seen as expedient.

2. Limited awareness of digital reporting channels and how to use them

Many residents were unaware of online service delivery platforms for complaints or requests. There, were on the other hand, many respondents who did know, in theory, that there were different (digital) ways they could report service requests to the City but did not know how to use these platforms. They did not know what WhatsApp number to use, what website to use or how to download and use the City reporting App.

At our community workshop with residents and the City there were, interestingly, descriptions of how to log requests with phone numbers and email addresses on the walls of the community room, indicating that there had been a previous workshop (seemingly held by an NGO Asivikelane) on the topic. The participants expressed at the end of the workshop that it had been very useful to learn more about the reporting channels.

3. Difficulty of using digital channels

Our research shows that, for many residents, it is difficult to use existing CCT digital channels. Residents in informal settlements have limited access to Wi-Fi and data, and this prevents people from downloading the City App, making calls or sending emails. The main barriers are data costs and airtime availability. Very few indicated they had an email address. At the workshop, most of the participants (if not all) had problems getting data and had no access to Wi-Fi. They didn’t want to or couldn’t download the City app without being hot spotted.

It is clear the City App is unlikely to be a successful digital channel for informal settlement residents. Downloading the app requires an uninterrupted connection and requires a lot of data. It also requires a relatively high-spec phone. No-one we engaged with was using the App and it proved very difficult to install on resident’s phones, even when free data

was provided. There was also a concern the App took up too much memory and slowed down the use of the phone.

Additionally, users reported dissatisfaction with social media interactions, citing instances of no response despite messages being read.

4. *Potential of WhatsApp*

The findings show that WhatsApp is the most viable digital channel to support service delivery requests. This was seen as the most accessible and the most affordable. While not all residents own smartphones, there are enough residents in the community to make WhatsApp a feasible reporting platform.

b) Citizen-centric engagement

This section addresses how residents experience the City's reporting system, once they have logged a request. It also looks at whether residents feel they can be part of the monitoring of sanitation assets in a sustainable and effective way.

As part of our research we provided data to 30 residents to log requests over a three month period. There were far fewer requests logged than anticipated. For example, we only had record of nine logged requests for May 2024 (with City allocated reference numbers). Our researchers followed up continuously with residents to ascertain why they were not logging requests. This was due to a range of factors, but often because they assumed someone else had done it. For example they would post a picture of a broken toilet and ask someone else to log it. Alternatively it was because they did not think they would get a response from the City. One finding here is that residents struggle to know 'where' the request goes to – without a 'human face' to engage with, and thus several participants were not motivated to engage with the digital platforms.

c) Citizen Centric communication

As part of this project we also interrogated what residents *want* from City engagement platforms. Do they want to only share and receive information, or is there a desire for sustained partnerships in planning and servicing? Our data highlighted the following:

Many respondents feel the CCT lacks effective outreach, engagement, and information-sharing efforts within the community. Residents indicated they had limited prior engagement with CCT regarding sanitation issues. Those aware of reporting channels for issues such as water and

sanitation express doubts about follow-up action from CCT. Participants highlighted inadequate toilet facilities and delays in maintenance, despite diverse options for reporting faults.

While noting the above there is a strong desire to improve the relationship with the CCT. Participants voiced a desire for a more collaborative relationship with CCT. They expressing feelings of neglect and inequity in comparison to the attention they believe other communities or areas in the City receive.

Participants expressed a strong interest in sustained, collaborative partnerships with CCT for planning and servicing. Almost all respondents expressed a desire to be more involved in planning, reporting and maintenance of sanitation services.

Engagements with City staff indicated that they have significant staff constraints and cannot monitor the servicing of thousands of PFTs and CBS on the ground. The monitoring is mostly focused on ensuring that the hired contractors are paid for the services they deliver and not the quality of that service. While the Informal Settlement Basic Services (ISBS) department do have some community engagement, they rely heavily on the private contractors who service sanitation to inform them of any challenges. Contractors, however, are not democratically accountable to residents, nor are they best placed to act as a 'complaints conduit' and thus accountability gaps emerge. Yet, given the challenge of City resources, it may not be feasible to expect the City to close this gap through its own staffing. Residents would like to play a more active role in closing this gap.

d) Recommendations ways forward

In order to think through the servicing of sanitation in informal settlements it is important to take a holistic view of the 1) **causes**, 2) **reporting** and 3) **response** to sanitation problems. All three aspects must be addressed to improve sanitation provision and servicing.

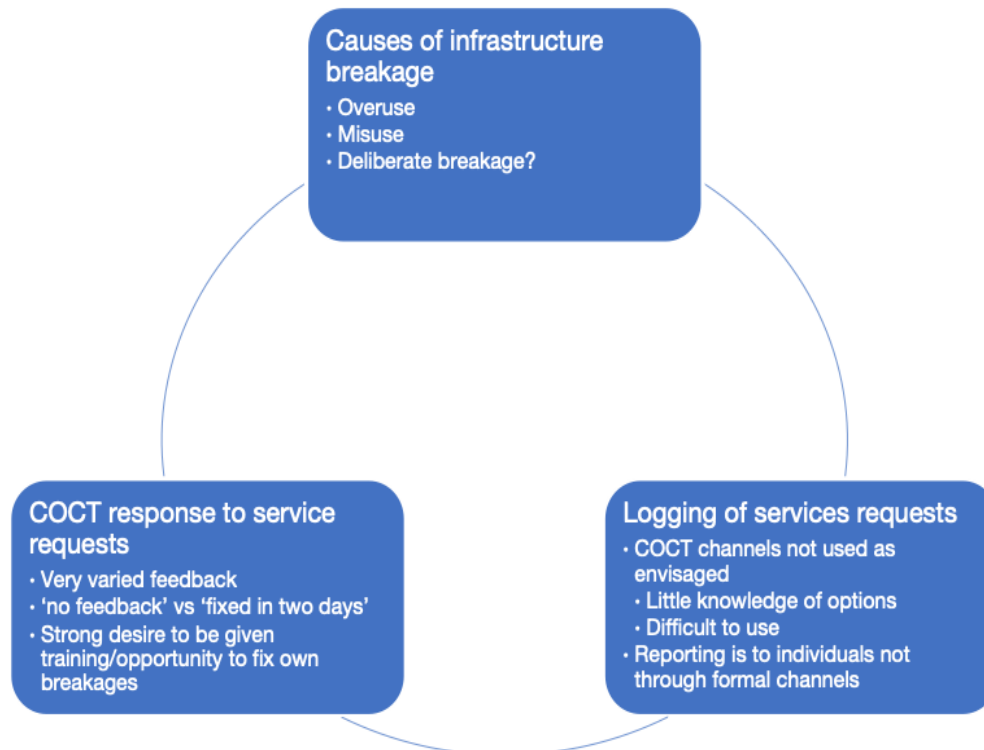


Fig 1. Sanitation servicing cycle

Recommendations:

1. *Create more opportunities for face-to-face engagement around service request reporting*

Residents clearly want to engage with individuals who they can hold accountable for a response or feedback when reporting a fault or service request. This is beyond the remit and staffing of the CCT. There are two potential avenues to support more face-to-face and accountable engagement. First, the CCT could expressly require staff on the ground (e.g. janitors or a supervisor) to log requests, and this person could be made known to the area in which they work. There are several issues to consider in this scenario: a) resources required of a staff member such as phone and data; b) safety of the staff member if they are known to have these resources; c) the type of work contract required for this staff member, as janitors and pullers are usual EPWP contracted staff, and thus on short term contracts; d) expanding the role of community development workers or the new community liaison officers.

A second scenario could be for the CCT to work more closely with exiting NGO's who are already monitoring sanitation servicing in informal settlements. One example we came across several

times in BM Section is Asivikelane, a community based organization, linked to the International Budget Partnership, who had residents reporting faults and had clearly been disseminating information to the community. Asivikelane members do use the C3 system (via the CCT App or WhatsApp etc.) to log requests and could be supported as a central logging 'face'.

2. City supported access to wi-fi or data

City Wi-Fi expansion is viewed as a potential solution to increase the use of resident's use of digital platforms. Without increased access to data and WIFI it does seem unlikely that requests will regularly be logged.

3. Explore ways to work with residents in settlements

Residents very clearly want to be more involved in the design and maintenance of sanitation in their settlement. The City could investigate the potential of a system where select residents, with experience, could be trained to do on site repairs to fix relatively minor issues speedily. This would require training, and a form of remuneration, which may be difficult to align with City processes. One potential pathway may be to expand the mandate of PFT contractors, or to expand the EPWP programme.

4. Reflect on the causes of infrastructure breakage

Although not part of this research project it was increasingly clear to researchers that sanitation servicing is only required because of breakages in the first place and that there were many misconceptions about what causes sanitation faults. Careful engagement with residents, facilitated by researchers would assist the City to better understand why some toilets may be apparently vandalised, or why some are used in ways not intended.

It has been a privilege to work with the City on this study. We do hope the findings are useful to both official and political actors in the City and are open to further engagement. There is a planned workshop in BM Section with the Mayor in early 2025 and we hope this will take engagements forward.

5. BUDGET

	Detailed description of budget line item	Budgeted Amount	Actual spend	Variance - notes
Project initiation workshop	Refreshments x 36	R 3,060.00	R 3,950.00	
	Data for initiation workshop	R 200.00	R 400.00	
	Venue hire	R 1,300.00	R -	No cost for the venue
	Transport	R 1,500.00	R 890.00	
Resident reporting x 12 weeks	Weekly data for reporting 30 pax x R30 x 12	R 14,400.00	R 14,400.00	
Feedback workshop with residents, CCT and UWC	Refreshments x 36	R 3,060.00	R -	This workshop has not yet taken place. The Mayor's office have indicated the Mayor would like to be present as we are looking at a date in Jan 2025.
	Venue hire	R 1,300.00	R -	
	Transport	R 1,500.00	R -	
Focus groups	Refreshments x 30	R 900.00	R 1,850.00	Two focus groups were held.
	Transcription of focus groups	R 3,000.00	R 2,000.00	

Smartphone survey/ WhatsApp survey	Data x 30 x 200 x 2 months	R 12,000.00	R -	Data for participants was not used. A face-to-face survey was conducted.
	Collection, translation of survey data	R 3,000.00	R 3,000.00	
Research assistant (Majola)	R700/day x 10	R 7,000.00	R 13,300.00	
Researcher (Dube)	R1300/day x 15	R 13,000.00	R 20,800.00	Additional time was used conducting the survey instead of using WhatsApp
Researcher airtime	2 researchers @ R100.00 x 12 weeks		R 2,400.00	This cost had not been budgeted but was necessary for researchers to communicate with residents.
Researcher transport	2 researchers @ R300.00 x 4 weeks		R 2,400.00	This cost had not been budgeted but was necessary for researchers to travel to BM Section.
Total		R 65,220.00	R 65,390.00	

6. APPENDIXES

Focus Group Questions – co-constructed with CCT staff

Sanitation Servicing Focus Group questions:

- 1) Why type of sanitation do you use most regularly? (prompt if needed - porta porta/ablution block etc. container toilet/portable flush toilet/full flush/chemical toilet)
 - a) Is there any member of the community that was part of the engagements when the toilets were initially rolled-out?
- 2) Do you ever have problems with your sanitation - if so, what are these? (keep this brief and linked to sanitation type)
- 3) If you have a problem with your sanitation, what would you do, if anything?
 - a) Do your actions differ depending on the type of sanitation?
 - i) How do you report on PFTs/ ablution block/ shared CBS and flush toilets?
 - b) Can you share any specific examples of how you have dealt with a sanitation problem (reporting/feedback/engagement).
 - c) Do you ever contact the companies that service the toilets directly?
 - d) What do you think of the role of EPWP sanitation cleaners and the pullers?
- 4) If you have a problem with sanitation or water do you engage with the City of Cape Town ? If you don't explain why not. If you do, explain how you go about communicating with them.
 - a) What communication channels do you know about? (i.e. WhatsApp/email/twitter/phone call - but don't prompt these)
- 5) What devices do you own (smart phone, tablet, laptop)?
- 6) Would you prefer to communicate with local government using their digital channels? Why or why not?

- a) Do you have any constraints or challenges to use these digital channels? Explain.
 - i) These should be prompted only - if needed. Do you have data/ access to WIFI/ internet? If not, is that a constraint? Do you have a device you can use?
 - b) Are there any specific examples of using a digital channel to communicate with the City, that you can share with us?
 - c) Do you have examples of where someone you know has used these channels?
- 7) Do you ever contact specific people to help with a sanitation or water problem?
 - a) Who and why? Can you give us a specific example?
- 8) What role does the ward councillor, or the ward committee play in helping to resolve sanitation and water problems?
 - a) How often do community members submit complaints to their councillor and what is the feedback? (improved turn-around times or the same as reporting directly to the City)
- 9) Do you engage with the City of Cape to report problems or get feedback on any other services such as electricity?
 - a) If so, how do you do this? (This can also be prompted through referring to the existing channels.)
 - b) What other City Departments are you aware of that work in the area and are you aware of how they work with Informal Settlements Branch?
- 10) What do you think would be the best way to report service delivery problems and to get feedback from the City?

- 11) What kind of relationship do you want with the City?
 - a) Do you want to share and receive information?
 - b) Do you want to have a partnership in planning and servicing of water and sanitation?
 - c) Other (please explain)--probing needed.

- 12) Would you be willing to pay for sanitation services if you could have improved service delivery?