

31 July 2020

Dear friends, partners and associates,

Across the world, the impacts of COVID-19 have highlighted inequalities and uneven access to critical and basic services, such as water and public healthcare. Rising unemployment exacerbates the problem, rendering citizens and residents unable to provide for their families' most basic needs. While many 'solutions' to these issues are proposed, they tend to put more responsibility on already overburdened and under-capacitated governments. Furthermore, a lack of accountability of local governments can erode the confidence of citizens and increase frustrations amongst communities.

A study conducted by [OneWorld for DEA in 2018/2019](#) across municipalities in South Africa on cities climate resilience found that only a few municipalities engaged communities on a regular basis on climate change, and on risk and resilience issues. South Africans therefore frequently take action through protesting against various injustices, including lack of access to basic services. This is a situation that play itself out in many developing countries, as crises escalate.

To continue our discussion on sustainability transitions in cities, this week we look at how and whether models of community-based action – and community-based networks – could help to build resilience in municipalities, in moving towards post-COVID-19 recovery.

We wish everyone good health.

Belynda and the OneWorld team



THE IMPORTANCE OF URBAN COMMUNITY ACTION

Checks and balances are a very important factor to enable change in planning, budgeting and implementation of adaptation measures that will build resilience across municipal functions. City dwellers, citizens and residents are at the centre of this principle. When their well-being and opportunities are jeopardized, municipal residents play a key role in helping to set objectives, tracking progress, and providing approval. Accountability and support between local government and the locally-governed is of primary importance in responding and adapting to both climate and health/sanitation-related crises, and municipal development pathways.

As COVID-19 marches relentlessly through cities, crowded informal settlements, and impoverished high-density peri-urban areas, hunger and ill-health increasingly impact the poor, - and disproportionately so. In countries like South Africa, the inclusive provision of basic services appears to be challenging for municipalities, due to the nature of city systems, and legacies such as apartheid-era planning. The consequential widespread wealth and spatial inequalities, and cultural divisions, neglect the most vulnerable residents. Given the existing municipal capacity constraints – worsened immeasurably by the pandemic – engaging and involving community activists can be a vital tool in maximising scarce resources and spurring action for change.

In 2019, we investigated a community-led activist initiative in East Jerusalem, called "MiniActive". This movement was born out of civil society frustration towards ineffective service delivery in East Jerusalem, a Palestinian inhabited part of the city. This group of female community activists identified one problem in their community that they believed could be solved within a month. These included repairing a broken streetlight, fixing a pothole, or improving the collection of garbage in a specific location. The activists then called the municipality every single day until these problems were fixed.

The MiniActive network has grown to over 1000 women, who continue to pursue new challenges to solve within their respective neighbourhoods. As MiniActive has grown, the women have asked for courses and classes, to better equip themselves to tackle community issues. This example highlights how community action can be used to improve service delivery, accountability and help to alleviate capacity constraints of local municipalities. Could this type of network provide an additional arm of resilience building elsewhere when municipalities are faced with crises such as COVID-19?

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