

# Harnessing Citizen-Based Monitoring for Sustainable Governance in South Africa: A Framework for Achieving SDGs through Enhanced Governance Practice

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**Abstract:** Citizen-Based Monitoring (CBM) has emerged globally as a participatory approach to enhancing governance by fostering accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement. In South Africa, despite its alignment with the principles of sustainable governance and its potential to support Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), CBM remains underutilized due to systemic and structural barriers. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with government officials, community-based organizations (CBOs), and community media representatives alongside an analysis of secondary data. The research examines how CBM contributes to or falls short of supporting sustainable governance, focusing on accountability, transparency, and equity in public service delivery. Findings reveal that CBM initiatives enhance citizen engagement and raise awareness of public service issues but face challenges such as inconsistent institutional integration, resource constraints, inequitable access, and limited governmental responsiveness. This study proposes a framework that prioritizes collaborative governance, resource sustainability, and inclusivity to address these challenges. Recommendations include fostering stronger government-community partnerships, expanding infrastructure and digital inclusion, institutionalizing CBM findings into policy processes, and building public trust through transparent and responsive governance. By situating CBM within the broader principles of sustainable governance, this framework offers a pathway for South Africa to achieve SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through more equitable, transparent, and accountable governance systems.

**Keywords:** Accountability, Citizen-Based Monitoring, Public Service Delivery, Sustainable Development Goals, Transparency

## Introduction

Citizen-Based Monitoring (CBM) has emerged as a vital tool in advancing governance systems by fostering accountability, transparency, and participatory decision-making. Rooted in the principles of New Public Management (NPM) and Good Governance, CBM emphasizes active citizen involvement in evaluating public service delivery, ensuring that government institutions remain responsive to the needs of the populace [1, 3, 5]. In South Africa, CBM holds profound significance, addressing historical inequalities while providing marginalized communities a platform to influence governance outcomes. This study investigates the potential of CBM to transform governance practices, focusing on its role in promoting sustainable development and achieving South Africa's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) [2, 7].

Sustainable development requires inclusive, adaptive, and accountable governance systems that effectively utilize public resources while ensuring equitable service delivery [6, 8]. CBM aligns with these goals by creating feedback loops where citizens collaborate with governments to design, monitor, and enhance public services. Through participatory mechanisms such as community forums, digital platforms, and real-time data collection, CBM fosters a dynamic governance model that is both responsive and sustainable [4, 9]. Integrating CBM into public administration

ensures that government actions reflect diverse stakeholders' needs, bridging service delivery gaps and strengthening public trust. CBM's role in achieving sustainability is particularly evident in addressing urban challenges, such as waste management, water supply, and infrastructure development. By involving citizens in monitoring these essential services, CBM contributes to creating resilient urban environments and aligning local governance practices with global sustainability targets [10, 11]. Additionally, multi-stakeholder partnerships fostered through CBM enhance resource mobilization, knowledge sharing, and collective accountability, making it a cornerstone of effective governance in resource-constrained settings like South Africa [12, 14].

Despite its recognized potential to enhance governance and promote sustainable development, CBM remains underutilized in South Africa, primarily due to persistent systemic challenges. The core issue revolves around the ineffective integration of CBM data into decision-making processes and governance structures, limiting its impact on improving public service delivery and advancing the country's SDGs. CBM, while seen as a valuable tool for fostering accountability and transparency, often fails to trigger the desired policy changes or improvements in service delivery due to a lack of institutional responsiveness. Despite their acknowledged role in fostering citizen participation, government agencies frequently overlook or fail to incorporate the feedback generated through CBM initiatives into policymaking or service improvement efforts, resulting in a substantial disconnection between citizen feedback and institutional action. This situation undermines the transformative potential of CBM, as it does not lead to the necessary corrective actions that could enhance public services and governance outcomes. For example, in areas like municipal service delivery, CBM initiatives have highlighted significant deficiencies in waste management and water provision. Yet, these insights often go unnoticed or are inadequately addressed by local authorities [1, 7, 13].

The underutilization of CBM directly contributes to a lack of progress in sustainable development in South Africa, especially in marginalized communities. Despite the active participation of citizens in monitoring public services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, governmental institutions consistently fail to act on the data gathered through CBM. A practical example of this issue can be seen in the water and sanitation crises in various South African townships, where CBM has pinpointed severe service gaps, but little to no action has been taken by relevant authorities to address these deficiencies. The inability to integrate CBM data into policy adjustments creates a vicious cycle where citizens continue to provide feedback. Still, their efforts result in minimal impact, further alienating communities and reducing public trust in government systems. This issue exacerbates social inequality and economic disparities, as marginalized communities, often the most impacted by poor service delivery, are left without meaningful channels to influence improvements. The fragmented and disjointed approach to implementing CBM across different governmental departments compounds the issue, with each department operating in silos and failing to coordinate on citizen-driven monitoring data, hindering the effectiveness of CBM as a governance tool [5, 7, 13]. This is particularly concerning given South Africa's commitment to achieving the SDGs, as CBM could serve as a critical mechanism for monitoring progress toward inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban development [12, 14].

The failure to effectively implement CBM, despite its clear potential for enhancing transparency and accountability, reveals a serious governance gap that demands urgent attention. The lack of systematic integration of CBM into policy frameworks limits the broader goal of building a resilient governance system that is responsive to the needs of citizens. Government agencies, particularly at the local level, have not developed adequate structures or strategies to act on CBM insights, leaving a significant gap between public service monitoring and service delivery improvements. This disconnect between citizen-generated data and institutional response reduces the overall effectiveness of CBM in achieving long-term sustainable development goals. Furthermore, the lack of institutional mechanisms to support CBM implementation prevents it from being institutionalized as an essential tool in governance, undermining its sustainability and scalability. Without these mechanisms, CBM remains an isolated effort rather than an integral part of governance and policymaking. It is less likely to contribute to the broader goals of social justice, equity, and sustainable development [5, 13].

This study addresses the critical research gap by developing a comprehensive framework for CBM specifically tailored to South Africa's unique socio-political context. The gap in current research and practice lies in lacking a cohesive framework to institutionalize CBM within the public sector. This ensures it becomes a systematic tool for fostering transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in governance. The proposed framework will focus on overcoming the barriers preventing effective CBM implementation, particularly the institutional and infrastructural constraints that hinder its scalability and impact. By enhancing public awareness and strengthening institutional support, the study aims to provide a practical solution to the underutilization of CBM, ensuring it contributes meaningfully to achieving SDGs. The framework will offer strategies to integrate CBM findings into policy and decision-making, creating a unified approach to service delivery that includes citizen feedback as a fundamental component.

The research intends to provide a practical framework for institutionalizing CBM in South Africa, ensuring that CBM is not merely an isolated initiative but a central aspect of governance that drives sustainable development. By positioning CBM as a core tool in governance, the study seeks to enhance the quality of public services and promote social equity. This framework will also contribute to the global discourse on sustainable governance by demonstrating how CBM can be integrated into developing countries' public governance systems. By addressing the challenges of institutional fragmentation, public awareness, and lack of policy coherence, this research aspires to transform CBM into a sustainable governance tool that aligns with the SDGs and promotes a resilient, accountable public sector in South Africa [3, 12, 14].

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, the theoretical foundations of CBM are explored, providing context for its role in governance and sustainable development. This section will also examine key literature and frameworks that have shaped CBM practices globally and within South Africa. Next, the paper will identify and discuss the key challenges hindering the implementation of CBM in South Africa, focusing on barriers related to public awareness, institutional support, and fragmented policy frameworks. Following this, the proposed CBM framework will be presented, outlining practical strategies to overcome these challenges and enhance CBM's effectiveness in promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in governance. The paper will then explore the implications of the framework for policy and practice, particularly in relation to South Africa's efforts to achieve its SDGs. Finally, the paper will conclude by summarizing the findings and suggesting potential directions for future research, aiming to strengthen the integration of CBM into governance systems and contribute to achieving sustainable development goals at both national and global levels.

### **Theoretical framework**

This study draws on four key theoretical frameworks: New Public Management (NPM) Theory, Good Governance, Dialogic Communication Theory, and Critical Theory. Each of these theories has been selected for its relevance in understanding how CBM can enhance transparency, accountability, and sustainability in public service delivery, particularly in South Africa. These theories collectively highlight the potential of CBM to contribute to a more participatory, inclusive, and sustainable governance model, which is essential for achieving long-term development goals. By incorporating citizen feedback into governance systems, CBM aligns with the principles of these theories, ensuring that public institutions are more responsive to the needs of citizens and fostering a culture of continuous improvement in service delivery [1, 5, 13].

The NPM theory provides an essential framework for understanding CBM's role in modern public administration. NPM emerged in the late 20th century as a response to inefficiencies and unresponsiveness within traditional public sector models. It advocates for a shift from bureaucratic structures to more results-oriented, citizen-centered approaches. This aligns with CBM's focus on empowering citizens to monitor government services, assess their effectiveness, and hold public institutions accountable for their performance. In South Africa, where inefficiency, service delivery protests, and resource limitations are persistent challenges, NPM offers a solid foundation for adopting CBM to drive improvements in public service effectiveness. By fostering performance measurement, accountability, and responsiveness, NPM supports CBM's aim of creating a governance system where citizens act as active participants in improving public services [1, 7, 13]. Through CBM, citizens can evaluate service delivery in real-time, providing feedback that governments can use to make necessary adjustments, thus ensuring services remain relevant, efficient, and sustainable.

Another significant theoretical framework for this study is Good Governance, which emphasizes accountability, transparency, participation, and responsiveness in public administration. Good governance underpins the essential characteristics of a well-functioning democratic system and is fundamental to achieving sustainable development. CBM directly aligns with these principles by enabling citizens to engage actively in the decision-making and monitoring of public services. This participation ensures that governance processes are transparent, services meet community needs, and government institutions are held accountable for their actions. In South Africa, where corruption, service delivery protests, and institutional inefficiencies often undermine public trust, CBM is critical in restoring accountability and transparency. By allowing citizens to monitor service delivery and demand improvements, CBM becomes an effective tool for realizing the goals of good governance and promoting sustainable development. As such, Good Governance theory justifies using CBM to improve governance practices, providing a foundation for creating more inclusive and responsive public institutions in South Africa [6, 9, 12].

Dialogic Communication Theory provides an additional lens through which CBM's role in governance can be understood, emphasizing the importance of open, two-way communication between citizens and government institutions. According to Kent and Taylor, effective governance relies on transparent, interactive, and continuous

dialogue, where feedback from citizens is actively sought and incorporated into decision-making processes. This aligns perfectly with the goals of CBM, which creates structured mechanisms for citizens to communicate their concerns, experiences, and expectations regarding public services. In South Africa, where historical mistrust of government institutions persists due to past injustices and ongoing governance challenges, dialogic communication through CBM can help bridge the trust gap between citizens and government officials. This two-way communication fosters public trust, strengthens governance resilience, and ensures that services remain adaptable to the evolving needs of communities. By integrating continuous citizen feedback, CBM supports governance systems in being more responsive and relevant, contributing to long-term sustainability and development goals. The dialogic nature of CBM also encourages government institutions to adapt and improve based on citizen input, ultimately strengthening the governance structure in a way that reflects the values of transparency, inclusivity, and sustainability [9, 10, 13].

Lastly, Critical Theory offers a critical perspective on CBM by addressing power dynamics, inclusivity, and social justice within governance processes. Rooted in Habermas's and Horkheimer's works, Critical Theory challenges existing power structures and advocates for democratic, participatory governance that reflects the voices of marginalized communities. In the context of CBM, this theory underscores the need to give historically excluded communities a platform to participate in the monitoring and evaluating public services. In South Africa, where socioeconomic inequalities and historical exclusion remain entrenched, CBM, through the lens of Critical Theory, can help empower marginalized groups, giving them a voice in holding public institutions accountable. By involving disadvantaged communities in governance, CBM promotes social justice and ensures that public services are equitably distributed, addressing the historical imbalances that have excluded many from full participation in the democratic process. In this way, CBM contributes to creating a more just and inclusive public sector, aligning with the ideals of social equity and sustainable development. Through this framework, CBM can potentially reduce inequalities in service delivery, ensuring that all segments of society benefit from public services and have a stake in the governance process [12, 13, 14].

These four theoretical perspectives— NPM, Good Governance, Dialogic Communication, and Critical Theory— provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the potential of CBM to transform governance in South Africa. Each theory highlights a different dimension of CBM's impact on governance, emphasizing its role in creating more transparent, inclusive, and sustainable governance systems. Together, these frameworks illustrate the multifaceted role of CBM in promoting accountability, improving service delivery, and ensuring that governance systems are responsive to the needs of all citizens. By applying these theoretical lenses, the study aims to develop a CBM framework tailored to South Africa's specific governance challenges and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, ultimately contributing to a more resilient and equitable public sector [12, 14, 15].

### **Literature review**

CBM is a vital tool for promoting sustainable governance by engaging citizens directly in the monitoring and evaluating public services and resource management. Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of CBM in promoting accountability, transparency, and public participation, which are essential for managing public resources effectively and ensuring long-term sustainability. CBM empowers communities to monitor and assess government actions, ensuring that public institutions meet the populace's needs. Studies show that CBM increases government responsiveness, helping create a dynamic governance model that encourages continuous improvement in service delivery. By involving the public in environmental monitoring and social services evaluation, CBM builds public trust and ensures that government actions align with community needs, fostering sustainable governance (1, 2, 6). In various case studies, it has been observed that when citizens participate in monitoring public services, they help improve the efficiency and equity of resource allocation, making governance systems more responsive and adaptable to long-term development goals (5, 13, 14).

CBM's role in advancing SDGs, particularly SDG 11, which emphasizes sustainable cities and communities, is well-documented. A study on urban CBM initiatives in Brazil demonstrated that participatory budgeting, a form of CBM, allowed communities to allocate funds toward public services, resulting in improved healthcare, sanitation, and education in underserved areas. This initiative improved health outcomes, reduced inequalities, and enhanced urban resilience. Similarly, in the Philippines, community-based monitoring systems were employed to oversee natural resource management, contributing to protecting coastal ecosystems and promoting sustainable practices in fisheries management (9, 10, 11). These examples show that CBM fosters environmental stewardship and promotes social equity, ensuring that local knowledge is integrated into decision-making. This integration of community priorities into governance processes ensures that public services meet environmental sustainability goals while promoting social inclusion and equity (2, 13, 15).

The benefits of CBM also extend to community resilience and social cohesion. Active participation in CBM initiatives has been linked to stronger social bonds and greater community solidarity. For instance, in Brazil, the use of participatory budgeting improved service delivery and helped foster a sense of ownership among community members, contributing to stronger social ties and more resilient communities. These initiatives demonstrated that CBM can enhance community cohesion, essential for addressing environmental degradation, public health issues, and resource scarcity (9, 10, 16). Similarly, in India, community-based monitoring programs focusing on water quality have resulted in better management of local resources and have improved community-led environmental protection efforts. These findings show that CBM contributes significantly to the sustainability of governance systems, promoting both social equity and environmental protection through active community engagement (15, 26, 28).

Despite the potential of CBM, several barriers hinder its effectiveness, particularly in resource-constrained settings. One of the primary challenges for CBM is securing sufficient financial support and ensuring that programs remain sustainable beyond the initial phases (see Table 1). Many CBM initiatives rely heavily on external funding from international donors or government entities. Once this funding is withdrawn, many programs struggle to continue, as local governments often lack the resources and capacity to sustain these initiatives (26, 27, 28). A review of CBM efforts in Cameroon, Botswana, and China showed that many community-based initiatives failed to maintain their operations once the external funding ended, highlighting the need for sustainable funding models. In these instances, the lack of government integration into formal policy-making prevented community feedback from influencing decision-making or improving service delivery (28, 29, 30). Additionally, CBM initiatives often face challenges related to the digital divide, particularly in rural and underserved areas where access to internet infrastructure is limited. Without adequate digital tools, these communities are often excluded from participatory monitoring, which undermines the inclusivity of CBM programs and limits their ability to contribute effectively to sustainable governance (32, 33, 34).

**Table 1: Durability of CBM initiatives after founder departure**

Location	Management Type	Funding	Durability
Botswana (Mbaiwa 2004:44) - [27]	Community-based forestry monitoring (CBFM)	UNDP	Not tested in the field
Cameroon (Tiani & Bonis-Charancle 2007:4) - [30]	CBFM	United States (US) NGO	Stopped
China (Van Rijsoort & Jinfeng 2005:2543) - [31]	Protected Area (PA) participatory management	Dutch cooperation	Significant decrease
India (Garcia et al. 2004:60; Kumar 2005:275) - [36]	Joint forest management (JFM)	French cooperation	Not tested in the field
Laos (Poulsen & Luanglath 2005) - [28]	PA participatory management	Danish cooperation	Stopped
Madagascar (Andrianandrasama et al. 2005:2757; Raik 2007:8) - [35]	JFM	International sponsors	Durable but funded by NGO
Namibia (Stuart-Hill et al. 2005:2611; Kockel et al. 2020:138) - [29]	JFM	State and international NGOs	Extended through (moderate) international support

Philippines (Danielsen et al. 2005:2633) - [27]	PA participatory management	Danish cooperation	Durable but funded by the state
Nepal (Ojha et al. 2003) - [35]	CBFM	English cooperation	No answer
Philippines (Olbrei & Howes 2012:108) - [28]	CBFM	State	Stopped
Tanzania (Aur�lie et al. 2011) - [29]	JFM	District and Danish cooperation	Significant decrease

*Source: Author's own compilation (2023) as extrapolated from the literature review*

The lack of public awareness also limits the reach and effectiveness of CBM initiatives. Many citizens, especially in rural or underserved regions, are unaware of their rights to monitor public services or lack the knowledge necessary to engage in CBM activities effectively. This knowledge gap reduces the impact of CBM initiatives, as only a small proportion of the population participates in monitoring and feedback activities. Research has shown that advocacy, capacity-building, and public awareness campaigns are critical for ensuring that CBM can effectively contribute to sustainable governance (33, 34, 35). In Africa, CBM initiatives face additional challenges due to weak governance structures, political instability, and corruption, which undermine the effectiveness of citizen-driven monitoring efforts. Governments in some regions resist CBM initiatives out of fear that they might expose inefficiencies or corruption within the system, suppressing participatory governance efforts (27, 29, 32). In South Africa, these challenges are compounded by the legacy of apartheid, which continues to affect citizen trust in government institutions. Despite policy frameworks like the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation (GWM&E) system, CBM remains under-resourced and inconsistent in its implementation, particularly in rural areas, where lack of access to information technology and financial support prevents full citizen engagement in governance activities (5, 6, 16).

### **Methodological Framework**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively understand the factors affecting CBM and its potential role in promoting sustainable governance in South Africa. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for an in-depth exploration of citizens' and stakeholders' perspectives on CBM and the challenges and opportunities associated with its implementation. The methodological framework focused on ensuring data accuracy, validity, and reliability through rigorous research design and data analysis methods

### **Survey Design and data collection**

A carefully structured sampling strategy was applied to capture a representative sample of perspectives across South Africa. The target was 6,912 participants, with 384 individuals selected from each of the nine provinces, balancing urban and rural representation. The final dataset included 7,282 responses, exceeding the initial target and enhancing the robustness of the findings. Structured surveys with closed-ended questions were used to gather quantitative data on citizens' awareness and engagement with CBM, their involvement in monitoring public service delivery, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of CBM in promoting transparency and accountability. The survey focused on key aspects of CBM, such as community engagement, citizen empowerment, and perceptions of government responsiveness. This approach provided consistent data across respondents, allowing for statistical analysis and insights into trends related to public awareness and involvement in CBM across various regions.

To enhance validity and reliability, a pilot study was conducted before full-scale data collection. The pilot test helped refine survey instruments by identifying ambiguous questions and ensuring that response categories were clear and comprehensive. This pre-testing phase reduced potential methodological errors and enhanced the quality of data collected.

### Interview Design and data collection

To supplement the quantitative data, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 key stakeholders, including government officials, representatives from CBOs, and community media. These participants were selected based on their involvement in CBM processes and their potential to provide insights into the practical challenges and opportunities of implementing CBM in South Africa.

The interviews were designed with open-ended questions, allowing for a detailed exploration of participants' perspectives on the sustainability, effectiveness, and long-term viability of CBM initiatives. The qualitative data collected from these interviews enriched the study by providing a nuanced understanding of complex issues that quantitative data alone could not capture.

To ensure data credibility, all interviews were transcribed verbatim, and thematic coding was conducted using both manual techniques and software-assisted analysis (NVivo). This dual approach ensured that key themes were consistently identified and analyzed while minimizing the risk of subjective bias or misinterpretation.

### Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data sources were consulted to provide additional context and support for the analysis. These sources included academic literature, government policy documents, and case studies related to CBM, public service delivery, and sustainable governance. By incorporating findings from secondary sources, the study contextualized the primary data within broader theoretical and practical frameworks, providing insights into best practices and common challenges associated with CBM globally and within the South African context. This combination of primary and secondary data presented a comprehensive understanding of CBM's potential role in achieving sustainable governance, highlighting both the practicalities of implementation and the theoretical foundations of citizen engagement in public monitoring.

### Participants

Out of an initial pool of 24 potential interview respondents, 12 individuals ultimately participated. The interviewees represented a range of sectors, including government, CBOs, and Community Media, each bringing unique perspectives on CBM practices and their impact on public service delivery. While some respondents were unavailable or unresponsive, the data collected from the final participant pool provided valuable insights into the practical and strategic considerations of CBM. Additionally, two individuals contributed indirectly by providing relevant documentation that enriched their organisations' understanding of CBM practices. Table 2 presents the background information on the interview participants, detailing their organizational affiliations, provincial representation, sectoral background, respondent codes, and years of experience. This diverse sample ensured that the qualitative data represented various views on using CBM to promote sustainable governance in South Africa.

**Table 2: Sector Specifications of the Respondents**

Organisation	Province	Sector	Respondent Code	Experience (yrs)
A	Gauteng	Government	ARE1	5 years +
B	Gauteng	Government	BRE2	5 years +
C	Gauteng	Government	CRE3	5 years +
D	Gauteng	Government	DRE4	5 years +
E	Mpumalanga	Community Media	ERE5	5 years +
F	Free State	Community Media	FRE6	5 years +
G	Gauteng	Community Media	GRE7	5 years +

H	Limpopo	Community Media	HRE8	5 years +
I	Western Cape	CBO	IRE9	5 years +
J	Gauteng	CBO	JRE10	5 years +
K	Gauteng	CBO	KRE11	5 years +
L	KwaZulu-Natal	CBO	LRE12	5 years +

Source: Author's own compilation (2024)

This methodological framework, which integrates quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and secondary data analysis, provided a comprehensive approach to examining CBM within South Africa's governance landscape. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data ensured a robust dataset that captured the diversity of opinions and experiences among citizens and stakeholders regarding CBM. This approach enabled a deeper exploration of CBM's challenges, potential contributions to sustainable governance, and the practical steps necessary to enhance its effectiveness in addressing public service delivery in South Africa.

#### **Raw Data Analysis and Methodological Validity**

To ensure internal data validity, the study employed a robust methodological approach. One key strategy was triangulation, where data from multiple sources—structured surveys, in-depth interviews, and secondary data—were cross-verified. This allowed for validating findings from different perspectives and minimized any inconsistencies. Additionally, pilot testing of the survey design was conducted to identify and eliminate potential ambiguities before the full data collection began. This ensured that the survey questions were clear and comprehensible, reducing the risk of misunderstandings or methodological errors. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and systematically coded, with both manual and software-assisted analysis used to maintain objectivity and consistency in interpreting responses.

#### **Methodological Error Prevention**

To minimize potential methodological errors, several safeguards were put in place. The survey design was refined through pilot testing, ensuring that any unclear or ambiguous questions were corrected before the full-scale survey. This helped eliminate confusion and ensured that responses were based on clear, unambiguous questions. Furthermore, data verification was carried out by cross-referencing primary data from the surveys and interviews with secondary data sources such as literature and case studies. This process provided additional assurance that the findings were not skewed by biases or inconsistencies and helped validate the robustness of the results.

#### **Ensuring Accuracy and Reliability**

The study ensured the accuracy and reliability of the results by implementing several strategies. A comprehensive and carefully structured sampling strategy was used to select participants from across South Africa's nine provinces, ensuring that diverse demographic and regional perspectives were represented. The final dataset of 7282 responses exceeded the initial target, strengthening the statistical confidence in the findings. In addition to the surveys, in-depth interviews with 12 key stakeholders involved in CBM processes provided rich qualitative data, further enhancing the reliability of the results. These interviews offered deeper insights into the practical challenges and opportunities associated with CBM. To complement the primary data, secondary sources, including academic literature and government reports, were consulted to ensure the findings were grounded in broader theoretical and practical contexts.

#### **Study's context**

This study is part of the author's original doctoral research titled *"Social Media as an Effective Citizen-Based Monitoring (CBM) Tool for Public Service Delivery in South Africa."* The PhD research explored the role of digital platforms in enhancing public participation, accountability, and transparency in governance. It examined how social media can complement traditional CBM mechanisms by enabling real-time feedback, fostering civic engagement, and improving government responsiveness. The findings from that study provided a foundation for the current research, which extends the discussion beyond digital CBM tools to a broader framework for sustainable governance. By



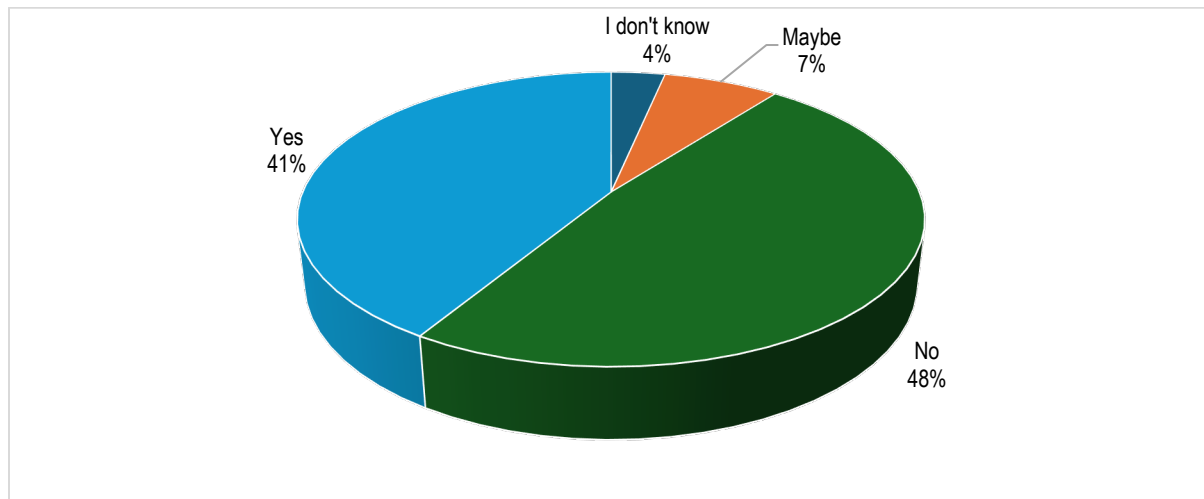
integrating insights from the original PhD research, this study builds on existing knowledge and contributes to the ongoing discourse on participatory governance and public service monitoring in South Africa.

## Findings and discussions

### Awareness and Engagement in CBM

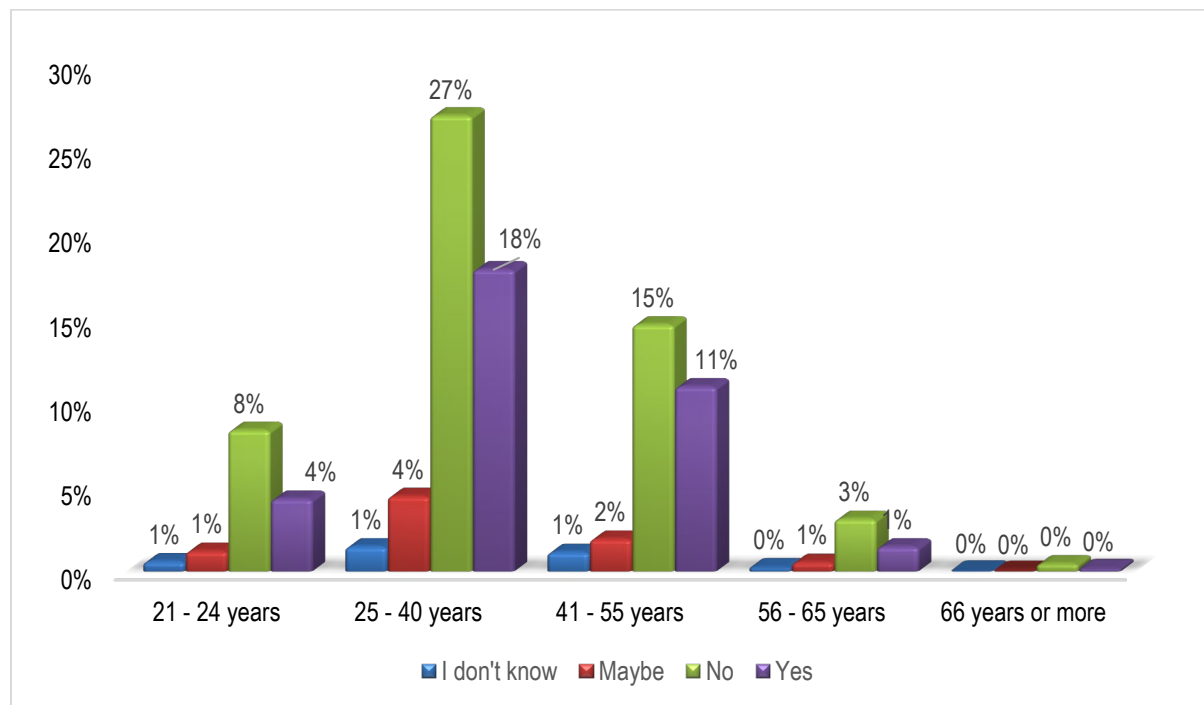
The data reveals a significant gap in awareness and engagement in CBM among South African citizens, which has profound implications for sustainable governance. As shown in Figure 1, a considerable 48% of respondents reported a lack of knowledge on monitoring public service delivery, pointing to an overarching awareness deficit within the population. This aligns with the argument that civic education is critical in enabling citizens to participate effectively in governance [1]. When citizens are uninformed about the tools available to monitor public services, they cannot hold public officials accountable, undermining the potential for increased transparency and efficiency in governance systems. The NPM theory emphasizes the importance of efficient and responsive governance, which can be fostered by CBM. However, as the data indicates, the lack of awareness limits citizens' ability to engage in CBM, thereby reducing the efficacy of these initiatives in promoting sustainable governance and public sector accountability [5]. In the absence of sufficient knowledge, the potential of CBM to drive positive change in governance is severely hampered, highlighting the need for targeted awareness campaigns to ensure that more citizens are equipped with the skills and information required to engage in monitoring.

**Figure 1: Percentage of participants who knew how to monitor service delivery**



Source: Author's own construction (2024)

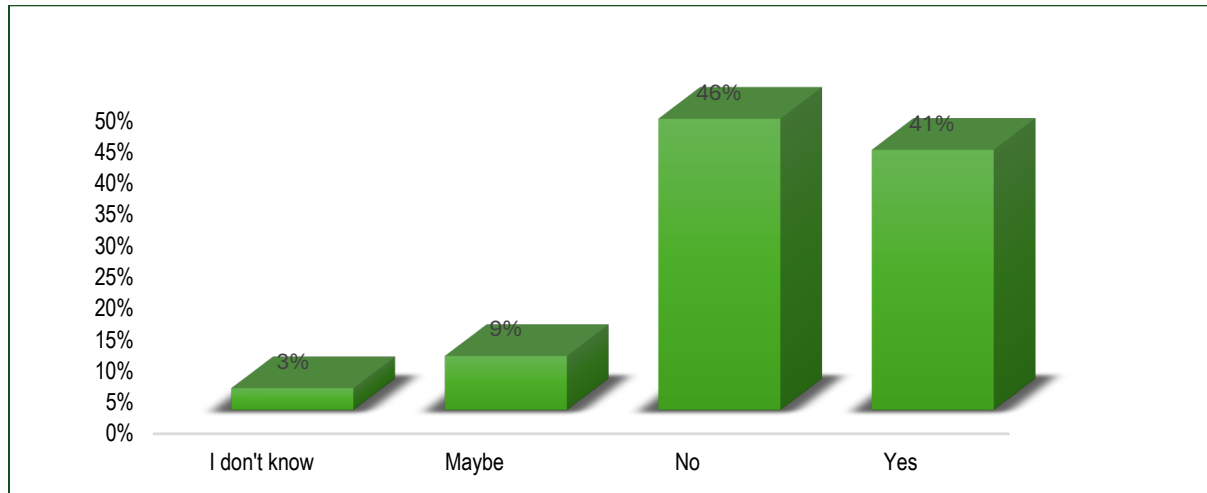
Further compounding this challenge is the low level of community engagement in governance, with 54% of respondents reporting no participation in local community activities, as indicated in Figure 2. This reflects the difficulties in mobilizing citizen involvement in local organizations, which are crucial for fostering a sense of community responsibility and trust. The Good Governance framework stresses participation as a key pillar of accountable and transparent governance. Without active engagement, communities lack the mechanisms to monitor local governance or influence decision-making processes effectively. The findings highlight a socio-economic divide, where marginalized groups, especially in rural areas, face greater barriers to participating in governance due to a combination of economic disparities, geographic isolation, and a lack of access to resources. Moreover, younger age groups (25-40 years) demonstrated more engagement in CBM activities compared to older age groups (56-65 years), suggesting that generational factors influence the willingness to participate in civic activities [6, 9]. This trend further supports the view that marginalized populations often face greater participation challenges, perpetuating existing socio-economic inequalities and hindering the realization of inclusive governance [14].

**Figure 2: Percentage of respondents participating in local government**

Source: Author's own construction (2024)

In addition to the challenges of awareness and engagement, the data reveals significant confusion about citizens' rights to monitor public services, as shown in Figure 3. A substantial 46% of respondents were unaware of their rights to monitor public service delivery, reinforcing the citizen rights gap in South Africa. This is particularly concerning because the Dialogic Communication Theory emphasizes the need for two-way communication between citizens and government, which fosters accountability and transparency. When citizens are unaware of their rights to monitor services, they are less likely to engage in meaningful dialogue with government officials, hindering the potential for effective public participation. This knowledge gap exacerbates the challenge of empowering citizens to hold public institutions accountable for their performance. As noted by Fox [32], for CBM to be effective, citizens must be well-informed about their rights and responsibilities, and public awareness campaigns are essential for closing this gap. Without such initiatives, CBM efforts will continue to be marginalized, preventing them from reaching their full potential in contributing to sustainable governance. Moreover, the findings also suggest that the sustainability of CBM initiatives is tied to the availability of resources and ongoing funding. The data points to the fragility of CBM programs, as many face difficulties sustaining operations without continued financial support from government or international donors [28, 29]. This highlights the institutional and infrastructural challenges that must be addressed for CBM to become a consistent tool in promoting long-term, sustainable governance.

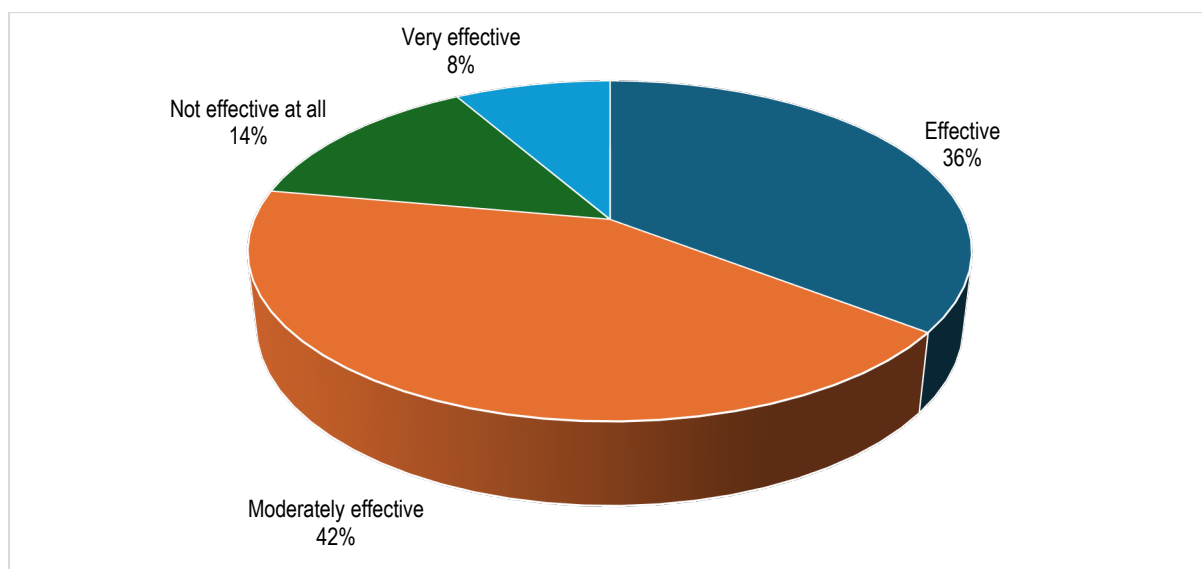
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**Figure 3: Understanding of citizen rights to monitor public service delivery**

Source: Author's own construction (2024)

#### **Perceived Effectiveness of CBM in Advancing Sustainable Governance in South Africa**

The study aimed to assess the potential of CBM in fostering sustainable governance in South Africa, focusing on the perceived effectiveness of existing CBM tools. As depicted in Figure 4, respondents expressed mixed views about the effectiveness of these tools in promoting accountability and transparency. Most respondents (42%) rated CBM tools as moderately effective, while 36% considered them effective, and a smaller group (8%) found them very effective. However, a significant portion, 14%, indicated that CBM tools were ineffective. This variation in responses highlights both the potential of CBM to enhance sustainable governance and the limitations of its current application in South Africa. While CBM tools can promote transparency and citizen engagement, their overall effectiveness depends on how well they are integrated into governance structures and how responsive government agencies are to the feedback generated. The data suggests that, while CBM can drive accountability, its success is currently limited by inconsistent implementation and governmental commitment to act on citizen feedback [5, 6].

**Figure 4: The effectiveness of CBM tools**

Source: Author's own construction (2024)

Insights from interviews with government officials, NGO representatives, and community media members revealed the complexities surrounding CBM's effectiveness in the South African context. Government officials acknowledged the existence of CBM frameworks in some sectors but pointed out that their implementation is inconsistent, often being more symbolic than substantial. One government official mentioned, "CBM initiatives are acknowledged as important, but they are not always fully integrated into our monitoring processes, especially in rural areas." This response highlights a significant challenge in institutionalizing CBM at different levels of government, with rural and underserved areas facing particular difficulties. The NPM principles stress the importance of efficiency and responsiveness in governance. Yet, CBM's potential to advance these principles is constrained without consistent implementation nationwide. The disparity in CBM's effectiveness between regions where it is properly supported and those where it is not fully utilized underscores the need for better integration of CBM tools within public service structures [5, 7]. This inconsistency limits the transformative potential of CBM as a driver of sustainable governance, particularly in areas where citizen oversight is most critical.

NGO and community media representatives offered additional perspectives on the practicalities of CBM in South Africa. NGO representatives emphasized that, when fully utilized, CBM empowers communities to monitor government services and advocate for improvements. However, they also noted significant variation in outcomes across municipalities. One NGO representative commented, "In some municipalities, CBM reports lead to real changes, but in others, it's like hitting a wall—there's no follow-up or accountability." This variability in the effectiveness of CBM is consistent with McGee and Gaventa's (2011) findings, which argue that government commitment to citizen participation is key to the success of CBM initiatives. In municipalities where local officials are committed to responding to CBM feedback, there have been tangible improvements in public service delivery, demonstrating the potential of CBM to promote sustainable governance. However, in municipalities where feedback is ignored or sidelined, CBM's impact is substantially diminished. Similarly, community media participants highlighted the lack of follow-up actions from government bodies, which undermines the potential for full transparency. The Good Governance framework stresses that transparency must be coupled with accountability for it to be effective. Yet, when government responsiveness is lacking, CBM's role in advancing sustainable governance is severely constrained [9, 14]. The findings suggest that for CBM to reach its full potential, government agencies must be more committed to acting on the feedback provided by citizens, ensuring that transparency leads to accountability and improved public service delivery.

### **Challenges to CBM Implementation in Promoting Sustainable Governance in South Africa**

Implementing CBM in South Africa faces several significant challenges that hinder its effectiveness and sustainability in fostering good governance. Interviews with key stakeholders—including government officials, NGO representatives, and community media members—highlight critical barriers such as limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, the digital divide, political resistance, and low levels of public trust. These barriers resonate with discussions in the literature, emphasising that effective CBM requires active citizen participation and systemic support from public institutions to achieve its full potential in promoting transparency and accountability [5, 6]. Without sufficient resources and institutional backing, CBM struggles to function as a reliable mechanism for monitoring public services, particularly in rural and underserved communities where it is most needed. The interviews indicated that the underutilization of CBM stems from these persistent challenges, which limit its capacity to engage citizens meaningfully and hold government officials accountable.

A predominant challenge identified through interviews was the lack of funding for CBM initiatives. Government respondents frequently cited budget constraints as a key limitation in implementing CBM effectively. One government official stated, "CBM initiatives are acknowledged as important, but we simply don't have the budget to fully integrate these tools into our monitoring systems, especially in rural areas." This reflects a broader trend where limited financial support hampers the ability to scale CBM efforts and sustain monitoring over the long term. According to McGee and Gaventa [5], funding constraints are a common obstacle for participatory monitoring initiatives, particularly in developing countries with limited public resources. The lack of consistent funding restricts the scope and frequency of CBM activities, making it difficult to follow up on citizens' issues or track long-term improvements in service delivery. Burns et al. (2014) also emphasize that without sustained investment, CBM programs struggle to achieve meaningful impact, as they lack the resources necessary for comprehensive monitoring and integrating feedback into policymaking. This barrier to financial sustainability limits CBM's potential to act as an effective mechanism for accountability, particularly in areas where citizen oversight is most needed.

In addition to funding constraints, inadequate infrastructure presents another significant barrier to implementing CBM effectively. NGO representatives pointed out that poor infrastructure, especially in rural areas, limits the accessibility of CBM tools and hampers the ability of citizens to participate in monitoring processes. One NGO representative mentioned, "Without reliable transportation and communication networks, it's nearly impossible to gather the data needed for effective monitoring, particularly in remote areas." This reflects a critical issue in South Africa, where infrastructural deficiencies impede citizen engagement in CBM, making it harder for communities to monitor public services promptly and consistently. Cornwall and Coelho (2007) highlight that infrastructure deficits can limit the inclusivity of participatory governance, as marginalized communities often lack the means to engage fully. These infrastructural challenges exacerbate existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting rural and underserved areas. Additionally, the digital divide further compounds the issue, as many South Africans—particularly in rural areas—lack access to stable internet connections or the necessary digital literacy to engage with CBM platforms effectively. One community media representative explained, "CBM's digital tools are only as effective as the connectivity available. People cannot engage with these platforms in some areas at all." This exclusion of certain populations undermines the principle of inclusivity central to CBM and reduces its potential for fostering equitable governance [9].

Political resistance to CBM is another significant barrier identified during the interviews. Some government officials acknowledged that local political dynamics often hinder CBM initiatives, particularly when monitoring activities expose inefficiencies or areas of mismanagement. One government official stated, "In some municipalities, there is reluctance to engage with CBM because it often highlights problems political leaders are not prepared to address." This resistance to participatory governance is common, as political actors may view CBM as threatening their authority or stability. McGee and Gaventa (2011) emphasize that such political resistance undermines the ability of CBM to foster accountability and transparency, as local governments may be unwilling to release data or respond to citizen feedback that could damage their public image. In South Africa, where historical and political dynamics often shape governance practices, political resistance weakens CBM's potential to drive meaningful reforms in public service delivery. Furthermore, low public trust in government emerged as a critical barrier to CBM's effectiveness. Many community members and NGO representatives expressed skepticism about the impact of CBM, with one community respondent noting, "People don't trust that CBM will lead to real changes; they've seen too many promises go unfulfilled." This lack of trust, fueled by past governmental failures, diminishes citizens' willingness to engage in CBM activities. As Lavalley et al. (2005) argue, participatory initiatives require a foundation of trust between citizens and institutions to function effectively. Without this trust, CBM's role in promoting sustainable governance is undermined, as citizens may be reluctant to invest time and effort in initiatives that they believe will not lead to tangible outcomes [14].

### **Collaborative Dynamics in CBM Implementation**

Findings from interviews with government officials, CBOs, and community media representatives reveal key insights into the collaborative dynamics essential for effective CBM initiatives in South Africa. Government officials and CBO representatives agreed that a partnership between government and community stakeholders is crucial for the success of CBM. However, their views diverged on the government's willingness to fully integrate CBM findings into decision-making processes. Some government representatives acknowledged the value of community input, citing it as a critical tool for improving public services and promoting accountability. On the other hand, others expressed frustration with bureaucratic limitations and resource constraints that hinder the integration of CBM data into policy-making. One government official remarked, "While CBM findings are valuable, they often lack the necessary resources to integrate into our decision-making processes properly." This inconsistency in government responsiveness to CBM feedback highlights the challenges in institutionalizing CBM as a systematic tool for fostering sustainable governance [6].

Community media representatives emphasized their crucial role in publicizing CBM findings and facilitating dialogue between communities and the government. They noted that community media helps educate citizens about their rights and fosters public participation by making CBM data more accessible. One media representative stated, "Our role is to make CBM findings visible to the public, ensuring that government actions—or inactions—are transparent." Community media, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, is a bridge to overcome the digital divide, where traditional media and online resources are often inaccessible. Community media has the potential to foster a sense of collective responsibility and mobilize citizens to take action based on monitoring results. However, challenges such as limited funding, political pressure, and restricted access to digital resources hinder their ability to engage communities and advocate for accountability effectively. Burns et al. (2014) emphasize that local media outlets are crucial in reaching underserved populations, thereby promoting more inclusive CBM efforts and enhancing

transparency [5, 9]. However, political resistance from government officials can further complicate the role of media in holding the government accountable. One community media participant said, "While we report on CBM issues, without a government response, transparency only goes so far—it doesn't translate into meaningful accountability."

CBO representatives observed that community engagement is key to the success of CBM, particularly when communities feel a sense of ownership over the monitoring process. This ownership strengthens community involvement and fosters more meaningful feedback on public service delivery. However, many CBO representatives expressed frustration with the inconsistent responsiveness of local authorities to CBM findings. One CBO representative explained, "In some municipalities, CBM reports lead to real changes, but in others, it's like hitting a wall—there's no follow-up or accountability." This lack of consistent action underscores a significant barrier to effective CBM implementation. Hickey and Mohan (2005) note that CBM's most significant impact occurs when local authorities actively engage with citizens and community media to ensure that feedback loops are productive and lead to improvements in service delivery. The Good Governance framework stresses that accountability and transparency must be followed by action. Yet, the findings highlight that failing to act on CBM data is a persistent challenge in South Africa [6, 14]. To achieve sustainable governance, community media, CBOs, and the government must work collaboratively to ensure that CBM findings lead to tangible, measurable improvements in public service delivery, particularly in resource constraints and political resistance.

### **Implications of the Findings for Sustainable Governance**

The findings from the study underscore several critical implications for sustainable governance in South Africa, particularly regarding the role of CBM in promoting transparency, accountability, and public engagement. Survey data revealed that while CBM is recognized for its potential to empower citizens and encourage accountability, significant gaps in its implementation undermine its effectiveness. The mixed perceptions of CBM's effectiveness, as shown by survey responses—where 42% rated it as moderately effective and 36% as effective—highlight the uneven implementation of CBM tools across different regions. These variations point to a more consistent approach to CBM implementation that ensures equal access to participatory tools and guarantees governmental responsiveness to citizen feedback. The lack of a comprehensive policy framework to integrate CBM into government decision-making processes hinders its potential to drive sustainable governance reforms. Moreover, low public awareness of CBM, as indicated by the survey data, limits the engagement of citizens, particularly those in rural areas or marginalized communities. This underscores the urgent need for targeted public education campaigns that empower citizens with the knowledge and resources necessary to engage with CBM initiatives effectively [5, 6].

Another significant implication of the study is the need for better institutional support for CBM. Government officials and CBO representatives emphasized that CBM's underutilization is mainly due to resource constraints and the lack of political will to act on the collected data. Despite the potential for CBM to improve service delivery and ensure government accountability, its integration into policy frameworks has been inconsistent. Survey responses and interviews reveal that many government officials are open to utilizing CBM data but face bureaucratic hurdles and institutional resistance that prevent meaningful action. Inconsistent funding and the fragmented application of CBM across various governmental sectors further exacerbate this issue. Community media participants emphasized the importance of amplifying citizen voices and CBM findings but noted that their impact is limited without political buy-in and governmental follow-through. These findings suggest that while CBM can play a key role in fostering sustainable governance, it requires a more robust institutional framework that ensures coordination, sustained investment, and commitment from local governments to act on CBM data. Without such support, CBM's long-term viability and effectiveness remain compromised, preventing it from achieving its full potential as a tool for accountable governance [5, 7].

The study's findings also underscore the disparities in CBM's implementation, particularly regarding access and digital inclusion. The survey and interviews revealed that rural communities and marginalized populations face significant barriers to CBM participation due to limited internet access, low digital literacy, and inadequate infrastructure. These barriers exacerbate existing governance inequalities, making it difficult for underserved communities to monitor public service delivery or hold government officials accountable. CBO representatives and community media participants cited the digital divide and lack of infrastructure in rural areas as critical obstacles to inclusive CBM. The study suggests that addressing these systemic barriers is essential for CBM to fulfill its potential as a mechanism for inclusive governance. Investing in digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy, and ensuring that CBM tools are accessible to all citizens—regardless of geographic location or socio-economic status—are crucial to creating a more equitable governance model. This reflects the principles of SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which emphasize the need for inclusive and

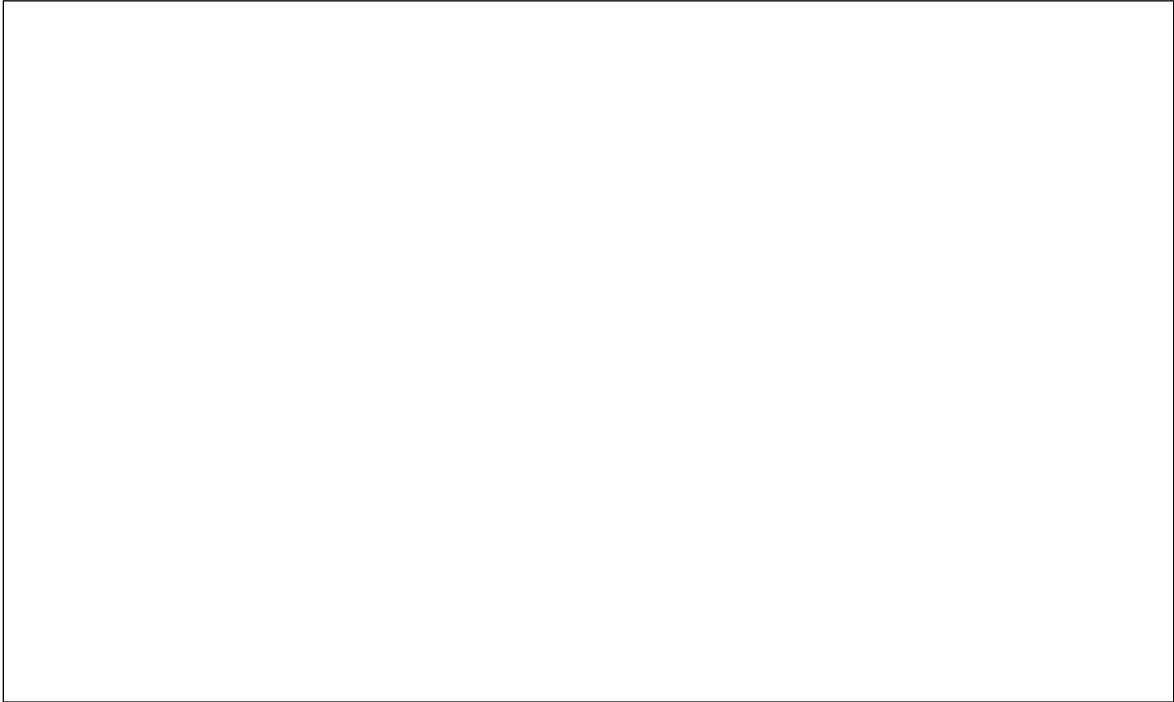
accountable institutions to support sustainable governance. These findings highlight the critical need for a framework that addresses the digital divide and creates inclusive pathways for all citizens to engage in CBM [8, 14].

Given these challenges, it is evident that the current CBM landscape in South Africa requires a comprehensive framework to address its systemic barriers and maximize its potential for promoting sustainable governance. The lack of institutional commitment, insufficient funding, poor infrastructure, and uneven access to CBM tools necessitate the development of a framework that fosters citizen participation and ensures government responsiveness. This framework should incorporate institutional support, targeted education programs, and technological solutions to address the digital divide. By providing a cohesive policy structure that integrates CBM into decision-making processes and guarantees adequate resources for its implementation, South Africa can strengthen its governance systems, ensuring that accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement are at the core of public service delivery. This framework will be instrumental in bridging the gap between citizen input and governmental action, enabling CBM to contribute more effectively to achieving Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring a more equitable and inclusive governance model for all [6, 8, 9].

### **CBM Framework for Sustainable Governance**

The CBM framework for sustainable governance proposes a comprehensive and practical approach to integrating citizen participation into governance systems. By focusing on the core principles of participatory decision-making, equity, transparency, and accountability, this framework aims to transform governance structures into more inclusive, transparent, and sustainable models capable of addressing the challenges faced in public service delivery. Drawing from the study's findings, existing governance theories, and best practices identified in the literature, the proposed framework offers a clear path forward for institutionalizing CBM to promote sustainable governance. The framework outlines key strategies for strengthening citizen engagement and bridging the gaps that hinder the widespread implementation of CBM, ultimately aiming to build governance systems that are responsive, equitable, and accountable to the needs of all citizens, especially those in marginalized communities [5, 6, 7].

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**Figure 5: Proposed CBM Framework for Sustainable Governance**

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### ***Strengthening Participatory Decision-Making***

Participatory decision-making is fundamental to sustainable governance, ensuring local knowledge and community needs drive decisions. The framework emphasizes institutionalizing citizen involvement by establishing structured engagement platforms like citizen forums and feedback loops. This is crucial for ensuring that governance decisions reflect the diverse needs of communities and foster a more inclusive governance process. The findings from the study underscore that many citizens face barriers, such as lack of knowledge, limited access to participatory tools, and inconsistent government responsiveness, which hinder their ability to engage with CBM initiatives fully. Addressing these barriers requires targeted civic education programs and capacity-building initiatives that equip citizens with the tools and knowledge necessary to engage effectively with CBM. Moreover, the framework advocates for technology-enabled platforms that allow for real-time feedback from citizens, thereby facilitating direct communication between communities and decision-makers. These platforms can enhance citizen participation and improve policy responsiveness. Still, as emphasised in the literature, these platforms must be designed with accessibility in mind to ensure that marginalized groups are not excluded due to digital divides [5, 6, 9]. For CBM to thrive, participatory decision-making must be institutionalized within the governance system, creating continuous engagement between citizens and government representatives and ensuring that feedback leads to meaningful policy changes.

### ***Promoting Equity and Inclusivity***

Equity is essential to sustainable governance, ensuring that all citizens—regardless of their socio-economic status, geographic location, or background—have equal access to public services and opportunities to participate in governance. The study's findings highlight significant barriers to participation, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, where limited internet access and infrastructural gaps prevent full participation in CBM. To promote equity and ensure that CBM reaches underserved populations, the framework proposes capacity-building initiatives to empower disadvantaged groups to engage in the monitoring process. These initiatives should focus on building digital literacy, providing training on monitoring tools, and fostering community leadership within marginalized groups. Moreover, the framework calls for investment in infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, to improve internet connectivity and expand mobile technology access. Partnerships with the private sector and international organizations could help provide the necessary resources to address these infrastructure deficits. Additionally, promoting inclusive governance structures that actively involve women, youth, and other underrepresented groups is essential for ensuring that CBM initiatives reflect the diverse perspectives of the entire community. This can be achieved through outreach programs, advisory councils, and quotas to guarantee representation in CBM efforts. Addressing these structural inequities will allow CBM to advance social justice, ensuring that governance systems are responsive to the needs of all citizens and not just the privileged few [5, 9, 12].

### ***Enhancing Transparency and Accountability through Open Data***

Transparency is essential to sustainable governance, enabling citizens to monitor government actions and hold institutions accountable. The study revealed that while CBM generates valuable data, this information is often inaccessible to the public, undermining the transparency of governance processes. The framework advocates adopting open data practices to address this, ensuring that CBM-generated data is publicly available in user-friendly formats such as interactive dashboards or geospatial visualizations. Public reporting mechanisms should also be established, allowing citizens to see how their feedback is incorporated into policy and service improvements. This aligns with the Dialogic Communication Theory, which stresses the importance of two-way communication between citizens and government. Transparency alone, however, is not enough; it must be paired with accountability to be genuinely effective. For example, Brazil's participatory budgeting initiatives have shown that resource allocation transparency can improve citizen trust and service delivery outcomes. The framework also emphasizes that community media can be crucial in promoting transparency, particularly in areas with limited access to digital platforms. By publicizing CBM findings, community media can amplify citizen voices, ensuring that government actions (or inactions) are visible to the public. Moreover, the framework highlights the need for robust data security measures to protect citizen privacy and build confidence in CBM systems. To foster greater trust and engagement, real-time information sharing should be prioritized, with mechanisms in place to ensure offline communities have access to feedback channels [5, 12, 14].

### ***Institutionalizing Accountability Mechanisms***

The effective institutionalization of accountability mechanisms is critical to ensuring that CBM leads to tangible improvements in governance. The study's findings reveal that despite the valuable data generated by CBM, government responsiveness remains inconsistent, with many CBM findings either ignored or only superficially

addressed. To overcome this challenge, the framework proposes the establishment of precise feedback mechanisms that allow citizens to track the outcomes of their participation. This can include establishing timelines for government responses, providing regular progress updates, and offering avenues for citizens to appeal unsatisfactory outcomes. Performance tracking systems must also be integrated into governance processes, linking CBM data with key performance indicators (KPIs) for public service delivery. The framework suggests that independent oversight bodies, comprised of representatives from civil society, academia, and international organizations, should be established to audit the implementation of CBM recommendations and ensure compliance with governance standards. Finally, institutionalizing CBM within legislative frameworks is essential for ensuring its long-term sustainability. This can include laws that mandate citizen participation in governance, protect whistleblowers, and require public institutions to act on CBM findings. By embedding CBM within formal governance structures, South Africa can create a more accountable and responsive system, ensuring citizen participation directly influences governance and public service delivery [5, 6, 7].

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The CBM Framework for Sustainable Governance proposed in this study offers a practical and adaptable approach to fostering transparency, accountability, and social equity in governance. By engaging citizens directly in monitoring public service delivery, CBM enhances government accountability by ensuring that public institutions remain responsive to the populace's needs. This participatory framework underscores the importance of inclusive decision-making, which aligns policies and services with the real needs of communities. The study's findings demonstrate that participatory governance increases public trust in government institutions by giving citizens a sense of ownership and responsibility in the governance process. This enhanced trust fosters better relationships between citizens and government, improving public service efficacy.

Moreover, by focusing on transparency, the framework enables real-time monitoring of public services, empowering citizens to demand timely and effective responses from government agencies, thus creating a continuous cycle of public accountability. Institutionalizing feedback mechanisms ensures citizen input directly informs policy decisions and service improvements, facilitating a more responsive and responsible governance structure. As a result, CBM plays a vital role in enhancing the effectiveness of government actions and promoting long-term sustainability in public service delivery. This aligns with South Africa's broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). The potential of CBM to strengthen governance is especially significant in South Africa, where issues such as corruption, service delivery protests, and historical inequalities persist. The framework presented here offers actionable and scalable solutions that can be implemented across various levels of government and sectors, ensuring that CBM becomes a core element of South Africa's long-term governance strategy rather than a temporary or symbolic tool.

To realize the full potential of CBM as a tool for sustainable governance, policymakers, institutions, and citizens must actively adopt and integrate CBM practices into everyday governance processes. Policymakers should prioritize the inclusion of CBM within national and local governance frameworks by enacting legislation that mandates citizen participation in decision-making and monitoring processes. Institutional reforms must ensure that CBM data is collected and used effectively to implement tangible improvements in public services. This can be achieved by ensuring that government agencies allocate adequate resources to support CBM initiatives, including funding for technological infrastructure, citizen engagement programs, and capacity-building efforts aimed at citizens and public officials. Such reforms will enable the institutionalisation of CBM, making it a key feature of government operations and public service oversight.

Additionally, institutions must play a proactive role in fostering partnerships between the government, CSOs, and CBOs to support the implementation of CBM across diverse sectors. These partnerships will enable sharing of knowledge, resources, and expertise, ensuring that CBM is a collaborative effort that reflects the varied needs of South African communities. CSOs and NGOs must advocate for the institutionalization of CBM within policy processes and actively mobilize citizens to participate in monitoring efforts, bridging the gap between government actions and community needs. Lastly, citizens must recognize their central role in driving sustainable governance through CBM. Engaged and informed citizens are the backbone of any successful CBM system, and their participation is essential for holding public institutions accountable and ensuring that public services are responsive, equitable, and inclusive. Citizens should actively participate in local CBM initiatives, demand transparency from government bodies, and work alongside other stakeholders to ensure that governance systems prioritize accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability. By adopting CBM as a tool for sustainable governance, South Africa can move closer to achieving its SDGs, strengthen public trust, enhance service delivery, and create a more resilient and inclusive society. The framework

outlined in this study provides a clear pathway to making CBM a core component of South Africa's governance infrastructure, paving the way for effective governance, greater public participation, and, ultimately, a more sustainable and just future for all citizens.

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