The Free State Housing Campaign: supporting people-led demands for social justice and accountable governance

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At the time of writing, **Francesca Feruglio** was a research officer at the Institute of Development Studies, working on the Making All Voices Count programme. She managed a cohort of research grants and provided technical input on their design, methods and stakeholder engagement strategies where needed. She also shared the lessons from these projects with broader audiences.

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Summary

In South Africa, community advice offices (CAOs) have historically played an important role as intermediaries for community issues and in efforts to increase accountability. CAOs are non-profit organisations that offer free legal and human rights information, advice and services to local communities, particularly poor and marginalised groups. Since the end of apartheid, their role has changed and their funding has been cut, with some turning to state service provision, potentially compromising their social justice role. Yet CAOs remain a well-known and trusted body for local people to raise issues through.

This practice paper focuses on the experience of the Free State Housing Campaign, run by a group of 22 CAOs across the province, which aimed to improve people's access to housing. The campaign came about through a Making All Voices Count scouting process, which convened the 22 CAOs. The CAOs received an innovation grant to design and launch a housing campaign to tackle their most pressing problems. The campaign adopted a participatory action research approach as a fundamental way of working and achieving its goals. The campaign also received an embedded practitioner research and learning grant from Making All Voices Count, to enable a process of evaluation, reflection and learning, rather than simply focusing on achieving the stated campaign objectives.

In this paper, Francesca Feruglio, who managed the practitioner research and learning grant, discusses the campaign from the perspective of its two facilitators, Angela Conway and Alvin Anthony, whose task was to accompany its development and learning process. The paper also includes the perspective of Deborah Byrne, Making All Voices Count's Country Engagement Developer in South Africa, who initiated efforts with the Free State CAOs to explore if they were interested in working collaboratively to strengthen responsive governance and to reflect on the lessons learned.

Key themes in this paper

- Participatory action research as a way to strengthen voice and build activism
- The challenge and potential of community-led activism in the current neoliberal context
- Building women's leadership in a patriarchal context
- Lessons for donor agencies about supporting grass-roots campaigns towards accountability and good governance

After analysis and discussion, the programme awarded an innovation grant to the CAOs to design and launch a housing campaign, centred on action research, to tackle their most pressing problems

Setting the scene for practitioner learning

Making All Voices Count was a citizen engagement and accountable governance programme. Its Research, Evidence and Learning component, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), focused on building an evidence base on what works in technology for voice, transparency and accountability, how it works, and why (McGee, Edwards, Minkley, Pegus and Brock 2015).

The programme's practitioner research and learning grants gave funds and mentoring support to transparency and accountability practitioners to provide them with the space and capabilities to explore key questions that will enable them to better implement their governance projects. Most, but not all, of these practitioners were using tech-enabled approaches. This real-time applied research contributed to project learning and improved practice.

The practitioner research and learning grants supported grantees to form their own learning and judgements, and the programme's series of practice papers – of which this is the last – was part of this process. Practice papers document the process of practitioner research and learning from the perspective of both the grant recipients and the programme. They are co-produced, and intended to prompt critical reflection on key learning questions that arise from the research process.

As well as giving practitioner research and learning grants, Making All Voices Count also gave innovation grants, to develop innovative approaches to strengthening citizen voice and government responsiveness. Its vision of innovation was that it "needs to be embedded in and built on the lived realities of citizens; unlocking and scaling the potential for innovation demands active scouting…" (Brock, McGee and Besuijen 2014: 26). It was therefore committed to "actively scouting for local partners, investing time in developing relationships bilaterally" (*Ibid.*: 22).

This practice paper focuses on efforts by a newly emerging Free State Housing Campaign, run by a group of 22 community advice offices (CAOs) across South Africa's Free State province, with the aim of improving access to decent housing. CAOs are community-level, non-profit organisations that offer free legal and human rights information, advice and services to people who are marginalised through poverty, social circumstances and geographical location.[1]

The campaign came about through a Making All Voices Count scouting process, which convened the 22 CAOs. After a process of analysis and discussion of 'strengthening responsive governance', the programme awarded an innovation grant to the CAOs to design and launch a housing campaign to tackle their most pressing problems. The campaign's proposal describes it as centred on action research as a way to "deepen the understanding of the extent and nature of housing needs and provide opportunities for building united responses".

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[1] CAOs are non-partisan and non-political, and are located in poor and rural communities across the country. CAOs have played a crucial role during the struggle against apartheid, and have been historically linked to other community structures, trade unions, faith-based organisations and others in civil society to unite as activists to tackle structural issues. This angle of their work declined following the end of the apartheid regime and the new political system in 1994. Today, CAOs remain deeply embedded in local communities; however, the sector suffers from endemic constraints of human and financial resources (NADCAO 2014).

Along with the innovation grant, Making All Voices Count also awarded an embedded practitioner research and learning grant to enable a process of evaluation, reflection and learning within the campaign. It encouraged those involved in the campaign to consider the following questions.

- To what extent are we implementing our agreed / emerging strategy, programme, praxis and methodologies (at ward, municipal and provincial levels)?
- What gains, advances and progress are we making?
- What are the problems, constraints and challenges that confront us? Why?

This practice paper discusses the experience of the campaign from the perspective of its two facilitators,

Angela Conway and Alvin Anthony, whose task was to accompany its development and learning process. It also opens and closes with the voice of Deborah Byrne, Making All Voices Count's Country Engagement Developer in South Africa, who initiated efforts with the Free State CAOs to explore if they were interested in working collaboratively to strengthen responsive governance and to reflect on what was learned.

Thus, the paper does not present a comprehensive picture of the campaign and the perspectives of all the stakeholders involved in it; rather, it presents reflections on the part of some of those involved regarding what they learned and situates that learning in wider issues of citizen voice and accountability.

How the campaign came about: Making All Voices Count South Africa's scouting process

Francesca:

How did the Free State Housing Campaign come about?

Deborah:

In October 2015 I joined Making All Voices Count in South Africa, and began working with programme officer Gontse Legong. When we reviewed the country plan on South Africa we noted that it highlighted "the critical role played by local and grassroots actors such as community advice offices. These have been subject to funding cuts yet are spaces in which informal and formal community leaders are both known and trusted. Spaces at this level are well networked locally and may be best suited to facilitate community consultations and other forms of public participation."

The recognition of CAOs as historical players on issues of local accountability and as intermediaries of community issues resonated with my background as an activist working in the 'access to justice' sector and, before that, in the workers' rights sector.

So we began exploring the possibility of collaborating with advice offices, and held meetings and consultations with key stakeholders: the National Alliance for the Development of Community Advice Offices (NADCAO),[2] the Association of Community Advice Offices of South Africa (ACAOSA),[3] Hivos SA,[4] the Mott Foundation[5] and other relevant funders. Upon the suggestion of Hivos SA, the Free State province was identified as "a recently formed energetic hub wanting to significantly re-energise their community support linkages (over and above their individual client work, recognising the patterns of problems and the need for tackling key issues collectively)".

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[2] The NADCAO is a body formed by an alliance of human rights organisations in 2005, supported by several key donors including the CS Mott Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies and the Foundation for Human Rights. NADCAO works towards the development and long-term sustainability of CAOs. See: https://nadcao.org.za
[3] ACAOSA represents more than 320 CAOs in nine provinces of South Africa. See: https://acaosa.org.za/
[4] See: https://southern-africa.hivos.org/
[5] See: www.mott.org/

Box 1. Building up to funding the Free State Housing Campaign

December 2015: an exploratory meeting was held in Bloemfontein, Free State, with six CAOs and other key allies, co-facilitated by Hivos and Making All Voices Count. Each CAO reflected on their particular challenges, then compared them to the provincial strategic plan priorities identified earlier in 2015 by the Free State CAOs. The group then identified the most common issue that communities raise with their office. And they discussed if and how they would want to tackle the issue in collaboration with each other and the wider grouping of around 20 CAOs in the Free State. 'Housing List Corruption' was the issue chosen. Making All Voices Count committed to exploring within its grant-making and collaborative programming team whether this issue could form the basis for a concept to be considered for funding.

March 2016: an external mentor was commissioned by Making All Voices Count to work with the Free State grouping of six CAOs to develop a concept note for consideration in the grant application processes.

September to October 2016: two grants were awarded – the innovation grant (GBP47,690) and the practitioner research and learning grant (GBP29,603). An inception workshop was convened by Making All Voices Count in Bloemfontein for the 22 CAOs. It included a day to introduce their ideas to other role-players from local, provincial and national civil society and government, in the hope of gaining support and cooperation going forward.

November 2016: a campaign design workshop was convened by the 22 CAOs, which included 35 participants among each of the 20 CAOs and 15 support organisations, the South African Human Rights Commission, the Commission for Gender Equality, social justice activists, housing activists, legal civil society organisations (CSOs) specialising in land and housing, and local university academics.

The Free State Housing Campaign: context, objectives, methodology and achievements

Despite strong equality provisions and a number of legal instruments and policies designed to address the injustices of the apartheid era, actual progress to ensure equal access for all to services has been slow. South Africa today is one of the world's most unequal countries: in 2015, the Human Development Index ranked it 116th out of 187 (UNDP 2015). Inequality figures highlight race and geography as key factors: black men and women and those living in ex-homelands and informal urban settlements are most likely to be poor. Social tensions persist, with many protests related to service delivery and government performance.

Affordable housing is a particularly contentious issue. In recognition of the fact that access to prime (centrally located) land was the main demand of the anti-apartheid movement from its early days, the 1994 Housing White Paper committed to building 1 million houses by 1999. However, the Department of Human Settlements states that between 1994 and 2012, only 2.5 million houses were delivered; this figure is highly contested, however, and it fails to take into account the poor quality of these houses (Free State Housing Campaign 2016).

Many people in Free State province, and across South Africa, struggle to get decent housing. Allocation criteria and processes are complex, confusing and not transparent, making it difficult to track applications and compounding corruption

Many people, in Free State province and across South Africa, struggle to get decent housing. Allocation criteria and processes are complex, confusing and not transparent, which makes it difficult for beneficiaries to track applications and compounds corruption. The budgets and development plans of local municipalities do not reflect the real housing needs on the ground. Housing standards are not consistent and there is inadequate monitoring of contractors, resulting in the delivery of sub-standard houses. Corruption and nepotism impact on allocation, discriminating against applicants and marginalising vulnerable groups.

The challenges in housing delivery are indicative of the failure of service delivery more generally, especially services for people living in poverty and other vulnerable groups. Women-headed households, unmarried women and widows are particularly vulnerable; they often have to compromise on safety and live in dangerous circumstances due to a lack of decent, affordable housing.

Against this backdrop, the campaign was established with the following objectives and goals:

1. **People with inadequate housing being capacitated to hold government (local government in particular) accountable for housing delivery**
   - People who are informed and with access to information to identify blockages and pressure points and track delivery.
   - Women are better informed of their housing rights and the campaign is highlighting women's housing issues.
   - People are mobilised and speaking with one voice around housing delivery.
   - People's voices are amplified through diverse media strategies.
2. **Government and statutory bodies responding to real housing needs**
   - More transparency around the inclusion of housing in local budgeting and planning processes. Improved housing delivery at municipal level.
   - Statutory bodies exert pressure for improved housing delivery.

Methodology

The campaign chose to use participatory action research (PAR), a methodology which originated in Latin America and which involves community members and outsiders working together on cycles of inquiry, reflection and action (Fals-Borda and Rahman 1991; Reason and Bradbury 2008). The campaign understood PAR as "an action / learning process of initially people talking about and analysing their housing issues and determining what action they will take. As they act people and formations learn – acquiring a critical consciousness of their own condition and increasingly move their struggles for transformative change" (Anthony 2017). This choice is based on the fact that "people have the capacity, the wisdom and the passion to effect change because neo-liberalism and all its manifestations affects them, they feel strongly about it … sometimes there is 'the culture of silence', 'the culture of conforming as recipients of services'" (*Ibid.*:10).

The campaign design proposed that the initial action research would include the participating CAOs and focus on four strategic towns. The process would be used to enhance capacity of CAOs for action research, which they would replicate in their own areas, to highlight core housing issues in the province.

At the campaign design workshop (November 2016), the cycle of action and research was developed further, and the following steps were identified.

1. A group of core activists is established by local advice offices (AOs) and trained using an educational pack, which covers key information on housing issues, political education, women's power and gender egalitarianism, and on organising concepts, principles and strategy, as well as a guide to PAR developed by the ARL (action, reflection and learning) facilitator.

2. The door-to-door survey is then rolled out in the four selected towns. AOs "play a supportive role and enabling role" in the process, which is led by community activists.

3. Activists go into the field and the process unfolds – could be street / path meetings, block meetings, mass meetings – and action unfolds.

4. Activists document, including case studies; these findings are compared and validated with policy-level research conducted by two universities (see below).

5. Further action and engagement with local governments and relevant institutions and media, directly and through community radio stations.

6. The process is constantly evaluated and refined in provincial and local reflection workshops.

What was achieved?

In relation to its first objective (community awareness and activism), during the year for which it received funding, the campaign achieved the following.

- Participatory action research: the door-to-door survey was undertaken in four towns: Kroonstad, Bethlehem, Smithfield and Wesselbron. The survey engaged 1,643 households. Twenty-eight PAR core groups (with 282 members) were formed across 12 towns in the province. Of these, 12 groups (four of which are women's groups) received one to two rounds of PAR training and support.

- Mobilisation: all core group actions involved mobilisation, with door-to-door work undertaken in the four areas where the PAR took place. More than 3,000 community members attended meetings and took action, including marches to deliver petitions and community meetings with decision-makers (such as mayors and the province's premier), and a general meeting (*indaba*) with the South African Human Rights Commission.

- Women's leadership: four women's core groups were set up, along with a provincial women's task team of six members elected to monitor the women's power programme. In addition, two provincial women's workshops were held with the goal of strengthening the role of women in the campaign and within the CAO sector. Women's housing issues are emerging, particularly in Kroonstad, where the women's core group has had time to settle into the rhythm of Tuesday meetings and heightened activity. Overall, at local level, there has been a visible shift in women's confidence levels and their ability to articulate issues, whether in relation to housing or processes.[6]

- Research support: the University of the Free State (UFS) undertook a baseline study on housing in the Free State and Rhodes University worked with the data available from the PAR to compare it with formal policy information and the baseline data.

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6 The shift is evidenced by the Making All Voices Count Country Engagement Developer's observations of the early meetings and the last coordination committee meeting attended in June 2017.

- Use of community radio and video: to popularise and raise awareness about the campaign, this involved six stations with at least 16 interviews broadcast.

- Action, reflection and learning activities: these included a campaign design workshop in November 2016, which led to the election of a campaign coordinating committee, integrated in the structure of ACAOSA (with hub and district hub CAOs). The committee had six meetings over the course of the year, while four other meetings were held by the coordinating hubs.

In relation to the second objective, key outcomes included the following.

1. **Government and statutory bodies were responding to real housing needs:**

   - The premier and other provincial government officials with key roles visited Kroonstad. The process of issuing title deeds was begun, as was the process of demolishing old and dangerous houses in order to rebuild.

   - In Ficksburg, the councillor provided information on housing waiting lists, houses built and budget allocated for housing.

   - In Bethlehem, fake 'title deeds' were issued as a build-up to local government elections. These were later proved to be false and the matter reported to the Office of the Deeds Registry, which has begun to investigate. The Deeds Registry also launched a provincial road show towards fast-tracking the issuing of title deeds and addressing cases of fraud such as emerged in the Xariep PAR, where one owner can have title deeds of up to ten 'RDP' houses.[7]

2. **More transparency around the inclusion of housing in local budgeting and planning processes: improved housing delivery at municipal level. PAR activists are more confident to demand transparency given their training and the guidance available in the education packs.**

3. **Statutory bodies exert pressure for improved housing delivery: the South African Human Rights Commission responded to the campaign by holding a housing *indaba* attended by more than 3,000 community members, and agreed to present cases in their parliamentary report and to report back on progress.**

Reflections on the Free State Housing Campaign

Francesca:

Alvin and Angela, your role throughout the campaign was to support its early development and articulation (Angela) and later on to support the implementation of the PAR, and the action and learning cycle (Alvin). How did you become involved with the campaign? What is PAR to you and what was the process of choosing it as a methodology?

Angela:

I was contacted to see if I could support putting together a concept note. An initial four-day conversation with the CAOs and the funder made it clear that this is not the usual work of advice offices – beyond the case-by-case, some people in the room agreed that this was conceptualised in the campaign. At that point emerged a strong need for ARL support. I had never envisioned my engagement to expand beyond the initial conceptualisation, and I felt geographically I was in the wrong position so we got Alvin involved as he was much closer geographically and had experience with community-driven campaigns.

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7 'RDP houses' are small, four−room built houses, constructed under the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme.

What PAR has given to people is a consciousness about the structural problems in the delivery of housing; it has surfaced women's leadership, and the bravery and courage of people claiming back the dignity in a situation of de-humanisation

Alvin:

The PAR methodology was chosen at a workshop held in November 2016, with a number of stakeholders and partners including the local university that would have provided research support. At that meeting we adopted PAR because it's a people-led methodology which is what we agreed this campaign needed to be. We needed a methodology that allowed for people's voices and perspectives on housing issues to be at the centre of the campaign's actions and proposed solutions. In this case, the PAR entailed the formation of core groups of activists trained to gather the perspective of the community on how they experience housing issues, and what they think can be done to address them. Activists went door-to-door to discuss with their fellow community members about their housing issues and what, in their view, could be done to address them. We needed a very participatory process through which communities could organise in local structures (core groups), do their own inquiry and research, set their own agenda of actions to take and demands for the government. CAOs were to support this people-led process by providing space and resources to carry out the activities.

What PAR has given to people is a consciousness about the structural problems in the delivery of housing; and it has surfaced women's leadership, and the bravery and courage of people claiming back the dignity in a situation of de-humanisation. It has also led to other projects, such as women-led initiatives to obtain playground areas for their children.

Francesca:

One of the challenges that the campaign had to grapple with from the very beginning was ensuring unity in struggle, bearing in mind that the 22 advice offices had different political and organisational approaches. What differences emerged between advice offices, and how did these impact the campaign's strategies, including the PAR?

Angela:

During the initial design workshop, when it was agreed that this issue would have required CAOs to go beyond their traditional case-by-case model of operation, there were many nods of agreement but one person stood up and said "we are service providers, we extend the arm of the government, not campaigners". Looking back, we should have been more aware that there was not a homogenous understanding of the campaign.

In fact, significant differences emerged in the way PAR was implemented across the four towns. While everyone agreed to the methodology developed during the November workshop, in most cases CAOs sent out their own staff for the door-to-door survey, and PAR ended up being similar to a traditional type of research. This, according to us, weakened the outcome of the process. Deeper than that, there was a failure in understanding PAR as an emancipatory and 'self-do' process that requires an orientation that understands the ability of people to do by themselves. Our assumption that AOs would facilitate a truly people-led process was revealed to have been a wrong assumption: you can't expect people who work in a 'service delivery' mode to just jump into bottom-up activism.

Alvin:

This has to do with where CAOs currently stand today in the civic space. CAOs were very important centres of struggles in the 1980s, but over time, as governments adopted neoliberal frameworks and CAOs became dependent on the government for funding, they shifted towards a service delivery model of work. Accordingly, over time, they have taken a service delivery role and their staff have developed skills accordingly.

Angela:

And to expect CAOs who have been in the mode of service delivery, and maintained a certain power at community level … it was too big an ask to shift to PAR.[8] The different understanding of the role of advice offices in the process saw many offices remain focused on service delivery, leading actions and engaging with stakeholders on behalf of people (i.e. 'management' of actions such as the campaign), one or two CAOs have shifted towards a more emancipatory practice of self-organising and people-led action.

Francesca:

With regards to the first objective of the campaign … what type of outcomes resulted from these different approaches to PAR?

Alvin:

Community agitation and mobilisation brought attention back to the issue of housing. The door-to-door process dealt with very nuanced issues and exposed endemic corruption at local level. However, it also increased people's expectations that something can be done to address their issues. Whether the campaign will be able to take forward the issues raised by people depends on the extent to which the PAR was successful in building people's capacity to organise. Where the PAR process was more emancipatory and led to the formation of solid community groups, including women's groups, that meet regularly, it is definitely more likely that these will be able to sustain the advocacy with the government. CAOs won't have the capacity to sustain the campaign as it does not fit in their working model.

In terms of engaging with the state, in Kroonstad, where the PAR process was more emancipatory and there was a more solid history of activism, core groups organised an impressively large march to which the local government retaliated by smearing and attacking the campaign, and putting quite a few activists behind bars. We tried to mitigate the risk of retaliation by engaging with partners who have experience on these issues, such as the Right2Know campaign. Also, the leadership was

very tactical as they were not in the forefront of the struggle because they knew that they would have to deal with the aftermath. Nevertheless, getting people out of jail has proven difficult, and some people should have been released much earlier, because the state provided a lawyer who was not truly supportive of the activists.

Francesca:

And what about the approaches used to engage with the government in other areas? Did different approaches to PAR lead to less confrontational engagement?

Angela:

The first thing that needs to be said is that generally at local level people do try to engage the state, they ask for meetings and the state doesn't create the space for those meetings. People really wanted to engage, but there was such a failure [from the government]. This is why they get to the protest dimensions, to gain a space for engagement.

The choice of approach depends on conditions that are conducive to that. In some cases you can have a conversation with people in government, depending on their orientation and how sensitive they are to listening.

For instance, in other towns, like Bethlehem, for example, the PAR led to engagement with chapter 9 institutions.[9] There, the CAO had good relations with the South African Human Rights Commission and it was easier to engage with them and get the government to respond.

Francesca:

So partially it also depends on who is leading the efforts to engage with the government?

Angela:

Yes, that's true, in Kroonstad there is deeper history of activism so that's why it became confrontational. But we have found that a strategy that may have started in a certain way evolved differently. In Bethlehem, as I said, the initial

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8 The PAR Guide developed by the ARL facilitator spells out: "the praxis of AOs needs to be looked at as to how AOs approach the campaign and an AO if supporting a campaign may need to change its praxis for this campaign".

9 Chapter 9 of The South African Constitution (1996) provides for the creation of "state institutions to support constitutional democracy". These bodies are "independent, and subject only to the Constitution and the law, and they must be impartial and must exercise their powers and perform their functions without fear, favour or prejudice", section 181(2).

The evidence from the PAR was so overwhelming ... that the councillor realised it wasn't a personal attack on him, but was raising systemic issues. He began collaborating, leading to more transparency over allocation of houses, agreements and budgets

strategy was to present the findings of the PAR to the mayor and local councillor who seemed open to engage. Then the tactic shifted and local groups approached the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), who invited the same mayor and councillor. When these stories came out, the local government officials were not that open anymore as they felt they had been put in the corner in front of the commission.

In every PAR findings the issues were huge, people living in terrible circumstances, so the extent was so overwhelming that it was clear that they needed a bigger intervention than the councillor; and ACAOSA has an institutional relationship through a memorandum of understanding with the SAHRC.

In Ficksburg, at the beginning, the councillor came out very aggressively against the campaign but when the PAR findings were presented to him he was helpful and shared processes and agreements over the housing. The reason why is that the evidence coming out of PAR was so overwhelming, the issues were so far-reaching – Ficksburg activists also used videos on their phones to document them – and the approach with which it was presented wasn't aggressive, that the councillor realised it wasn't a personal attack on him, but rather was pointing at systemic issues, and began collaborating. This led to increased transparency over the processes for allocation of houses and agreements, including budgets.

Francesca:

Campaign dynamics: With regards to your role as campaign mentors, how were these different approaches and interpretations of PAR dealt with internally? Given that we know that people shift their consciousness at different paces and through different processes, how did you try to accommodate 'complementarity' of styles and approaches?

Angela:

From the ARL, it was very clear that there were different approaches, but it was difficult to navigate them. Once we realised that there was not a homogenous understanding of what it means to be people-led, and that it would have been difficult for AOs to give away their power and let the people lead the campaign, we tried to address it through peer-learning. We wanted to use Kroonstad, where the most emancipatory process was taking place, as a pilot for other towns, and that's why (for instance) the regional reflection was planned to be in Kroonstad. The idea was that since PAR was working there, other towns could learn from it.

But this had been highly resisted by part of the leadership, triggering a huge conflict between the campaign 'champion' [who was from Kroonstad] and the coordinating committee, which completely paralysed the campaign, made the campaign champion resign. It resulted in some of the most active and vocal core groups being side-lined and left without the support needed to run the campaign.

Francesca:

In reflection, what could have been done to build a more cohesive campaign? Was the strategy of having advice offices, with all the constraints and limitations they face, doomed to fail from the start?

Angela:

I don't think it was the wrong entry point, there was a lot of care in that choice. CAOs are rooted in the community, and very well-positioned to lead campaigns. What I think we failed at is that we underestimated the extent of the differences and how they would have played out.

Alvin:

I think that one of the failures and weaknesses of the ARL was to develop organisational culture based on common grounds and principles. That would have created the conditions conducive to people saying what route they wanted to take. Instead, there wasn't the space for discussing different political strategies and allowing people to pursue the one they wanted. In these kinds of collective processes, it's important to start where people are at in relation to your paradigm. Their position and thinking needs to be unpacked carefully. Instead, there wasn't space for letting people choose their way; the PAR was rushed in the other towns without the core groups having adequate support.

Angela:

The rush came from the fact that the geographical spread was so big. In fact, both the issue and the area covered were too broad and made conversations vague and left even more space for disagreements and confusion. Maybe focusing on one issue – for instance, the title deeds – would have been better.

Lastly, something very important is that the way the funding was reallocated within the campaign became a way for imposing a certain line and approach. Because the leadership from ACAOSA was in disagreement with the champion, any activity that the champion would try to do was not financially supported. Chronic lack of funding among CAOs pushed some of them to do PAR in order to receive funding, even if they did not buy into the approach. Something that I would do again is to not have the funding linked to the ACAOSA structure.

Francesca:

In addition to unity, another issue that highlighted uneven power relations within the campaign was the emergence of women's leadership. The focus on women's leadership was designed from the very beginning of the campaign, and culminated in the appointment of a woman campaign champion to replace the champion who had resigned. Could you talk about the campaign's experience in building women's leadership? In what ways did women's voices shape the strategies and issues raised by the campaign? And what were the obstacles in building their leadership?

Angela:

The main strategy was to create a safe space for women to discuss about housing issues and develop leadership skills. This began in the first Campaign Design Workshop last November, where women held their own discussions and then reported their perspectives to the rest of the group – which was very much needed, since women would remain silent during plenary sessions. Again at the campaign champion's meeting in July, women were very vocal and spoke out the managerialist style of some of the male leaders.

Alvin:

Providing the space for women to raise their own issues and take the lead on PAR activities brought significant contributions to the campaign. By being at the forefront of door-to-door surveys, women were able to develop a more grounded understanding of the range of issues connected to housing, and suggest concrete solutions: for instance, the need for children's playgrounds and the potential for community-based solutions to address hunger, such as school gardening.

Angela:

The role of women has been crucial in two ways: firstly, women are more practical about what constitutes a house which fosters dignity – for instance, what concrete arrangements should be made to ensure that people live in dignity, enjoy privacy and safety (e.g. having toilets inside the building, separate rooms and beds, etc.). This nuanced understanding helped address issues of design of the homes, something around which people are never consulted. Secondly, they were able to translate individual families' needs, which emerged through the PAR, into community-level demands – a key example being the strong demand for safe spaces for children to play. Similarly, they were able to expose the links between evictions and domestic violence, as many women are forced to endure situations of abuse because of fear of being evicted.

In terms of how the women's leadership component of the campaign was managed, I would say that we have been successful at prioritising activism and leadership at provincial level, but we failed to translate these efforts at local level. For many of the women involved, this was the first experience of engaging in political activism, and in provincial-level meetings where they found a safe space to

Communications can be very elitist and the right technology needs to be chosen carefully. In our case, radio was used extensively and effectively – community radio stations and community journalism

build their confidence there was a great energy in the room. However, their enthusiasm and sense of confidence crumbled at the time of implementing their ideas at local advice office level, where they had to run decisions through the predominately male-led CAO leadership. In most AOs, women do not hold positions of power, and the male leadership is a huge barrier for women to carry out the plans made at provincial level. The surprisingly high degree of patriarchy entrenched in ACAOSA frustrated the programme developed at provincial meetings and led by the women's champion, Noma Tshabalala.

At the end of the first year of the campaign, there was a solid group of about six women from different CAOs, led by the women's champion, who are communicating regularly and are very interested in developing a plan to carry ahead the campaign for the future. In Kroonstad, a local group of women was formed and will continue convening to discuss issues and organise actions. The challenge is to sustain these efforts, both at local and provincial levels, in the absence of funding.

Francesca:

With regards to technology, following a period of consultation with Making All Voices Count, the campaign chose to not use digital technologies for data collection purposes, as this would have widened existing marginalisation by excluding those who are not comfortable with digital technologies or cannot afford them. Instead, the campaign preferred using types of technologies such as radio that are suitable for popularising issues covered by the campaign, make the campaign visible and amplify its messages. How did you work with the question of technology from start to end of this first year of the campaign, given Making All Voices Count's particular interest in this and its relationship to improved responsive governance?

Alvin:

Because of the Making All Voices Count approach, in the beginning we included some tech experts (from the Code for SA project of tech hub Cobebridge[10]). But in the November workshop, that was rejected – people said it's not going to work. The coordinating committee rightly realised that there was a disconnect between the type of technology being discussed and the needs on the ground. For instance, it was very clear that we couldn't have done the PAR with smartphones and tablets: they would have been a barrier to interaction and to building trust with communities. Also, there were issues of Internet access, and we didn't want technology to reinforce existing inequalities. So we agreed that the PAR would be very basic.

Communications can be very elitist and the right technology needs to be chosen carefully. In our case, radio was used extensively and effectively – community radio stations and community journalism. Interestingly, Ficksburg AO was part of another project funded by Making All Voices Count that was training CAO staff in journalism skills – the Citizen Justice Network. Through that, the women's champion was trained on the use of videos to produce journalistic content on housing issues. We could have invested more in using videos as organising tools, but that was not possible during the short time frame of the grant.

Francesca:

In your reflections to Making All Voices Count you mentioned that the programme's focus on innovation and strengthening of voice and engagement with government was interpreted as being in opposition to the confrontation and mass actions such as the one that took place in Kroonstad. In your view, how can programmes such

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10 Chapter 9 of The South African Constitution (1996) provides for the creation of "state institutions to support constitutional democracy". These bodies are "independent, and subject only to the Constitution and the law, and they must be impartial and must exercise their powers and perform their functions without fear, favour or prejudice", section 181(2).

as Making All Voices Count (multi-donor and large scale) better support grass-roots political processes in contexts with high social conflicts?

Alvin:

First of all, we had a great Country Engagement Developer. She understands activism, the nature and complexity, and was not totally surprised by the dynamics that emerged. That made it much easier to deal with the challenges. If programmes like Making All Voices Count want to support people's struggle they really have to understand the contexts, the social terrain and where people are coming from. Sustainable justice programmes in contexts with closing civil society space need to build tactical skills within people, and that's organic, it doesn't happen overnight. And they need to invest in local people, who have the ability to develop tactics because those people see what the problems are and understand the context.

Grants also need to create systems that are conducive to understanding the process – which the ARL component allowed for – and mitigating that 'input–output' orientation. We develop our learning paradigm, and that's important because it controls the frames and not vice versa. Donors need to see that social change and the resonances of work around it are difficult to measure, and that their reporting formats are not conducive to learning. They complicate matters that do not need to be complicated. Much more qualitative reporting could have taken place, without the frustrating experience of filling in a format in blocks that repeats itself. Subjecting community leadership to this kind of technical form-filling is not necessary, especially where there's an ARL approach. In this respect the ARL reports, including Angela's report, were very useful. Now if we had the Kroonstad ARL provincial event and its reflection, then it would have been even more exciting in relation to the qualitative change.

Angela:

Donors need to be terribly aware of their language! Even a word like 'innovation' could be misused in this context, with people from the coordinating committee saying there is nothing innovative in 'old-style marches'. Of course, it is true that one should use technology, but in a context like the Free State Housing Campaign,

both these words were easy to be misinterpreted.

This campaign was a good choice of investment but perhaps donors did not envisage its outcomes – so it's important to be open to outcomes that were not anticipated, and support them if they are led by people.

Alvin:

A focus on innovation is good, but it needs to be based on solid contextual and political analysis; our broad-level analysis of housing is framed within the current neoliberal paradigm, and this allows us to identify at the ground level the strategic issues and what we hope to achieve and on the basis of which we develop the strategy and tactics. The use of technology may be powerful, but enabling people to talk to each other and investing in people is very powerful too, and should not be put in second place! It's also important to rely on resources that are [already] available to people, and expand it from there.

Francesca:

Future: Following this first year of actions, what were some overall gains by the campaign? And what is the way forward for municipalities where core groups remain active?

Alvin:

I would say that overall, some important gains were made. In some places, poor-quality houses were demolished and rebuilt properly (Kroonstad), while in others people were given keys of a number of houses that had been laying vacant until now (Bethlehem). Moreover, the Human Rights Commission has undertaken to address the many cases documented with relevant authorities, including raising them with the relevant parliamentary commission. In response to the uncovering of hundreds of cases exposing issues with title deeds, the Deeds Registry at provincial level has undertaken to clear the backlog of title deeds and issue all pending ones.

This demonstrates that, overall, the campaign succeeded in putting housing on the government's agenda, and that power dynamics have begun to shift. One year is a very short time for the type of change the campaign seeks to obtain, but this is a

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10 See Brock with McGee (2017: 9) for a description of Codebridge's work with Making All Voices Count.

good start. The challenge from here on is to sustain the pressure on local governments and follow up with relevant players who made commitments and promises. This requires having strong structures at local level, which can keep the mobilisation on. I think that the approach undertaken by some AOs, which have raised people's expectations through the PAR process, but have not put enough efforts into building local leadership capable of continuing this work, is very risky and potentially damaging.

In areas where the PAR approach has been more bottom-up, such as Kroonstad, Bethlehem and

Ficksburg, this pressure is likely to continue, although it may be challenging for local CAOs to support people's struggle, beyond their routine type of work, without having adequate funding and if ACAOSA or the AOs' leadership are not campaign-oriented.

Lastly, in terms of strategies, the campaign now needs to focus on articulating alternatives and advocating for them. Some initial suggestions emerged during this first year but more work is needed in developing these ideas into concrete plans.

Putting the Free State Housing Campaign in perspective: the view from Making All Voices Count

Francesca:

What do you think has been the significance of this campaign for the advice offices involved? What has it meant and what's left of it now that the grant period is over?

Deborah:

With the consistent decline in funding to the CAO sector since 1994, the pressure has driven CAOs into a precarious existence. The lifeline that they are currently seeking has many wanting to formalise the position of 'paralegal' within the legal hierarchy and to have CAOs function formally as providers of access to justice services. This would shift the position of CAOs as historically accountable to communities and they will be accountable within the state – a very different arrangement. In fact, ACAOSA is increasingly shifting away from the 'C' in CAO and what it can mean for strengthening community self-organising.

But this shift is not homogenous and there are still CAOs who want to retain their autonomy and work outside of the state, and who worry that this new arrangement would compromise their work and 'silence' their social justice work.

This campaign is in tension with the trajectory of institutionalising CAOs, and as this tension

emerged, so did the conflict internal to the campaign's structure.

This group of CAOs chose to look at what it will take to build a campaign that addresses 'responsive governance' and they have certainly learned some good and some tough lessons. The toughest lesson has been on assumptions around what it takes to build and have unity and that this needs some very deep political and philosophical questions settled for the campaign to cohere. All of the CAOs have had to think really carefully about what this question of 'a community-driven campaign' means and what their approach is to the questions that drive it.

The discordance and discomfort that it has brought to the group is not a bad thing in our view as it has posed some of the sharp questions for CAOs to answer about what they are and where they are going. And it has exposed the fault lines around power in the group and how it is organised.

Housing campaign work is likely to continue in Kroonstad because the core groups have cohered and done follow-through work over the period of months. There is also a chance that work that was not just a one-off event will continue in some form (such as in Ficksburg, Bethlehem and QwaQwa). And the radio work should continue, with housing

We have also learned about the dangers of development sector language and the assumptions we make when using words – terms like 'innovation' and 'M&E' have come to have very neutralised technocratic meanings to many

an obviously important ongoing issue that communities will want to engage on. But the Free State Housing Campaign as originally conceived will not go forward holistically given the divisions that emerged within the group.

Francesca:

What has Making All Voices Count learned about facilitating the creation of, and supporting, a large-scale partnership among community-based organisations, accompanied by external mentors? What were some assumptions and how were they managed?

Deborah:

We accepted the risk associated with the assumption that this group of CAOs would unite around the issue of housing to be able to build a viable campaign. We were committed to allowing for the experiment and not to pilot with 'just a few' so that smaller and more marginalised offices could be exposed to the experiment.

We have learned that in working with a large and complex group, plus with the ARL mentors – organisations like Making All Voices Count need to play a role that is actively supportive but has the capacity to give regular and consistent accompaniment time itself. This will allow for the 'critical friend' role to be effective. The campaign should have had better results on key features like the quality of the education pack and the quality of feedback given to the universities on their reports, and this work should have yielded better-quality results.

We have also learned about the dangers of development sector language and the assumptions

we make when using words. So terms like 'innovation' and 'M&E' (monitoring and evaluation) have come to have very neutralised technocratic meanings to many, and we need to take care if using them to clarify what we mean. One of the moments of feedback at the end of this project was the verbal message that the ARL mentors "did not do M&E properly, as they were too political".

Francesca:

More generally, what has Making All Voices Count learned from this process about supporting voices of historically marginalised groups on such a politically contested issue?

Deborah:

This work demands a highly agile approach as a donor and therefore is time and resource demanding, but is necessary to do if they are funding in complex contexts like this.

Funding in such complex contexts and with such disparate interests and voices necessitates an approach that is accepting of multi-pronged dimensions to one campaign. We were comfortable that some CAOs would want less contested approaches to campaigning while others would be more strident. But the energy and time demanded of mentors and accompaniers of such campaigning is huge, and is not easy for them if they are philosophically and politically committed to one or a few angles to the approach.

And last but not least, an important lesson is that the quality of the research and learning materials in such a campaign must be excellent and really well-written and mediated for second language and literacy considerations.

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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.

Making All Voices Count is supported by UK aid from the UK Government, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Omidyar Network, and is implemented by a consortium consisting of Hivos, IDS and Ushahidi.

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 fields of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and technology for T&A (Tech4T&A).

About Making All Voices Count practice papers

The Research, Evidence and Learning component has produced a series of practitioner research and learning grants to support a range of actors working on citizen voice, T&A and governance to carry out self-critical enquiry into their own experiences and contexts. The main output of each grant is what the practitioner learns and applies to their own practice. Practitioners can also decide to produce their own written outputs. The purpose of the practice papers, written on completion of each grant, is to capture the essence of that learning process through a reflective dialogue between programme staff and funded partners, to share with a wider audience of peer practitioners and policy-makers.

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