

## Asivikelane: Helping South Africa's informal settlement residents' voices be heard

April 2021

The Asivikelane campaign was founded in early 2020 through a coalition formed by IBP South Africa and its partners – Afesis-corporplan, CORC and Planact – in the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The coalition feared that the conditions in which informal residents live – very close quarters, with failures in adequate water, sanitation and refuse removal provision – were not being sufficiently addressed by the government and municipalities. While the government in general, and metropolitan governments in particular, have enough money available in their budgets to reduce poor service delivery in informal settlements, they do not allocate enough of this money to improving services and infrastructure in these poverty-stricken areas. IBP and coalition partners had worked together since 2018 to hold metropolitan governments accountable for improved service provision in five metropolitan municipalities using the power of evidence-informed advocacy with local governments. As the COVID-19 pandemic set in, Asivikelane was designed to mobilize informal settlement residents to monitor failures in the delivery of critical water, sanitation and refuse removal services; report those findings, notably through the media; and engage metro governments on the challenges and potential short-term and long-term solutions.

Asivikelane – which means “let’s protect one another” in isiZulu – asks informal settlement volunteers to respond to questions regarding the quality of water, sanitation and waste management services over a seven-day recall. IBP South Africa then consolidates the answers and disseminates monthly results to bring problem areas to the attention of the relevant city agency and the public.

Since the campaign’s inception a little more than a year ago, the number of partners in the coalition has grown from three to 14<sup>1</sup>; the number of municipalities monitored has increased from an initial five metro municipalities to eight metros and seven smaller

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<sup>1</sup> Namely Afesis-corporplan, SASDI Alliance, Luthando OVC Care Centre, Planact, Abahlali baseMjondolo, 1to1, Development Action Group, Social Justice Coalition, Social Justice Initiative, European Union, SECO – Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, Luminate, Open Society Foundation for South Africa, and the Raith Foundation.

municipalities; and the number of informal settlements represented through citizen monitoring has grown from an initial 65 to 275.



Through consistent monitoring of service delivery and holding the relevant municipalities and governments accountable, Asivikelane has contributed to large-scale improvements in informal settlement communities since its

implementation in March 2020: 30 settlements (400,000 people) have access to improved water taps and tanks; 36 settlements (500,000 people) have access to safer and more hygienic sanitation facilities; and 18 settlements (250,000 people) have more regular refuse removal.

Furthermore, Asivikelane has built a network of 79 community leaders in participating informal settlements who have been empowered to campaign and advocate for improved service provision, armed with service failure information and insights, and connections to local decision-makers.

In late 2020 and early 2021, Asivikelane conducted budget analyses on the City of Cape Town, City of Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, and eThekweni. In addition, the team wrote a general analysis with suggestions about how these municipalities can improve services to their informal settlements without breaking the bank. These types of analyses serve to underpin the Asivikelane campaign with evidence-informed budget advocacy for improved allocations to water and sanitation services in informal settlements.

## Background

More than 5 million South Africans live in informal settlements. These sprawling, crowded communities frequently lack even the most basic of public services, such as clean toilets, running water and refuse removal. In fact, it is estimated that 43% of the total population of South Africa does not have access to clean water. In addition, within informal settlements communal toilets are often neglected and not regularly cleaned. Broken taps and blocked or broken toilets are the norm, and metros are generally slow to repair these. As a result, residents are left with fewer working taps and toilets, or in some cases none at all.

Most metros indicate that maintenance and repairs of basic services infrastructure is a “priority”, but recent comparative research has found that only six out of the 257 municipalities have spent adequately on repairs and maintenance over the 2016/17 – 2018/19 period. The lack of detailed budget information makes it difficult to evaluate whether the maintenance of taps and toilets in informal settlements is indeed being treated as important. This opacity makes it very difficult for the public and oversight actors to participate meaningfully in the local government budget process. What is clear is that the informal settlement share of budget allocations for the maintenance of taps and toilets is not sufficient, and more than 70% of residents reporting to Asivikelane have noted that it takes more than three months for anything to be fixed. Moreover, budget allocations

currently prioritize slow, high-cost upgrades that only benefit a few settlements. Scaled interventions that also meet the basic services needs of a larger number of residents in the short term would be far better.



Prior to Asivikelane, IBP's work focused on building the collective agency of informal settlement residents by promoting their participation in the planning and implementation of budgets for basic services. This work was done with support from its partners, Afesis-corplan, CORC and Planact. Planact has a solid reputation and base in the City of Johannesburg and Ekurhuleni; while Afesis-corplan is active in the Eastern Cape province, which covers metros like Nelson Mandela Bay.

Meanwhile, CORC is an important partner that has prioritized mobilizing networks of informal settlement residents around issues such as land, evictions, informal settlement upgrading and basic services. By working together, this coalition can have a far wider reach across the nation and build on relationships with officials in certain target areas.

## **Path to Asivikelane's results**

### *Joining of technical and political power*

Asivikelane builds on work carried out in 2018, when IBP South Africa and the Social Audit Network (SAN) partnered with Planact and 13 informal settlement communities in Ekurhuleni to conduct a social audit on the provision and maintenance of portable toilets. The audit mobilized the community as a whole, involving 20 000 residents as respondents, 157 community volunteers and seven ward councilors. The audit contributed substantial improvements to one of the city's new contracts for the provision of good quality sanitation services.

In the same way that previous work by IBP and partners focused on mobilizing the collective power of informal settlement communities, Asivikelane also relies on informal settlement community volunteers to report and monitor sanitary conditions in the informal settlements in which they live on behalf of the communities they represent (between 1.5 million and 3 million people, as reliable informal settlement population estimates are hard to come by).

To reinforce this network of community members, Asivikelane developed a network of 63 community facilitators, of which half are women. The core function of these community facilitators is to help partners build the budget collective agency of informal settlement residents through a number of ways. They mobilize communities, particularly women and the differently-abled; assist in the identification of stakeholders in the communities; brief communities about who in government is responsible for basic services and how they may be reached; inform communities about what level of basic services should be provided to them; report to our partners about the state of basic services and improvements that have been made; liaise with and rally communities around formal participation processes like Integrated Development Plans and budget submissions; participate in and provide feedback to communities about the outcomes of engagements with the government; and coordinate the collection of stories (sometimes writing them up), videos or photos from the community in order to gather more evidence of the sanitation challenges faced in the community.



*Communal toilet in an informal settlement*

The number of residents and informal settlements taking part in Asivikelane’s service monitoring is constantly increasing (from an initial 65 to 258 informal settlements at the peak of the campaign in 2020). This is in large part due to excellent collaboration with partner CSOs and the reach they have in these communities. By mobilizing members of the community to become engaged in the process of holding the government accountable for its failures in providing adequate basic services, Asivikelane has helped informal settlement residents find their voice and achieve real change that has affected the lives of millions of individuals. Within the first weeks of Asivikelane’s launch, metros committed to improving water, sanitation and waste management service delivery and quickly acted on their commitments, installing new water tanks and taps and addressing water shortages in cities such as Cape Town, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni, eThekweni, or Buffalo City. In addition, some residents reported that more regular cleaning of communal toilets was taking place at their settlements and that protective gear was being distributed to janitors.

### ***Building budget and political advocacy skills***

Since the beginning of SPARK implementation, IBP South Africa has provided 160 instances of training, technical assistance and mentoring to seven partner organizations on SPARK strategy development and implementation, SPARK monitoring and evaluation, and engagements in relevant decision-making processes etc. Partners then further imparted knowledge and built the capacity of 876 informal settlement community members (including community facilitators) on budget and political advocacy.

In addition, two important learning events took place. The first occurred in July 2020 and was entitled 'Building residents' voice in Asivikelane: what have we learnt to date about deepening connections with communities and residents?' The discussion brought to the surface several results from, and learning points about, what is working well in Asivikelane. We were able to determine that Asivikelane has strengthened connections between residents and community leaders within and across communities by providing accessible platforms for remote engagement; it has obtained and secured commitment from community respondents to stay engaged; it has given residents voice, which has raised hope and allowed space to raise other issues; and there are emerging signs that Asivikelane has helped create a dialogue between municipalities and informal settlements. This is significant as Asivikelane provides information that municipalities do not have and which they have no other means of accessing. It was also determined that in some cities the campaign is still viewed with suspicion and that traction is disappointing, a reminder that acceptance by residents is not automatic or necessarily continued. Asivikelane needs to up the ante in engaging residents in their responses and in closing the information loop back to them. It is crucial for residents to feel that they own the results and not that they are cogs in a wheel over which they have no control.

The second important learning event was on the subject of community engagement and occurred in October 2020. This event's main function was to serve as an opportunity for partners to share their approach to community engagement and their strategies for building agency. Again, partners reflected on lessons learnt from the Asivikelane experience. They also discussed what would come next in terms of engagement and agency-building after COVID and a return to the 'new normal'. Particular attention was given to the value of community facilitators and the impact their assistance has had so far on communities and the success of the project. Liaisons with individual informal settlement residents who volunteer their time, and sometimes their resources, to assist us in interacting with the communities in question form a core part of our partners' activities. These community facilitators play a vital role in helping CSO partners build the budget collective agency of informal settlement residents.



### *Generating and leveraging data to support demands*

As indicated above, a primary part of the campaign is collecting data from informal settlement volunteers regarding water, sanitation and refuse removal. At present, 1296 residents from 275 informal settlements are monitoring service delivery across eight metropolitan municipalities and seven smaller municipalities, and reporting these results back to Asivikelane. This data collection is vital in giving residents a voice. Data is

published in the form of Asivikelane monthly releases, which are used to hold governments and municipalities to account by showing where they have fallen short, or alternately, where they have improved.

In addition, Asivikelane has also engaged in diagnostic work regarding the weaknesses in public finance management systems that cause the poor quality and quantity of services in informal settlements. This has primarily taken the form of budget analysis work that shows which budget shifts could help the government respond to the service delivery problems reported by Asivikelane. In the latter half of 2020, Asivikelane carried out budget analyses of the City of Johannesburg, City of Cape Town, eThekweni, and Ekurhuleni.

### Multi-level engagement with government

The Asivikelane campaign was careful to take a multi-level approach to form affiliations with as many decision-makers and influential organizations as possible to build a strong network that could assist in bringing about change. These engagements were both formal and informal.

A particularly valuable aspect of Asivikelane’s formal engagements with the government has been the solidifying of their working relationship with the Auditor General of South Africa (AGSA). In 2018, IBP South Africa developed a Memorandum of Understanding with AGSA that is now being fully implemented through sending social audits and

Asivikelane reports to AGSA once a month. They are then able to use this information to decide which aspects of municipal budgets and service delivery to audit. Asivikelane also meets regularly with senior managers of AGSA to discuss how the findings can be used.

Asivikelane’s work builds on a significant relationship that IBP South Africa developed with the Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) of the Department of Public Works. In

2019, the EPWP completed a strategy development process for Phase IV of their EPWP programme, of which social audits form a central part. After the department requested IBP South Africa's support with developing an implementation plan, it accompanied IBP South Africa on site visits during the Kameeldrift social audit, and IBP South Africa provided the department with background documents and materials to help with its thinking. Subsequently, EPWP contracted IBP South Africa's partner organization, Planact, to conduct social audits of EPWP projects at four sites.

*"I was previously afraid to talk to the municipality about the issues in my community. Asivikelane has encouraged me to not be lazy to engage and as a result, we have water and toilets in our community."*

**Interviewee no. 3: Kanele Gova**

**Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality – Emibhobheni, Dice Etwatwa**

In fact, the responses from the government have been very positive, with the national Minister of Human Settlements requesting a briefing. In addition, many city governments have undertaken to fix the issues that have been identified by Asivikelane's findings. They have requested that Asivikelane bring them these problems on a regular basis.

On an informal level, through careful and consistent relationship-building and by using the networks of all partners in the coalition, Asivikelane has been able to engage policy-makers to the point that the government has now become more receptive to engaging with civic organizations working on the plight of informal settlement residents. IBP South Africa and its partners went from having to work for months to obtain a meeting with the government to weekly meetings with various national and local governments. At present, Asivikelane is meeting regularly with metro and national government departments to facilitate government responses to Asivikelane results. In line with our goal of engaging residents in government budget decisions, we have worked with CSO partners to include residents in these meetings.

### ***Engagement with the media***

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit South Africa in March 2020, Asivikelane's first response was to start working with a team of health professionals to identify hygiene practices that would help informal settlement residents avoid contracting the coronavirus. Asivikelane produced posters about these hygiene practices, distributing and displaying them widely, including via social media and WhatsApp. The immediate response to the posters was overwhelming. National, provincial and city government agencies endorsed and reprinted the poster – often asking to add their own logos. After many requests from CSOs and community members, Asivikelane translated the poster into 11 languages. In addition, Wagtale, the film production company with whom they collaborate, also turned English, isiZulu, Tshivenda, Xitsonga and isiXhosa versions of the pamphlet into film animations as part of their pro bono support of Asivikelane's work. Such films are particularly helpful in spreading the message since online and social media content is often preferred in this

format by younger generations, as well as by those with low levels of literacy.

## Asivikelane campaign gives a voice to those living in informal settlements

Aditya Kumar Phumeza Mlungwana 30 May 2020



In addition, Asivikelane and Wagtale have produced several short films about service delivery issues in informal settlements and budget allocation failures. These films, which were distributed through Asivikelane's mailing list and social media, were also extremely successful in giving voice to informal settlement residents themselves and making their daily circumstances visible. Many metro and national government engagements came in the aftermath of the release of these films. Asivikelane also made small bandwidth versions available so their

community network partners could distribute them amongst community members.

Asivikelane also shares its monthly results releases via social media and its mailing lists. Their social media strategy is to share a mix of the good and the bad. They identify hotspots and tag the relevant municipality, which has helped to put pressure on municipalities to address those problems. However, Asivikelane makes a point of posting good news stories too. This shows that they are not only focusing on the negative but also praising municipalities when there is progress. Municipalities have started to respond to these posts and taps and/or toilets have been fixed after social media posts were made.

Because of the impact that the Asivikelane campaign is having, it has also been reported on regularly in newspapers and on radio and television. Every time the campaign is mentioned, it reminds the wider public about the issues being faced by their informal settlement neighbors and helps to keep the importance of the campaign in the collective conscience of South Africans.

## Asivikelane's main successes to date

The vast extent of the impact that Asivikelane has had on the lives of informal settlement residents is evident. Seven metropolitan councils took action in response to CSO campaigns for improved services. Not only did access to water improve in at least 30 settlements, positively affecting the lives of at least 400 000 people, but sanitation also saw an improvement in 36 settlements, with the result that 500 000 people have better toilet facilities. Moreover, refuse removal was either introduced or increased in 18 settlements, impacting 250 000 people.

In addition, Asivikelane successfully assisted communities in metropolitan municipalities in obtaining relevant budget information, such as service delivery schedules and the names

and numbers of government contact people during COVID-19. In 2020, four communities (BCM, City of Cape Town, eThekweni and Ekurhuleni) were able to access relevant budget information. Specifically, eThekweni provided Asivikelane with the names and numbers of their sanitation area engineers and BCM regularly gave their monthly COVID reports to Asivikelane partner, Afesis-corplan. These reports laid out their service delivery plans in response to the pandemic. Asivikelane received similar delivery schedules from the City of Cape Town, Ekurhuleni and eThekweni. In addition, the City of Cape Town made its entire COVID response available to Asivikelane partner, SASDI.

The metropolitan councils of the City of Cape Town, eThekweni, the City of Johannesburg, BCM, Tshwane, Nelson Mandela Bay and Ekurhuleni worked together with CSOs to improve service delivery. During the lockdown, IBP South Africa and its partners met with the metros multiple times per month to facilitate government responses to the Asivikelane campaign. Of particular significance is the fact that Asivikelane results have become a standing agenda item in the weekly COVID-19 meeting between metros, the National Treasury and the National Department of Human Settlements, and also in the weekly management meeting of the City of Cape Town's Water and Sanitation Department. Asivikelane's partner, Afesis-corplan, was also invited onto the COVID-19 command councils of the Eastern Cape Province and BCM.

Perhaps most significantly, Asivikelane has mobilized informal settlement residents so that there is now a firm cadre of community budget facilitators that is ever growing. These leaders have the potential to have long-lasting impacts on citizen mobilization in bringing about improved service delivery, as well as wide-reaching participatory budgeting processes.

## Conclusion

While the COVID-19 pandemic will hopefully soon start to subside, the long-standing difficulties experienced by residents of informal settlements when it comes to the delivery of water, sanitation and refuse removal are bound to persist. So far, the effects of Asivikelane have been positive. Relationships between the coalition and decision-makers have improved, and those in positions of power are taking more time to listen to the requests of residents and to implement real changes. As long as residents continue to be mobilized and empowered to speak in an informed way about their needs, change will continue to improve the lives of millions of South African citizens who are so often forgotten.