



# Action for Accountability Gathering report: Towns Action Network

22 September 2022

The [Action for Accountability](#) Gathering was hosted by the Towns Action Network (TAN), previously known as Changemakers Town Network. A diverse group of 67 people across South Africa joined, including changemakers, local government officials, NGOs and residents.

The gathering was convened by TAN Support Partners, [In Transformation Initiative](#), [Ranyaka](#), [Democracy Works Foundation](#), [Kagiso Trust](#), [Karoo Development Foundation](#), [Restaurare](#), [Accountability Lab South Africa](#) and the [Western Cape Economic Development Partnership \(EDP\)](#).

## Highlights included:

- Small town government and population trends in South Africa, by Municipal IQ
- Update on the Action for Accountability initiative in Makhanda
- Presentation from the Corruption Justice and Legitimacy Programme on Social Norms for influence

A recording of the full session is available on the EDP YouTube page.. Recordings from previous gatherings as well as support tools for all network members to explore are available in this online folder.

## 1. Welcome and Introductions

The participants entered the meeting to the sounds of [Makwande Lwande](#) performed by [Connections Carnival](#) micro-grant winner Sibusile Xaba, as well as a [slideshow](#) from the Carnival which is currently underway across South Africa. The aim of the Carnival is for organisations undertaking diverse small-town regeneration to partner and advocate for systems change for greater impact.

The EDP's CEO Andrew Boraine gave a brief background on the EDP and TAN which has grown from 100 to almost 300 members since launching in March. As a public benefit collaborative intermediary organisation, the EDP supports government and non-state sectors to work together to achieve development outcomes.

Andrew highlighted why small and medium towns matter: they support regional economies, agricultural production, and tourism and provide connection points for surrounding villages. Despite this, towns in South Africa are facing numerous strain, including from mines closing, employment anchors leaving due to the lack of service delivery, floods and municipal performance issues.

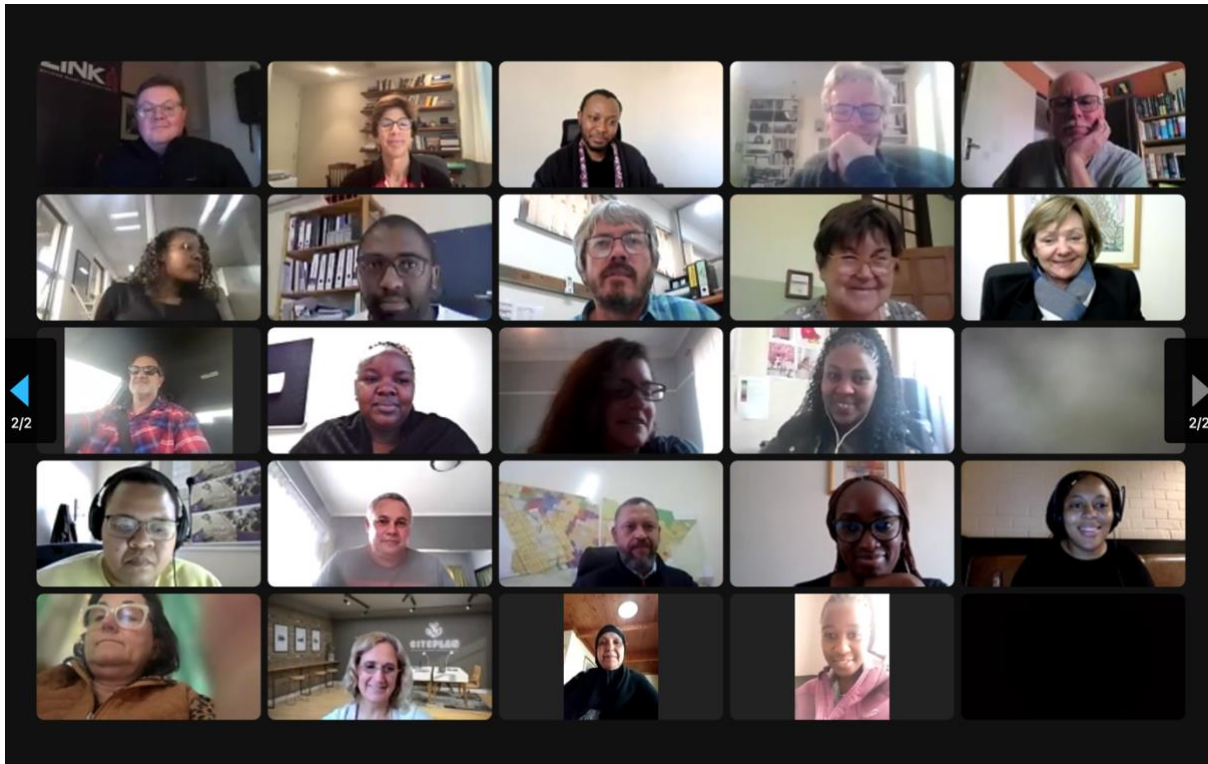
TAN's approach is similar to the EDP's response to Cape Town's 'Day Zero' drought in 2018, and the food crisis exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, namely the 3 C's:

- **Connect:** Connecting people with the same interests
- **Communicate:** Listening and documenting the stories of changemakers who have contributed to turning around the fate of their towns
- **Collaborate:** Working with residents, policymakers as well as researchers

TAN provides an independent platform that unites different sectors together across different parts of the country.

Andrew closed by asking participants to join hands under the Action for Accountability (A4A) theme, which has surfaced in many engagement processes across numerous small towns.

The recurring question is how to hold those responsible for delivering services accountable for their performance. Communities alone cannot turn around the fortunes of their town without cooperation from their public authority. The A4A theme calls for public authorities to be held accountable to their constituents rather than their political 'seniors'.



*Above: TAN members and participants join for the Action for Accountability Gathering*

## 2. Presentations

Below are summaries of speaker inputs and links to presentations, where available.

### Municipal IQ – Kevin Allen

Kevin shared insights on small town governance and population trends in South Africa, along with his concerns about small towns, particularly the impact of municipal deterioration due to the lack of governance on small-town communities.

#### Presentation highlights

- Positive trends and factors in small-town municipal governance that could be scaled across other municipalities.
- The reasons for out-migration of small-town populations
- Action for accountability: lessons from what has happened in municipalities

In summary: not all small-town municipalities are performing badly. Those that are performing well provide valuable lessons which other municipalities can emulate. It's important to reach out to municipalities performing badly to identify the root cause. Understanding why people are fleeing failing municipalities is also important, whether it is due to concerns about survival or unemployment caused by businesses leaving due to collapsed and unreliable services.

Kevin shared amendments to the Public Audit Act (2019), namely the new Systems Amendment Act which bars politicians from holding admin positions and sets out minimum councillor requirements. These amendments are there to assist lobby groups and communities to hold municipalities more accountable. Instituting legal proceedings or lobbying for a municipality to be placed under administration is expensive, burdensome, and doesn't really work.

He concluded by outlining the best ways to heighten the TAN's Action for Accountability theme – what can TAN participants do to get the municipality to do better:

- Create lobby groups that are representative of all stakeholders. This needs representativity and strength in numbers.
- Petitions, meetings with Mayor and councillors, supported by facts and figures
- Participation in public participation processes (convened by the municipality)
- Protests are a double-edged sword: if issues get to the media, the municipality will take note, but they are becoming increasingly more violent.
- Pragmatism is key.
- Partner with your municipalities by lending skills and expertise, such as accounting and engineering, or equipment like graders and tractors.



## Municipal IQ in a nutshell

1. **Municipal IQ specialises in the collection and analysis of local government data to assess municipal performance**
2. **Data used – aside from media-based service delivery protest data – is nationally collected, policy norm standard data e.g. National Treasury, AGSA, Stats SA**
3. **We are independent, data-driven, subscription organisation with public and private sector clients**

**MunicipalIQ**   
MUNICIPAL DATA AND INTELLIGENCE

2

© Municipal IQ. Not for quotation or circulation without permission.

*Above: About Municipal IQ in a nutshell.*

Accountability Lab – Sekoetlane Phamodi

Presenting on the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS)

Sekoetlane presented the work done through National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council, with a brief description of what the strategy is about and how it was developed. They focused on Pillar 1 of the strategy which is on Active Citizenry that encourages active citizenry by:

- Supporting active citizens and promoting values reorientation initiatives to prevent and combat corruption
- Protecting and supporting whistle-blowers and resource whistleblowing mechanisms
- Increasing and strengthening transparency in all sectors
- Improving integrity management and encouraging a commitment to ethical behaviour.



*Above: Snapshot of Pillar 1 – Citizen participation on the NACS.*

Sekoetlane concluded by inviting participants to engage as NACS is looking for strategic partners to assist and support the implementation of the strategy.

See Sekoetlane’s full presentation [here](#).

**Andrew (EDP) provided a summary with key highlights from the speakers:**

- As outlined by Sekoetlane, a decline in trust in government and public institutions exacerbates declining trust in communities and the breakup of the social fabric.
- Accountability is not just holding public officials accountable but also how we hold ourselves accountable. It is not only about the relationship between citizens and their government, but about the relationship between citizens. As seen in other projects where the EDP works, conversations between local communities and the authorities become fixated on who belongs and who doesn’t, which paralyzes citizen action, entrepreneurship and volunteerism.
- Simply putting municipalities under administration often does not work. Instead, building stronger cross-sector, cross-town alliances and strengthening numbers has greater impact.
- Poor governance is a disaster for the socio-economic and environmental performance of the local area. This is supported by Municipal IQ data on population shrinkage in some small towns. Provincial government dysfunction also plays a role in local, town and municipal dysfunctionality.



## Action for Accountability in Makhanda, Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM) – Lungile Penxa

‘Action for Accountability’ is a joint-project involving PSAM, Accountability Lab SA and Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, which aims to enhance public participation to improve citizen-led advocacy and accountability of duty barriers, particularly in local government.

The project was commissioned due to the state of poor governance, particularly in Makhanda where service delivery is poor, there is resistance from officials and politicians to being held accountable, and consequence management systems are not implemented.

Lungile explained the ‘Quick Actions’ concept where organisations involved in Makhanda work collectively with active citizens through an advocacy process. This involves looking at current issues faced by the municipality and challenging the municipality to be held accountable by writing to the media and giving the municipality an opportunity to present its side of the story.

Any organisations interested in working with PSAM may contact Lungile on [L.Penxa@ru.ac.za](mailto:L.Penxa@ru.ac.za)

## Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse (OUTA) - Norman de Villiers

Norman took participants through the [Link App](#), which gives users an easy, effective way to communicate directly with their municipality about any problems or service issues within their community. The app can be used for reporting faulty traffic lights and potholes, water leaks, sewerage overflows, illegal dumping and more. The app is available and downloadable on both IOS and Android.

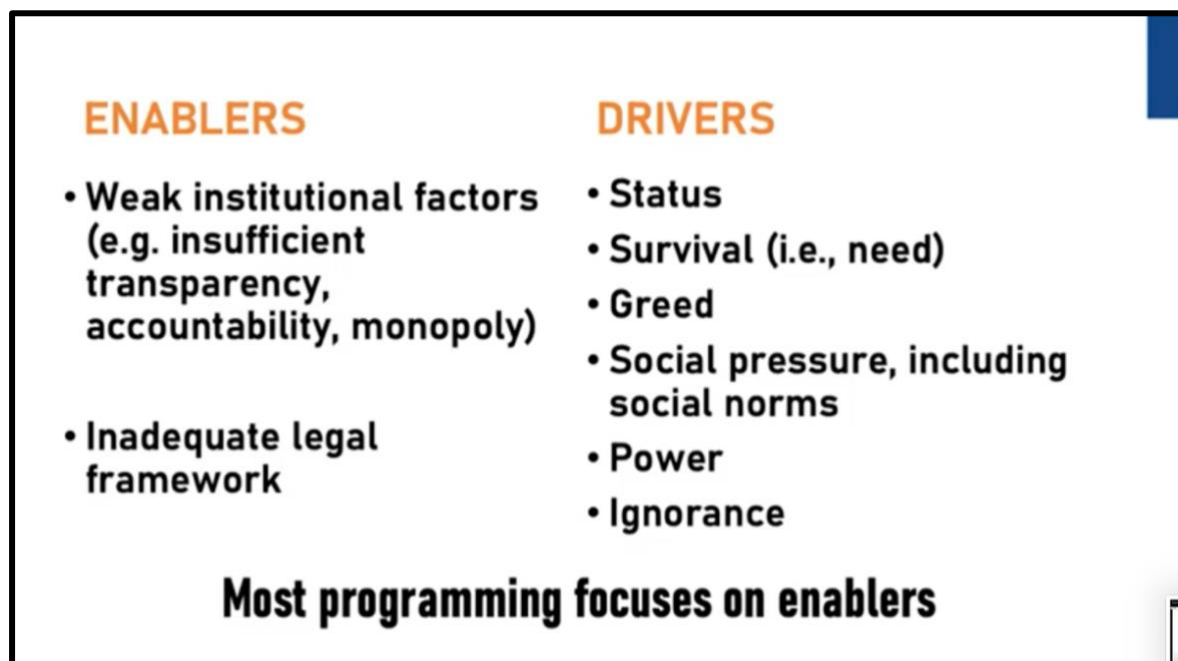


**Above:** The Link App, developed by OUTA, aiming to ‘make municipalities smarter’

## The Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy Programme – Diane Chigas

Corruption, Justice and Legitimacy (CJL) is a research-to-practice initiative committed to improving the effectiveness of anti-corruption programming in contexts of endemic corruption. CJL believes social norms should be considered a key element of programs that tackle corruption, accountability and transparency, or governance.

Tufts University Professor Diane Chigas explained CJL's work done in Uganda with the Public Service Commission. The Anti-Corruption Law of 2009 was adopted there, which mandates those that were convicted and jailed for corruption to be removed from the payroll. Although this law was adopted, those in jail for corruption were still getting paid. This is an example of how legal fixes to corruption often do not work.



*Above: Slide from Diane's presentation on the enablers and drivers of corruption.*

Diane also drew in on anti-corruption work done in Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo to understand the drivers behind corrupt municipal officials. In Ghana, where municipal officials were not getting paid enough, they decided to increase salaries; surprisingly this action actually increased the level of corruption.

So, what are social norms? Social norms are mutual expectations about the right way to behave. People do things because they believe that is what other people think they should do. Social norms have a high potential to reduce corruption and can be stronger drivers than attitudes or rules. Find out more about the CJL programme on social norms [here](#).

## COMPACT– Kate Tissington

The purpose of the [COMPACT project](#) is to improve accountability at the local government level and increase the quality of public participation in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP)

processes in local municipalities. COMPACT is working in 12 small town municipalities across South Africa (see slide below for towns) and is currently finalising an action research project, working with municipalities and partners to co-produce tools that will assist in increasing and improving public participation. Anyone who knows of organisations, civil society groups or institutions working in the 12 small towns are encouraged to contact Kate at [katet@pari.org.za](mailto:katet@pari.org.za)

**MY MUNICIPALITY compact PARTICIPATE PLAN ACCOUNT**

## Municipalities

Free State	Matjhabeng	LM
	Tswelopele	LM
KwaZulu-Natal	Newcastle	LM
	Umhlatuze	LM
North West	Moses Kotane	LM
	JB Marks	LM
Western Cape	Oudtshoorn	LM
	Witzenberg	LM
Eastern Cape	Blue Crane	LM
	Kouga	LM
Northern Cape	Sol Plaatje	LM
	Emthanjeni	LM

PARTNERS

**PARI** **SALGA** **INTEGRITY ACTION**

Co-funded by the European Union

**Above:** The COMPACT project's footprint across South Africa.

## Closing reflections:

- The diversity of initiatives across small towns in South Africa -from monitoring, research, campaigns, and pilot projects - is encouraging, and we can draw inspiration from the stories of people's efforts to enhance accountability.
- We need to collectively deepen our analysis of the causes of corruption and draw on global lessons from organisations like CJL on how best to utilise methodologies for combating corruption, linking theory to learning. Municipalities should be encouraged to take up the OUTA Link App reporting tool, which is free for use, both for communities and the municipality.
- We need to look at where resistance to being held accountable among municipal officials comes from. The current system is designed for upwards accountability to political parties for the next elections, rather than downwards accountability to the people they serve, including local communities and businesses, which is further entrenched by a deference for hierarchies and patriarchal systems.
- An emerging question is how to collectively support residents challenging their municipality and unblocking issues that are preventing service delivery. We



encourage organisations and participants to deepen collaboration and access to information to help build this support.

Lastly, singer and artist **Sibusile Xaba** surprised participants with a live performance from a hilltop in KwaZulu-Natal where his multi-cultural arts and culture hub U– The Space is working. As one of the Connections Carnival finalists, U- The Space has extended their arts programme through local permaculture and agriculture activities. In TAN tradition, participants joined Sibusile by grabbing a sound-making device and co-producing a carnival farewell.



***Above:** Sibusile Xaba turned his camera to the view for his performance.*

## TAN Resources

The following TAN support tools are available to all TAN members:

- The TAN database – includes contact details of TAN members. Due to POPIA, this is not ‘open access’. Please contact Phefumlela [phefumlela@wcedp.co.za](mailto:phefumlela@wcedp.co.za) to request contact details of any TAN members or organisations you require.
- An Towns Action Network [Interactive Map](#) which contains TAN members initiatives across South Africa. To be included on the Interactive Map, please share a brief description of your initiative with Phefumlela (email [phefumlela@wcedp.co.za](mailto:phefumlela@wcedp.co.za)).
- A [Towns Action Network](#) research and media articles database on the uKESA platform
- The Offers and Needs Catalogue for network members to utilize for partnership building, vertical and horizontal learning exchange and skills transfer.