E-Governance and Citizen Participation in South Africa: A Jobs to be Done Assessment

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Introduction

South Africa is teetering on the edge of major change. One of the wealthiest countries in Africa, the government has taken bold steps to modernize systems, restructure its economy, and invest in its people. At the forefront of these initiatives is a focus on good governance. Politicians at all levels of authority recognize the need to be more responsive to the needs of the people. At the national level, the Zuma administration has called out better local governance as a central priority for South Africa. As a result, the Department of Cooperative Government and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) announced its ‘Back to Basics’ initiative at the end of 2014 with the stated goal to “put people and their concerns first and ensure constant contact with communities through effective public participation platforms.”

Investment in a healthier citizen-government dynamic has been recognised at all levels of government as vital for the country to realize its potential. Like other nations, South Africa is looking at technology to help bridge gaps in government performance. Seen as an inexpensive and efficient way to modernize service provision, information and communication technologies (ICTs) also have the potential to connect people in ways that were previously unavailable to them. Upset about dilapidated roads? Rather than submit a complaint into a suggestion box, why not send it via SMS to the appropriate local official with an attached photo and geotag? Wondering how people in your district view the government-run health clinics? Ask them to rate and review their experiences on an online platform so you can track which ones are performing well and which ones need improving. The potential uses of technology to ease governance inefficiencies and increase engagement are enormous.

Technology, however, is not a silver bullet. While clear benefits exists, there are numerous challenges to overcome. This study, as part of the Making All Voices Count practitioner research programme, was undertaken to look at existing opportunities for tech-enabled government and governance initiatives in South Africa. The focus of the research was to uncover the set of underlying drivers that motivate people to look at ICTs as a plausible way to engage with their government. The guiding hypothesis is if technology enables people to access what they want from their government in an easier and more reliable way, they are more likely to adopt that solution. Initiatives that give citizens elaborate high-tech features that don’t directly address the basics of what they are trying to get done through their government will fall flat. Above all, e-government/e-governance initiatives need to be demand-driven and avoid the temptation to over-supply in the hopes that the people will eventually catch up.

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. This Grand Challenge focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The programme encourages locally driven and context specific change, as we believe a global vision can only be achieved if it is

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1 Mokobo, “Zuma Calls for Good Governance in Local Government,” (September 18, 2014).
3 Yowzit, with the support of Making All Voices Count undertook a research programme to explore the receptivity of the South African environment for technology-assisted governance solutions. The inquiry was launched as part of the Making All Voices Count initiative which promotes innovative solutions to improve citizen engagement in countries worldwide. The study focused predominantly on e-governance rather than e-government. Taking our cue from the wider literature, we define e-government in the narrower sense of providing on-line services to citizens whereas e-governance encompasses the larger discipline of cooperative governance including citizen engagement. The primary focus of this work is on how to use technology to promote that engagement. While we do not ignore the e-government domain, we largely focused on unpacking the opportunities and challenges for catalysing greater citizen participation in their local institutions.
pursued from the bottom up, rather than the top down. The field of technology for Open Government is relatively young and the consortium partners, Hivos, Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Ushahidi, are a part of this rapidly developing domain. These institutions have extensive and complementary skills and experience in the field of citizen engagement, government accountability, innovation and research.

Making All Voices Count is supported by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID), United States’ Agency for International Development (USAID), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and Omidyar Network (ON), and is implemented by a consortium consisting of Hivos (lead organisation), the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Ushahidi.

**Background**

South Africa suffers a problem of governance. Similar to other transitioning countries, the demands of the citizenry far outpace the capacity of many local institutions to keep pace. While progress is being made, the overall situation is difficult and becoming more unstable. Protests over service delivery failures are occurring with increasing frequency. Frustrated by the perceived indifference of local government institutions, people are taking to the streets in sometimes not-so-peaceful gatherings to voice their discontent. According to the Institute of Race Relations, there has been a 96% increase in service delivery protests in South Africa since 2010. Some of the more recent incidents in May of 2015 have resulted in substantial property damage and death.

The level of discontent is not surprising. The Department of Local Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) has assessed 63% of the country’s municipalities as being dysfunctional or highly dysfunctional in terms of their professionalism and efficiency. Problems noted in these troubled municipalities are numerous. Paramount is the decline in core government services that are not being delivered or are delivered at an unacceptably low level. The cause of poor service delivery is not always corruption and indifference, although these pathologies definitely play a part. It also stems from a lack of capacity on the part of officials to carry out basic functions, such as revenue collection, which would allow them to invest in better service output. Regardless of the cause, however, the result is an unvirtuous cycle of increasing distance and mistrust between local administrators and the people: the more local governments fail to meet popular expectations, the more they are reviled by the communities whom they purport to serve, the more they disengage from people’s everyday problems, and the less that gets done. With nearly two-thirds of South Africa’s municipalities not working well, the problem

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4. As reported by Petersen, “Protests Increase by Nearly 100% since 2010,” News24 (May 27, 2015). Africasecuritytracker.com, however, shows a decrease in service delivery protests, as reported by the media, and a decline in violent protests since they began monitoring this field in February 2015. See Africasecuritytracker.com for more information.
of local governance has become critical and requires bold initiatives to fix. As Minister Pravin Gordhan of CoGTA has stated, “We cannot solve today’s problems with the same level of thinking that created the problems in the first place.” It would seem that the time is ripe in South Africa for a creative approach to local governance reform.

This is not to say that initiative has been lacking. A number of approaches to utilize ICT for local governance purposes have been tried, including governmental efforts to set up web portals and online service options. To date, none of these initiatives has gained broad-based usage in the population.

Understanding the reasons why ICTs have not become more popular in the government/governance spheres, when there is obvious growing use in the social and even financial realms, is a critical question to unpack if South Africa hopes to capitalize on the benefits and opportunities that technology can provide to improve governance.

Through our background research of the literature and discussions with practitioners in the e-governance field, a number of general guidelines for South Africa have emerged. Many of these practices have been ignored by other programmes entering the e-governance field in South Africa, which explains shortfalls that they have encountered:

• A transition to technology for better governance outcomes must be demand-driven rather than supply-generated. E-governance is not one-size-fits-all and any system that hopes to deliver on the benefits of technology needs to reflect the realities of the situation in which it is being applied.

7. Ibid. Minister Gordhan was quoting Albert Einstein.
8. Mobilitate was one of the earliest attempts to ignite movement in the e-governance field. Started by South Africa entrepreneur Lionel Bischoff in 2010, Mobilitate set itself up as the go-to platform for citizen-local government engagement. Offering a number of functions such as the ability for people to log issues or complaints through their phone or computer with associated photos and geotags, tracking of complaint resolution, opinion blogs, and community discussion forums, the service had high hopes that it would become the standard for citizen-municipal engagement throughout South Africa. This vision has yet to be realized. While the site showed early promise, the lack of municipal uptake and the inability to sign up a critical mass of users and transform them into a vibrant online community have stalled Mobilitate’s momentum. More recently, Yowzit, a ratings and review platform originally for the private sector, began expanding its reach into the public domain. With grant support from Making All Voices Count, Yowzit re-purposed its platform so that people could not only rate and review their local restaurants and businesses but also government services. The use of the platform for governance purposes, while operational for only a little under a year, has already shown promise. By combining the private-sector techniques of online community-building and the public rationales, Yowzit is a stand out for a new model for social change.
9. An easy explanation for the stagnation in ICT use for governance purposes is the unfamiliarity of people with the methods or a lack of online access. The widespread use of social media and online access – via smartphone, PC, and tablet – for personal and business outcomes suggests that this is likely not the case.
• In a situation of strained citizen-government relations, it is vital that a new approach to improving these interactions proves worthwhile from the start. Attention to increasing both citizen participation and municipal response is a must. Given this requirement, movement to using ICTs to facilitate citizen-government interactions should set realistic expectations. Technology will not automatically create accountability and professionalism in offices that lack these attributes, nor will it catalyse widespread community participation. It can, however, help to spur reform by widening the conversation, giving all people—traditionally marginalised or otherwise—a way to input their opinions, allowing for increased transparency in decision-making, simplifying how things get done, increasing communication, and giving cash-strapped officials a more cost-efficient and immediate way to respond. Only when technology is embedded in larger efforts to build community responsiveness, can change occur.

• Use of ICTs for government and governance purposes does not happen automatically. Where widespread uptake has occurred, it has largely been due to concerted efforts to educate people on how to e-engage with their government coupled with strong mentoring of officials and accountability benchmarks for them to use the technology.

• For technology to play a truly transformative role in society, significant investment is needed to develop the key infrastructure, and there must be a willingness to continually invest in keeping it relevant.¹⁰

Methodology for Primary Research

The primary research findings of this report are the result of a six-month research programme undertaken primarily in South Africa’s Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal (KZN) provinces.¹¹ The research was designed to represent a cross-section of South African society from a socio-economic perspective. As such, the research was conducted in historically black areas, known as townships, and a selection of higher socio-economic locations, known as suburbs. Townships in South Africa are not homogenous and can vary significantly in socio-economic status. Two of the townships, Kliptown and Diepsloot, are populated by the poorest and most marginalised people while Tembisa, Umlazi and Chatsworth are populated by people with a higher socio-economic status. Suburbs in South Africa are now multi-racial and populated by people of high socio-economic status.

¹¹ Gauteng and KZN were chosen to provide diversity and to represent two of the three largest urban and peri-urban areas of the country. Due to the demographic composition of these provinces, the non-black African population surveyed skewed to be more Indian and less coloured or Afrikaans-speaking than the country at large. The survey was administered in English, although researchers translated questions into Zulu as respondents needed; Zulu is the predominant native language in these provinces.
Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used as well as extensive desk research and discussions with experts.

**The Jobs to be Done Approach**

The study applied the Jobs to be Done framework to structure both the focus group discussion (FGD) and survey questions. The Jobs to be Done approach emerged from the disruptive innovation work pioneered by Harvard Business School professor Clayton Christensen. Christensen argues that only by understanding what jobs people are trying to get done in their daily lives can organisations proffer offerings that are relevant and ultimately used. It is not sufficient to ask people what they want, as they often are only able to articulate a narrow, and often suboptimal, solution to the underlying job they are actually trying to satisfy. As Henry Ford reputedly said, “If I asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.” Identifying the jobs to be done allows for innovative and targeted solutions to be constructed with a high guarantee of success. This holds true whether working in the public or private sector. Questions in both the focus groups and the survey, therefore, probed to uncover the range of jobs that people were looking to get done with regard to their local government in order to better understand how technology, as well as which technologies, could be used to satisfy those jobs.

The study used the method of Jobs to be Done to understand latent needs and how new solutions would be received, given that the status quo is clearly inadequate and a poor baseline for conceiving the future. The Jobs approach, pioneered by consumer marketing organizations such as Procter & Gamble, maps the landscape both as it is today and how it will look as new solutions take root.

Beyond looking at the jobs that people are trying to get done, the Jobs approach examines what drives people to have distinct needs – in our study, these were factors such as comfort with social media and township vs. suburban location. It completes the view of today’s world by looking at current approaches and pain points, such as using suggestion boxes with little confidence that suggestions are even seen by anyone beyond the office where the suggestions are left.

The Jobs approach then provides critical perspective on what future solutions must achieve. It looks at success criteria for these solutions, such as the ability to show problems vs. just tell about them, as well as the ability for people reviewing institutions to remain anonymous. The approach also examines what obstacles may get in the way of adopting new solutions, such as feeling that one person can’t make a difference or not trusting the entity providing a new e-governance solution.

In contrast to other research approaches, which focus on what people are doing today and what their flash reactions are to new solutions, Jobs provides a very well-rounded view of what new solutions must accomplish to succeed and how they will be compared over time to the status quo. It thereby enables solution providers to devise concepts beyond the narrow
constraints of current thinking as well as to take a very realistic look at how those concepts will be received.

**Survey Techniques**

For the qualitative part of the research, 20 FGDs were undertaken with between 2-6 people in each group. Special attention was given to diversifying the respondent groups and talking to both high-technology users as well as those who have little to no access to the Internet or a tablet or smartphone.

Quantitatively, a sample of 381 people was surveyed through a combination of face-to-face interviews and an online questionnaire. Respondents for the face-to-face interview were selected through random selection of participants in public areas. Researchers stood outside shopping centres and asked every 3rd person, as possible, to take a short survey. No incentive was provided to the respondents. We found that some respondents in suburban commercial areas actually lived in townships, and we recorded them as such. There were few suburban residents whom we found in townships, but when that occurred we recorded them by their residence, not where we happened to encounter them. We obtained 229 township and 79 suburban responses through this face-to-face approach.

Online participants were recruited through Yowzit’s ratings and review platform. While recruiting through Yowzit’s site introduces a bias in favour of high frequency technology users of a certain age group and background, the interest in doing so was to ensure that we captured the voice of this vanguard population. It is this group that are likely to be the early adopters of any new ICT initiative and from whom early lessons will be culled. People coming to the Yowzit website, through a PC or via smartphone/tablet, were asked to click a link leading them to an online survey. Again, no incentive was provided to complete this survey. This part of the survey was national, and therefore 5% of the overall survey respondents were outside of Gauteng and KZN. We obtained 73 responses through the online approach.

Unexpectedly, social media usage was higher among the in-person respondents than we anticipated, and the online survey respondents were not substantially different from the in-person ones once we divided the population among township and suburban survey-takers. For the overall survey population, 35% of respondents claimed to be Yowzit users.

Overall the survey population was gender balanced, with 52% of respondents being female. This proportion was consistent across township/suburban and high/low social media usage, with the greatest skew being suburban low social media users at 56% female.

The age range of respondents covered younger adult as well as middle aged years, with a few older respondents as well. Here, the distinctions between township/suburban were more notable, with 28% of township residents surveyed being 18-24 vs. 17% suburban, and 34% being 25-34 in townships vs. 27% suburban. Interestingly, there was little divergence in age range between high and low social media users.

Data on education, race, and home language were also collected. The distribution reflected expected populations.

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12. We defined social media usage by how often people accessed — via smartphone, PC, or tablet — “social media such as Facebook or Instagram.” Respondents who answered “all day long,” “a few times a day,” or “once a day” were classified as High Social Media Users for the purposes of data analysis.

13. According to the United National Population Fund (UNFPA), 66% of South Africa’s population is below the age of 35. This youth bulge is consistent with many other developing or transitioning countries whose populations are skewed toward younger cohorts. See [http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/southafrica/2013/04/22/6609/youth/](http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/southafrica/2013/04/22/6609/youth/)
Findings from the data

Appeal of e-governance

The findings of the data presented both surprising and expected outcomes. Unanticipated was the level of receptivity on the part of those surveyed and discussants in the focus groups to using technology as a governance tool. The level of partiality for tech solutions was inconsistent with the results of many other studies conducted on early government and governance digitization efforts where technology has been viewed with a mix of scepticism and guarded interest by ordinary citizens. In contrast, respondents were open to the ways in which technology could make the back and forth of dealing with the government more efficient. As one woman in Durban stated, “we could do our queries online instead of holding on the phone for a long period of time”. Another respondent in Durban talked about his experience in Uganda with a municipality who worked through social media. He commented, “what I liked about the municipality there (in Uganda) is that they had a Facebook page for the community to state their need and concerns. It put pressure on them because there were a lot of things coming up.” Asked in the survey if they “would use an Internet or smartphone-based system to provide feedback and input to local government,” respondents generally said that they would. This sentiment was mirrored to a large extent in the focus group discussions. Intriguingly, the sentiment echoed across both high and local social media users, as well as township / suburban divides.

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<tr>
<td>Improve Service Delivery?</td>
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<td>73%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Businesses?</td>
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Why is the platform so interesting? Among those who answered that they found it appealing, citizens reported that a dedicated web platform for interacting with their local government and their larger community would potentially accomplish a wide range of jobs that they are interested in getting done. These jobs related both to very tangible outcomes—such as reporting immediate problems to government representatives for action—as well as more social-emotional needs—such as wanting to feel like a valued member of a vibrant community. As a participant in one of the FGDs in Queensburgh remarked, “I would use it (technology) to see an improvement in the quality of service delivery. I had an experience with the Department of Labour where my calls went unanswered for days.” A similar sentiment was expressed by a woman in Elandskop who noted that “we would like to see an improvement in the communication lines between government officials and citizens.” And still another respondent noted that communicating directly with the local government through a website or other digital platform may not only help her but others as well: “I would do it because if I am having a problem I am sure someone else who is less fortunate that I might have the
same problem and not have the means to voice their grievances.”

While attitudes were optimistic they were also realistic. Citizens of South Africa are under no illusions about what can be accomplished in the near term. They understand that the barriers to change are high. This no nonsense attitude was reflected in such statements as “people are scared to provide poor feedback” and “if you are not affiliated with a certain party you struggle to get access to this (community projects, jobs) information” or “people are very proud and wouldn’t feel comfortable sharing their problems.” Even in the face of these potential roadblocks, however, there was the palpable sense that small positive changes could have an outsized effect. “I would like to see small local successes” said one man. Another respondent talked about the need to show “quick wins” in order to “get people to think their voice matters.” And still another spoke about addressing “simple problems in the community” to “get people excited.” This same respondent suggested working with only “a handful of municipalities that seem inclined to be responsive.” Usefulness and demonstrable benefit will be key to getting people to value ICTs as a worthwhile option for engaging with their local government.14

Not everyone was attracted to the idea of a web-based platform for governance. While a minority opinion in this study, their views represent real obstacles that need to be understood. Concerns gravitated around the effectiveness of such a system, whether people would use it, as well as cost and security. One woman from Elandskop stated, “I don’t think your suggestion (communicating with the government through a website) would be taken seriously, so I think forming a group that would approach the counsellors and other officials would be more effective.” Another woman from Tembisa talked about the level of “ignorance on a personal level” and how “people often don’t take the time.” A less dubious participant from Durban was more amenable to using a web platform but stressed the need to show people how to digitally engage: “Yes, we could do our queries online instead of holding on the phone for a long period of time. But they would need to advertise how people can access them and how easy it is to access them through adverts.” Other people were more blunt in their commentary. One person from Tembisa stated very directly: “I would not waste my airtime on the government because I will not get anything.” Another participant from Umhlanga Rocks talked about how the technology doesn’t matter because “Government officials have no time and are not receptive.”

They are not passionate about service delivery.” While survey results highlighted cost as a concern, the issues did not present in the FGDs in a significant way. People mentioned cost in regard to thinking they had to pay for the government’s toll free help lines if they were not calling from a land line. Given that most of the people interviewed only had mobile phones, this was an obvious concern. One woman from Kliptown commented that “Internet prices are too high.” Similarly, survey results show that security was noted as a significant disincentive to use an on-line platform. This result was not mirrored in the FGDs, where security was barely mentioned.

Township residents, especially those in the worst-off locales, feel neglected. As one women from Elandskop stated, “It is very difficult for us to voice our concerns because government officials in our area are not receptive.” Services that are provided, e.g. job bulletin boards, are believed to be exploited to deliver benefits such as jobs to those who are related or otherwise connected to those with local power. This sentiment was stated several times but expressed very clearly by another interviewee from Elandskop: “Political affiliation is a major issue in our community because if you are not a member of a certain party you have very restricted access to information.” In the face of such mistrust, individuals often felt that one voice makes no difference. Critically, however, they felt quite differently about collective voices, and many said that there is power in numbers to demand something better. As a person in Chatsworth argued, “When one person complains, no one would listen. But if one would listen. But if a larger number of people complain about the same thing, government officials would be more responsive.” The theme of single vs. collective voice is one that will likely remain important in South Africa and be significant in how change takes place.

The survey asked respondents who said they were not interested in the system whether one reason might be it is “not my responsibility.” Relatively few chose this option compared to the more practical barriers noted above.

With both supporters and cynics, an underlying mistrust of the government colours perceptions of progress that can be achieved through technology or any other means. There is deep-seated doubt that the government will actually deliver upon promised services.
What people want from their government

Participants expressed a wide range of needs related to public services. Naturally, the first priority was having public services delivered reliably and at high quality. Currently, there is widespread criticism of the quality and consistency of service provision. In Pinetown, one participant spoke of the “high level of nepotism (that) affects the quality of services rendered to citizens, so even if you lodge a complaint, the people who attend to it are unqualified and lack passion for their jobs.” Another person from Merebank told of the uselessness of going through official channels: “They don’t let you know if your issue is being resolved; we have had issues and spoke directly to the local councillor about people who were illegally staying on our neighbour’s abandoned house and stealing from our yards but we found no joy.” Many spoke of long waits, poorly outfitted clinics, and unpredictable repairs. In Kliptown one young man told the story: “We complain about general and specific (things), for example long queues. Recently someone died in the queue!” Indeed, the survey showed that reliable information on government schedules, such as for power load shedding or vaccinations, topped the list with 90% of respondents rating it as important (5-7 on a 7 point scale of importance). A whopping 73% rated it a 7 on that 7 point scale. The finding was consistent across township/suburb and high/low social media users and was also reflected in those who participated in the FGDs. While disruptions from events such as load shedding or changes to rubbish collection schedules are distained, they are nevertheless expected. Respondents said that simply knowing about when these things would occur, or when positive events such as vaccinations would take place, would help in planning their often unpredictable lives.

Other information needs are assessed in the chart on page 12. Job opportunities stand out in both the survey and the FGDs as being extremely important. As mentioned earlier, there exists the widespread perception that job bulletin boards are rigged to favour the friends and families of those with influence. Jobs that are posted on these sites are generally thought to be already filled by those with connections. In this vein, people expressed an eagerness not only to have a more credible site to job search but also to have greater visibility on what is taking place in their neighbourhood and surrounding areas. Information on ongoing or upcoming municipal projects, which might provide a source of employment, was mentioned in several focus groups as valuable intelligence. Relatedly, people expressed an interest in knowing “more about what happens to the public funds given to counsellors for the development of our area.”

15 The chart concentrates on distinctions between township and suburb, as high and low social media users tended to be consistent on their information needs with the slight exception of high social media users being skewing more toward 5-6 than 7 in how important they viewed a community bulletin board to be; conversely, low social media users viewed it as more important. Throughout this report, unless stated otherwise importance is defined as a 5-7 rating on a 7 point scale.
Contrary to what may be expected in an environment of high frustration, people were keen to hear positive things about where they lived—history, notable happenings, and things to celebrate. One respondent from Queensburgh stated: “I would like to see notification about any positive things happening in my area, be it new businesses and individual success stories.” Another interviewee from Folweni also expressed interest in more positive news: “I would like to see positive news about my community and measures to be taken in addressing social ills.” And a woman from Tembisa, when asked what she would like to see on a web platform, responded “things to make me proud.” What is remarkable is that while many people often had little hope for immediate improvement of their surroundings, they enthusiastically welcomed good news of even very modest proportions.

Citizens responding to the idea of Internet-enabled engagement were keen on greater interaction—both with their local government as well as with their neighbours and community compatriots. The willingness to have a new modality with which they could interact with their local government was unexpected given the level of mistrust that define citizen-government relations. However people saw having such a site as being critical to helping government representatives understand local problems and issues. Many of those interviewed stated unequivocally that they would help populate the site with community information that could be helpful to local officials as well as to their neighbours. In one

Beyond the immediate need for employment, respondents in both the survey and the FGDs said they had difficulty finding out about things in their neighbourhoods, even ones where they had lived their entire lives. People seemed especially interested in knowing about events and programmes taking place in their area as well as things such as openings and closing of businesses and public buildings, church and social happenings, etc. Training and educational opportunities were also high on the list of youth responders. Surprisingly, very few people flagged crime. A handful of individuals in the FGDs mentioned that they would like to have information “about crime in my area (Queensburgh),” but safety and security were not mentioned by many people. When asked where people obtain information about government activity or events taking place in their community, the overwhelming response was TV, radio, and local newspapers. One person from Kliptown responded by saying: “It’s the ghetto. People get information for us.” Another young man from the same group said that “community leaders inform people (about events in Kliptown) using loud speakers.” Websites—which could be expected to have much more detailed and targeted information—lagged far behind. Even for high social media users, just 16% of township residents reported that they used websites to obtain information about government activity, and the figure rose to only 35% in the suburbs.
Durban FGD, all participants unanimously stated that they would contribute to the platform if it existed. “Social media is an effective way of voicing one’s concerns about government” stated another person from Chatsworth. “We need to know someone is listening” declared a women from Tembisa when asked to name a possible benefit of using a web portal to talk to the government.

The appetite for greater engagement with fellow citizens was less surprising. People see an obvious benefit in having a common knowledge base about what is happening in their area and what others see as important issues. In Kliptown, one person suggested that it would be useful for everyone to be able to see which areas are receiving services and which are not. Another participant from Durban suggested that perhaps local government needs more help from the communities: “maybe they (the government) don’t know” about specific problems. “Potholes are hard to find.” And still another person from Kliptown said a web platform would be useful if it allowed the government “to interact with the feedback and communicate with the community.” Ultimately, people interviewed clearly understood the power of collective action and their need for a common approach.

Interestingly, despite the obvious enthusiasm for community cohesion and an awareness that technology can help spur greater unity, some people interviewed for the FGDs were hesitant to trust the opinions of others, especially if those opinions were expressed online. Repeatedly, people stated that “information shared online is unreliable” or dismissed people’s input by saying “it’s only people’s opinion and I wouldn’t base my decision on something I read online.” The suspicion by some respondents of crowdsourced content is a barrier that requires deeper questioning to unpack the source of this mistrust. As people in South Africa have come to realise, a fragmented community is unable to accomplish very much in the face of a disorganised or indifferent local government.

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Interestingly, despite the obvious enthusiasm for community cohesion and an awareness that technology can help spur greater unity, some people interviewed for the FGDs were hesitant to trust the opinions of others, especially if those opinions were expressed online. Repeatedly, people stated that “information shared online is unreliable” or dismissed people’s input by saying “it’s only people’s opinion and I wouldn’t base my decision on something I read online.” The suspicion by some respondents of crowdsourced content is a barrier that requires deeper questioning to unpack the source of this mistrust. As people in South Africa have come to realise, a fragmented community is unable to accomplish very much in the face of a disorganised or indifferent local government.

As for why the idea of a web platform, in theory, seemed to appeal to people, the answer is likely found in the unsatisfactory approaches that people currently have
available to them now. Suggestion boxes, which are the most common method to lodge a complaint or problem are referred to as a “black hole” good for “recycling paper” by many people. As explained by a respondent from Tembisa, “I used the suggestion boxes in the past but nobody replied.” Whether true or not, the general perception is that negative feedback is simply discarded. Ward Councillors, in contrast, are generally viewed positively. People see them as having the authority to accomplish things. However, Ward Councillors only hear a very small percentage of issues and are largely inconsistent in how they respond. Furthermore, not everyone felt that they had easy access to people of that stature. Local government websites are another avenue through which people can find information. While one person interviewed said that he went to a government website and found information easy to find, the general feeling was that these websites were a difficult or impossible way to find things. Google was sometimes referenced for information, but data on local institutions was very scant. There were a few mentions in higher income groups of travel-related sites, namely TripAdvisor, but this was for very specialized needs.

People participate but do not provide much feedback

Citizens in South Africa have either lost or not adequately developed the habit of providing feedback to those in authority. Most respondents did participate governance via voting. 70% of township residents reporting voting in the last national election, vs. 78% for suburban residents. When it came to local elections, 56% of townships residents voted, as did 70% of suburban residents. Elections provoke involvement. Far fewer people had participated in protests: just 16% in the townships and 12% in the suburbs.

Unfortunately, involvement did not extend to providing feedback. Across the overall survey population, only 34% said they provided feedback, and there was little variation among sub-populations – the high was 38% among suburban high social media users, and the low was 31% among township low social media users. Among those who did provide such feedback, community meetings were by far the most common form of participation in townships, while suburban respondents who were high social media users reported social media to be their usual means of participation. For all populations, other mechanisms such as e-mail and letters to newspaper editors ranked far behind.

Despite their lack of involvement in providing feedback, citizens believe that doing so is critical.

Despite their lack of involvement in providing feedback, citizens believe that doing so is critical. This finding held true both when we asked about the importance of respondents providing feedback personally to local government (79% in townships rated it as important, and also 79% in the suburbs) and for their community to provide feedback to local government (87% township, 87% suburbs). Suburban residents who are low social media users were somewhat less engaged (32% rated community feedback as a 7 in importance, vs. 56% of high social media users). Nonetheless, the overall importance of providing feedback was striking.

If people view feedback as so essential, yet do not provide it, what stands in their way? The reason certainly is not rooted in satisfaction with government. On a 7 point scale, just 36% of township residents rated government service delivery a 5-7, and that fell to 28% in the suburbs.
When asked how they would like to provide feedback to government, the responses showed little alignment with how people currently do so – in community meetings. Respondents rated the following as the easiest methods to raise an issue with local government (rated 5-7 out of 7, with multiple selections permitted):

- Townships High: 42%
- Townships Low: 40%
- Suburb High: 52%
- Suburb Low: 36%
- Smartphone App: 42%
- Suggestion Box: 40%
- PC: 37%
- Telephone Call: 36%
- Tell In Person: 31%
- Text Message: 28%

Features of a Platform

The study also delved into desirable features of such a platform, as well as its administration. With regard to which part of the platform would be important to citizens, respondents indicated a wish for a broad range of features that include both one-way distribution of information and two-way interaction. Given the recent disruptions caused to power load shedding in the country, it is unsurprising that this feature emerged as the top choice. With the exception of the job bulletin board feature, it is striking that there is so much agreement between township and suburban populations on which features would be most important:

Factors relate to not understanding how to provide feedback

Partly, it may be because people believe government is simply uninterested in their opinions. 42% of township resident thought that government cares about their opinion, as did only 31% in the suburbs.

Our survey asked specifically about which factors get in the way of communicating with government. Many of these factors relate to not understanding how to provide feedback or the inconvenience of doing so. Responses are summarized above.
We also asked about specific features of how people would interact with an e-governance platform. The responses are as follows:

- Interacting with government officials online
- Participating in a discussion forum
- Accessing government services online
- Basic information about government offices and procedures
- Ratings and reviews of how well services are performed
- Filing complaints
- Job bulletin board
- Information from government such as load shedding information
- Feedback is anonymous
- Can read feedback from others
- Can turn speech into text
- Feedback through phone or tablet
- Feedback through web portal
- Can capture photos or video
- Feedback through social media
- Receive response from government
- Important ways to interact with the platform

Finally, we asked about which sort of entity would be trusted to administer the service. While the focus of the survey was on local governance issues, local government was not the preferred entity for the service. Township residents favoured national government performing the service, while suburban dwellers trusted the private sector most.
Technology is not a roadblock

The digital divide is often cited as an obstacle to e-government and e-governance initiatives. While any technology programme needs to combine high- and low-tech approaches to ensure inclusion of the majority of the population, South Africa is in the enviable position of having a significant portion of its population connected in some way or another. Smartphone usage among the citizens interviewed was very high. Only one FGD respondent, a woman in her 60s, did not have a smartphone (hers was a feature phone). Those without smartphones intended to acquire one when their financial situation improved. These findings held true even among the unemployed in some of the most deprived townships in the country, e.g. Kliptown. Paying for data service, and they used apps such as WhatsApp to avoid extra charges for text messaging.

Social media usage was also high, although far from unanimous. Some of the younger respondents were very heavy Facebook users, checking status many times a day. Many also used Facebook as a way to store their photos. “Technology will replace pen and paper. Kids will not be using pen and paper,” stated one man in Kliptown. The move toward the virtual word by young South Africans is widely accepted. “Online will be adopted by young people”.

Blackberry phones, where data (BBM) was included with the service. Usually citizens found the money for data service, and they used apps such as WhatsApp to avoid extra charges for text messaging.

The radical decline in cost means that more people will have smartphones in the coming years. Inexpensive smartphones are opening new opportunities for e-commerce and marketing in emerging markets and, concomitantly, developing new expectations for how transactions will be conducted. As more people have quick, easy and reliable access to the Internet, they will likely look at their smartphones as a major tool to help them get things done, including interacting with their local government.

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16 The radical decline in cost means that more people will have smartphones in the coming years. Inexpensive smartphones are opening new opportunities for e-commerce and marketing in emerging markets and, concomitantly, developing new expectations for how transactions will be conducted. As more people have quick, easy and reliable access to the Internet, they will likely look at their smartphones as a major tool to help them get things done, including interacting with their local government.
Analysis and Recommendations

At a high level, our research provided simple yet critical findings that impact how e-governance initiatives should be framed and executed:

- **Show relevance.** Any ICT platform aimed at improving governing outcomes needs to demonstrate clear and unquestionable benefits to both citizens and government officials. Initiatives should focus on satisfying immediate priorities as quickly and straightforwardly as possible before turning to more elaborate functions. In South Africa, improved service delivery stands out as an obvious focus. Small but effective progress can go a long way to building confidence in a solution. Quick wins can ignite enthusiasm and build momentum.

- **Keep it simple.** For any new ICT initiative or programme, it is critical to start simple and then build out. While it may be tempting to craft a complete e-governance system from the beginning, the likelihood that such a system will be used broadly is small. A rapid feedback loop is needed to continually understand how people are using an e-governance platform or not, which elements are most popular, why others are not, and how the system can be adjusted to become more relevant. Just as with private Internet initiatives, public programs need to retain flexibility to react quickly as individuals’ online habits evolve.

- **Progress will be gradual.** Initial progress will be modest and very significant improvement may take years to materialize. It is unrealistic to expect wide-scale change in the way that people operate to occur over night. Similarly, it takes time to read just how governing institutions perform their daily work. Establishing a credible time frame for change with realistic benchmarks will allow proper monitoring of progress and allow appropriate course corrections to be made throughout the course of the initiative.

- **Combine high-tech and low-tech approaches.** The digital divide in South Africa is closing. Initiatives such as South Africa Connect is working to provide all people access to broadband connections by 2020 at affordable rates. These nation-wide programmes are being complemented by provincial action to ensure not only that all citizens have broadband access but also that those who cannot afford to pay are able to go online for free.\(^\text{17}\) In spite of the impressive improvement in Internet access, a digital divide continues to exist and can be anticipated to limit certain underprivileged sectors of the population. Technology-enabled governance, however, does not have to solely rely on smartphones and cool apps. A successful system will combine high-tech and low-tech options to appeal to as wide a population as possible.

- **Smartphones are important.** Any platform has to be smartphone enabled. Mobile and broadband connections in Africa are expected to grow from 100 million in 2013 to 800 million by 2018 and the price of smartphones is dropping at an extraordinary rate. Most of the survey respondents owned a smartphone already.

More specific with regard to e-governance in South Africa, the research uncovered many useful findings:

- **Limited access is inhibiting feedback.** Citizens feel that they have input to provide, but they say they do not understand government processes and have trouble providing feedback directly. Existing mechanisms, such as community meetings, are used by a small minority of the surveyed population. Civil society groups—such as NGOs, churches or other trusted institutions—can play a key role in helping

their communities better understand how to engage with their local government, and each other, through an e-governance platform. Involvement of these critical actors is a must.

- **An e-governance platform is appealing.** While township and suburban residents, as well as high/low social media users, saw different levels of appeal in distinct sets of features, all groups found the concept of an e-governance platform to be attractive. Through offering several types of benefits, a platform can attract a broad range of users and be a truly inclusive mechanism for engaging citizens.

- **Information and interaction are both important.** Especially given the challenges caused by recent power load shedding, citizens sought information about schedules and other events. Township residents also had a particular interest in a job bulletin board. But it was clear as well that people sought interaction and wanted to contribute, not just consume, information. Having both one-way and two-way interaction holds promise of making a platform a top-of-mind destination. While many e-governance models suggest that the more sophisticated interaction-engagement components of the infrastructure be phased in at later stages of development, the preliminary results of this research suggest that simple models for citizen engagement, either with the government or between citizens, can be developed from the start. Give the low level of performance of many of South Africa’s municipalities, civil society may be a viable entry point.

- **Expectations are modest.** Unsurprisingly, people wanted a response from government to the issues they posted. However they did not expect a sea-change in performance. Citizens said they would engage because they wanted to play a part in improving their community, and the notion that they could join with government to improve public services was broadly appealing.

- **Administration should be arms-length.** Local government was viewed warily as an entity to run such a service. National government, the private sector, or an NGO was seen as a more trusted entity to ensure the service works as it should.

### Moving Forward

The findings of this report provide a clearer picture of the general e-readiness of South African citizens to engage in new ways with their formal institutions. People are frustrated with the ‘business as usual’ approach to managing their daily lives, which is yielding poor results and increased discontent. While the sample of this study was small, the data suggests a willingness on the part of people to consider technology as a governance enabler. The South African government, while vocally supporting innovation in governance through technology, however, has been slow to act. With more than half of their municipalities failing to meet basic standards of service and people becoming more aggressive in how they protest, the need is huge. Given the seriousness of the situation, the question of how change can occur becomes critical. This suggests an area ripe for further investigation. Best practices on how to address deficiencies in government performance through technology-enabled strategies are still being discovered. While many societies in the more advanced countries have effectively pushed forward ICT enabled government and governance initiatives, there is no guarantee that their strategies and successes can be replicated in lesser-developed contexts. In these settings, a key underlying requirement is often missing—willing government participation. For those who believe that technology can help improve public sector accountability and transparency and augment citizen voice, the question becomes how to best effect change in a non-cooperative environment?
Relatedly but more specifically, the question of the effectiveness of demand-driven e-governance programmes is also poorly understood. Currently, e-governance initiatives overly focus on a supply-driven model where government capacity to operate in the digital domain is built first and citizen e-engagement cultivated later. This model has worked successfully in many countries whose governments already perform reasonably well and see technology as an easy way to increase their efficiency and effectiveness. In societies where the government performance is more questionable and their willingness to perform uncertain, the supply-driven approach makes less sense. Follow-on research should consider demand-driven models for promoting better governance through technology. Questions could include: How can citizens use technology to call their government to account in a peaceful but open manner? What pressures or incentives work best to change government behaviour? How can citizens organise to address their own issues in the face of an indifferent or ineffective municipal government?

More practically, for Yowzit and others trying to work in this space, the findings of this report suggest a number of important learnings that can guide how to engage going forward in the domain of digital governance in South Africa. Five major points stand out:

- **Become a marketplace for information.** While Yowzit started as a ratings and review site of private sector entities, in the public sphere the platform must go beyond this service to provide content that is localised and relevant. People want to be able to plan, and information that allows them to do so is highly valued. For example, load shedding schedules give people the ability to organize their activities around when they have electricity and when they do not. Immunization announcements ensure that families can receive their annual shots and take care of their health. Knowing that your garbage won’t be collected on its usual day because of holiday scheduling or another disruption not only prevents trash from piling up on the streets, but enables you to dispose of waste on the substitute day. Efficiencies in information go a long way to making life easier.

- **Support different avenues to engage.** A common criticism of ICTs is that they leave out sections of a population that either don’t have access to technology or are uncomfortable using it for purposes other than basic communication. For the technology-initiated community, taking advantage of computers, tablets, and smartphones to perform a range of activities is enticing. This has been shown in many other countries where people have migrated online for a number of common activities like food shopping, online courses, reporting potholes, booking travel, taking surveys, managing bills, etc. There is no reason to think that as South Africans become more comfortable using their computers, tablets and phones in a variety of different ways that they will not embrace this modality as a legitimate means to interact with the public sector. This does not mean that virtual engagement should be touted as the best or only way for people to participate. Whether comfortable with technology or not, a variety of different means should be fostered for people to be able to interact with their government. Technology should not replace tried and true systems that already work. Rather, it is meant to work side-by-side with low-tech approaches to compliment and augment. The ultimate goal is not to force people to use technology. It is to creatively take advantage of all means possible to create a robust and working relationship between the government and the people for better socio-economic outcomes.

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18A recent article in the New York Times reported on how Egyptians began posting photos and reports of the miserable state of public facilities on Facebook. The article is unclear of the effect that such postings had on the al-Sisi government but it is an example of citizen use of technology to try to improve government services. Fahim and Thomas, "Frustrated Egyptians Turn to Facebook to Shame Officials," The New York Times, July 25, 2015.
• **Promote partnerships.** The move to digitalised government often focuses overwhelmingly on the supply-side of the equation. Equally important, however, is the demand. Creating awareness within communities of how they can use different technologies to access important information, express their opinions, provide feedback, and collaborate with others is critical for the evolution of a well-working e-governance system. Civil society groups are logical partners in any digital governance effort and must be included in the evolution of any system. These groups have the reach within communities to not only introduce how to use technology for governance but to support people in its application. Equally important, civil society groups are essential for acquiring real-time feedback on what works, what doesn’t and what else people want. Such feedback should be used to refine the specifics of the platform and test different approaches to generate local momentum for its use.

• **Facilitate citizen-government communication.** It is unrealistic to expect an open exchange between citizens and their government to emerge in the early days of any e-governance programme. The back-and-forth between people and their officials, however, is one of the key components that can endow credibility on the system and encourage its use. As municipalities are gearing up to become more responsive, they will need help in getting the basics right. This will include support in responding to constituents, posting important information on a consistent basis and communicating changes that are being undertaken. Without this responsiveness, people are likely to look at a governance platform—no matter how easy it is to use—as being ineffective and not worth their time.

• **Don’t under-invest in monitoring.** Any new system has the potential to be abused or used in unintended ways. A Do No Harm approach is required to be built into the management of the site. This means that active monitoring of content is required so that the site, which is intended for open and unbiased use by all individuals, does not become a platform for politically aligned groups promoting their own agendas. Similarly, security of the system is paramount. People need to be sure that their personal information cannot be accessed to be used against them. Privacy must be guaranteed.

## Conclusion

South African citizens want to engage more with local government institutions with better outcomes. The findings of this report clearly show that the demand is there even though most people lack access to their local government, and knowledge about how to do so and are dubious that their contributions will have any impact. Yet there is clear willingness to do more, especially if the process can be simplified. E-governance provides a mechanism to do so – one which is immediately appealing to a broad cross-section of society. With a variety of content and interaction, an e-governance platform would offer compelling ways to get citizens engaged.
Appendix A – Bibliography

Appendix B – Biographies

Jessica Wattman

Dr. Jessica Wattman is a veteran at creating strategies for environments in rapid flux. Her work has been predominantly in the public and nonprofit sectors, where she has deployed the Jobs to be Done and other innovation methodologies to create a wide range of trail-blazing programs in conflict and other unstable environments.

Her background includes time in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Zimbabwe, and other hotspots. She has worked throughout Africa and in other locales for organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme, Save the Children, Oxfam, the US Agency for International Development, and Mercy Corps. Jessica has extensive experience in conducting primary research and using those findings to create new approaches to facilitate communities’ adoption of new ideas. Her media coverage includes a feature story on the CBS Evening News, and she was a recently a speaker at the MIT Media Lab. In addition to her public and non-profit work, Jessica has deployed these innovation methodologies for private sector clients, working with New Markets since 2010 for clients in industries including online education and Internet services.

Jessica is a magna cum laude graduate of Columbia University’s Barnard College. She also has a Master’s in Public Policy from Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government and a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Stephen Wunker

Stephen Wunker, another co-founder of Yowzit, has worked for many non-profit organizations, including the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, where he advanced a programme of social change focused on strengthening the democratic process, peace-building, and sustainable development, and both the United Nations Development Programme and the Soros Foundations, where he worked on many other important social initiatives.

In addition to his Harvard MBA, Stephen has a Master’s in Public Administration from Columbia University and an undergraduate degree from Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

As an entrepreneur, Stephen has led a wide variety of corporate ventures. Stephen was the Managing Director of Celpay, a Lusaka-based mobile commerce start-up created by the pan-African cellular network Celtel. Additionally, he was CEO of Brainstorm, a developer of mobile software that acquired a start-up he founded, Saverfone. In that capacity, he co-founded what is now the global Mobile Marketing Association and worked with the UK’s Department of Trade and Industry to implement some of the first regulatory guidance issued worldwide for this nascent sector. Previously, he was responsible for taking the British electronics firm Psion into the cell phone market, leading development of one of the world’s first smartphones. He currently leads a consulting firm called New Markets Advisors that advises primarily Global 1000 firms on new growth initiatives, including new ways to be relevant in emerging markets.
Pramod Mohanlal

Pramod Mohanlal, one of the co-founders, and Managing Director of Yowzit, served as a Commissioner on South Africa’s Presidential Review Committee on State Owned Enterprises (PRC), assessing the country’s policy toward the 700+ firms owned by the state. He led the work-streams focused on reviewing the “strategic importance and viability” of these entities.

Over years of experience as a corporate executive at the leading South African financial institutions Absa and Nedbank, he has implemented a number of multi-national transformational programs. His achievements included designing a pioneering home loans product for Absa, in partnership with the bank’s parent company Barclays PLC, to finance cross-border mortgages and provide bundled services to international home buyers. He has deep experience in structuring and executing local and global partnerships in the private and public sectors. These partnerships include organizations such as, Nokia, Greenpeace Africa, Making All Voices Count, Multi-choice and Internet Solutions.

Pramod is a graduate of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and UNISA, with an undergraduate degree in Applied Mathematics and Statistics, a Master’s degree in Statistics, as well as the executive program from Stanford Business School.

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