

10th Edition Research Seminar

Co-production for Better Services Expanding Civic Space and Accountability in South Africa's Local Government System

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*A governance dialogue on resilient institutions, collaborative
service delivery, and public accountability.*

Prepared for seminar presentation

Co-production for Better Services: Expanding Civic Space and Accountability in South Africa's Local Government System

Enhancing community partnerships for effective governance

Context and Conceptual Foundations

Local Government, Service Delivery, and Democratic Context in South Africa



Role of Local Government

Local government in South Africa is constitutionally tasked with delivering basic services and facilitating democratic governance closest to citizens (Republic of South Africa, 1996; Republic of South Africa, 1998).

Service Delivery Challenges

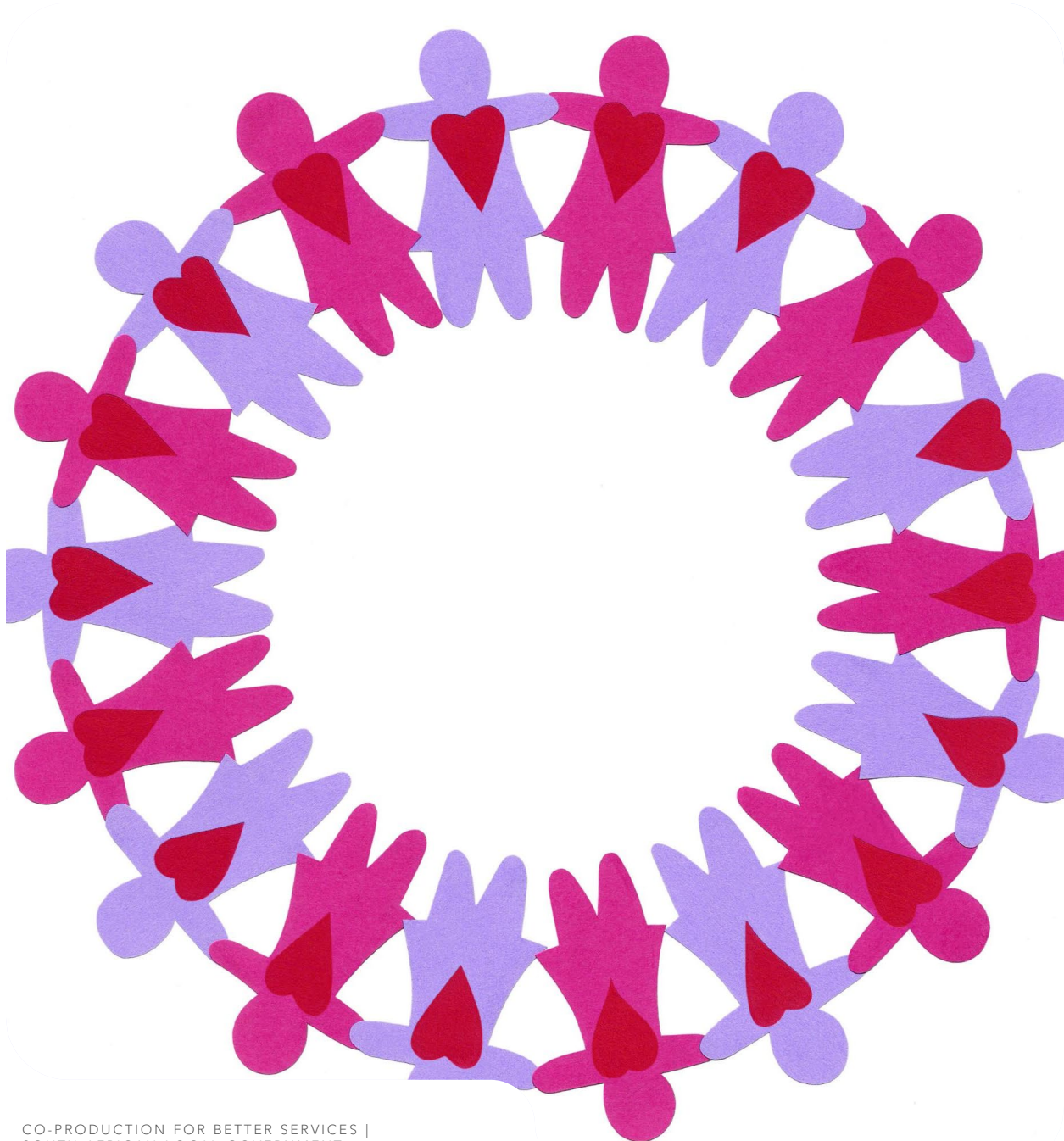
Many communities face service delivery failures, inequality and protests due to dissatisfaction with municipal performance (Auditor-General South Africa, 2025; Ndlovu & Muringa, 2026).

Citizen Participation Gaps

Formal participation mechanisms often feel procedural and fail to empower citizens effectively, reducing trust in local government (Ndlovu & Muringa, 2026; Vivier, 2023).

Co-production Governance

Co-production frames citizens as active partners in service delivery, promoting collaboration and strengthening democratic practices (Bovaird, 2007; Osborne et al., 2016).



Defining Co-production in Public Service Delivery

Concept of Co-production

Co-production involves citizens and officials jointly designing and delivering public services through shared responsibility and collaboration (Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen & Honingh, 2016).

Active Citizen Participation

Co-production requires active input from citizens, including practical knowledge, labour and local networks to improve service effectiveness (Bovaird, 2007; Osborne et al., 2016).

Transformative Governance Approach

Implementing co-production challenges traditional power structures and can foster participatory democracy and accountability when power-sharing is real (Brandsen et al., 2018; Mchunu & Theron, 2015).

Civic Space and Accountability

Understanding Civic Space in Local Governance



Definition and Types of Civic Space

Civic space includes formal invited spaces and informal claimed or invented spaces for citizen participation in governance (Cornwall, 2002; Gaventa, 2006).

Challenges in Local Civic Space

Invited spaces are often inaccessible or ineffective, leading communities to rely on protests and other claimed spaces to express their views (COMPACT, 2024; Ndlovu & Muringa, 2026).

Improving Civic Space Quality

Expanding civic space requires inclusivity, barrier reduction and meaningful citizen influence rather than mere procedural consultation (Gaventa, 2006; Vivier, 2023).

Co-production for Democratic Practice

Co-production links citizen participation with service delivery, making civic space practical and results-driven (Bovaird, 2007; Osborne et al., 2016).

Accountability in South Africa's Local Government System

Dual Accountability Types

Local government accountability includes vertical accountability by citizens and horizontal accountability through oversight institutions (Lührmann et al., 2020; O'Donnell, 1998).

Challenges in Local Accountability

Despite strong oversight systems, poor service delivery, financial mismanagement and weak consequences persist in many municipalities (Auditor-General South Africa, 2025).

Role of Co-production

Co-production fosters active citizen involvement in governance, strengthening relational accountability beyond formal procedures (Bovaird, 2007; World Bank, 2018).

Social Accountability Tools

Community monitoring, scorecards and participatory evaluations can strengthen accountability when embedded within co-production frameworks (World Bank, 2018; Transparency International, 2014).



Legal and Institutional Frameworks

Constitutional and Legislative Foundations for Participation

Constitutional Mandate for Participation

The 1996 Constitution establishes municipalities as a distinct sphere of government and requires community involvement in local affairs (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Municipal Systems Act Role

The Municipal Systems Act mandates municipalities to foster participation through engagement mechanisms, access to information and participatory municipal systems (Republic of South Africa, 2000).

Challenges in Implementation

Many municipalities face capacity and resource constraints, causing participation to remain a formal compliance exercise (COMPACT, 2024; Ndlovu & Muringa, 2026).

Co-production as a Solution

Co-production revitalises participation by aligning legal mandates with practical service delivery and collaborative governance (Chigova, 2021; Mchunu & Theron, 2015).



Institutional Challenges in Participatory Governance



Institutional Capacity Constraints

Municipalities face capacity limits, high turnover, political interference and poor coordination, which weaken participatory governance (Auditor-General South Africa, 2025; Vivier, 2023).

Ward Committees and IDP Issues

Ward committees often lack resources and clarity, while IDP processes can be technocratic and inaccessible to citizens (COMPACT, 2024; Ndlovu & Muringa, 2026).

Digital Participation Barriers

Digital platforms can broaden access, but unequal technology, data and connectivity can worsen exclusion (Ndlovu & Muringa, 2026).

Role of Co-production

Co-production fosters trust and shared ownership, supporting sustainable participation through institutional reform and collaboration (Bovaird, 2007; Mchunu & Theron, 2015).

Co-production in Practice

Applications of Co-production in South African Municipalities



Sectoral Applications

Co-production has been applied in water maintenance, community safety, environmental management and local economic development (Chigova, 2021; Mchunu & Theron, 2015).

Building Trust and Legitimacy

Visible collaboration outcomes can enhance trust and improve perceptions of municipal legitimacy and responsiveness (Chigova, 2021; Jakoet-Salie & Ramolobe, 2023).

Challenges and Sustainability

Power imbalances, capacity disparities and limited institutionalisation constrain sustainability and wider adoption (Brandsen et al., 2018; Osborne et al., 2016).

Towards Systemic Adoption

Successful co-production needs clear frameworks, leadership support and continuous relationship-building investment (Bovaird, 2007; Vivier, 2023).

Case Study: City of Cape Town

Planning, ward allocations and community-priority setting

Planning co-production



Entry point: ward/subcouncil allocations and IDP engagement connect local needs to municipal priorities.

Co-production logic: residents, ward structures and officials translate needs into local projects and service priorities.

Civic-space effect: formal engagement becomes more practical when it is linked to identifiable projects and feedback loops.

Accountability insight: The case shows partial co-production: citizens influence priorities and local projects, while formal budget authority remains with council.

1

Input

2

Joint action

3

Feedback

Case Study: eThekweni Municipality

Water and sanitation co-production in informal settlements

Service-delivery co-production



Entry point: communal ablution blocks provide shared water and sanitation facilities in informal settlements.

Co-production logic: municipal departments, NGOs, residents and caretakers share roles in access, use and maintenance.

Accountability effect: training, caretaker arrangements and user feedback help sustain facilities and identify problems early.

Accountability insight: The case shows that infrastructure works better when “hardware” is combined with community training, maintenance roles and feedback.

1

Input

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Joint action

3

Feedback

Case Study: Buffalo City

Waste management, clean-up partnerships and environmental stewardship

Operational co-production



Entry point: collaborative clean-up and recycling campaigns respond to littering, illegal dumping and public-space decline.

Co-production logic: municipal departments provide coordination while residents, businesses and civic actors contribute action.

Civic-space effect: participation becomes visible, practical and community-owned rather than only meeting-based.

Accountability insight: Waste partnerships demonstrate low-cost, visible co-production that can rebuild trust when municipalities and communities act together.

1 Input

2 Joint action

3 Feedback

Illustrative Application: Nkomazi

Community water monitoring and municipal technical response

Rural co-production design



Entry point: rural water service pressures require monitoring, fault reporting and faster municipal response.

Co-production logic: community water monitors can report faults while municipal teams integrate data into M&E and repair systems.

Accountability effect: citizen-based reporting creates early-warning signals and strengthens answerability between elections.

Accountability insight: This is a design application rather than a documented programme: it translates Nkomazi's water and M&E challenges into a co-production model.

1

Input

2

Joint action

3

Feedback



Expanding Civic Space and Accountability Through Co-production

Continuous Citizen Engagement

Co-production integrates citizens into daily service delivery processes, fostering ongoing dialogue and partnership with officials (Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen et al., 2018).

Enhanced Accountability Mechanisms

Shared monitoring and social accountability tools empower communities to track progress and improve responsiveness (Transparency International, 2014; World Bank, 2018).

Safeguards Against Risks

Inclusive facilitation, transparency and clear accountability prevent exclusion and elite capture in co-production (Cornwall, 2002; Gaventa, 2006; Osborne et al., 2016).

Implications and Conclusions

Benefits, Risks, and Policy Implications of Co-production

Benefits of Co-production

Co-production improves service quality, builds trust, mobilises resources and strengthens civic skills and social capital (Bovaird, 2007; Chigova, 2021; Mchunu & Theron, 2015).

Risks of Co-production

Poorly designed co-production can reinforce inequalities, privilege vocal groups and shift responsibilities unfairly (Brandesen et al., 2018; Osborne et al., 2016).

Policy Implications

Institutionalising co-production, investing in civic education and incentivising collaboration are vital for success (Ndlovu & Muringa, 2026; Vivier, 2023).



Conclusion: Co-production as a Pathway to Better Local Governance

Citizen Partnership in Governance

Co-production repositions citizens as partners, expanding civic space and rebuilding trust between communities and municipalities (Bovaird, 2007; Chigova, 2021).

Legal Framework and Institutional Reform

South Africa's legal framework supports co-production, but success requires institutional reform and power-sharing (Republic of South Africa, 1996, 2000; Vivier, 2023).

Democratic Ideal and Practical Necessity

Co-production is a critical strategy for creating responsive, accountable and people-centred local government (Mchunu & Theron, 2015; Osborne et al., 2016).

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Thank you for listening