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- Introduction**
- This presentation aims to:
 - Provide a description of the concept "Citizens' Forum"
 - Provide a background to the development of the concept and practice of Citizens' Forums
 - Indicate how citizen participation in service delivery developed post 1994, and
 - Provide a brief description of the concept and practice of Citizens' Forums
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Background

- Prior to 1994 South Africa had a history of undemocratic, secretive and unaccountable style of governance that ignored the rights and aspirations of the majority of its people.
- The post 1994 democratically elected government sought to operate in a manner that is accountable and transparent.
- They sought to do this in a large number of ways detailed in the Constitution and subordinate legislation, *inter alia*, through the values and principles enshrined in the Constitution, and through the public institutions they created with their concomitant powers, functions and responsibilities.

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Background (contd.)

- Although good policies have been formulated since the inception of the democratic government, policy implementation and service delivery have been less impressive.
- Uncertainties in the manner in which services should be delivered to users in a satisfactory and effective manner may prevail due to non-involvement of citizens at the service delivery decision-making level.
- Since 1999 the government placed substantial emphasis on programme implementation, service delivery and on service user consultation.

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The Mandate of the PSC

- The PSC's mandate is to, among others, promote the Constitutional values and principles of Public Administration. These values and principles include:
 - The efficient, economic and effective use of resources
 - Public administration must be development-oriented, and
 - Peoples needs must be responded to and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making
- Central to the realization of the above values and principles is the need to respond to people's needs, and to foster transparency and accountability.

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The Mandate of the PSC (contd.)

- In line with its mandate, the PSC decided to develop tools and methodologies that will promote the incorporation of the views and perceptions of citizens.
- To enhance the above the PSC researched a number of participatory methods in India, Nicaragua and the Philippines. Members of the PSC and its office, as well as Members of the Portfolio Committee on PSA also visited London and Manchester for this purpose.
- PSC in collaboration with the Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Admin opted for a conception and set of practices called Citizens' Forums to allow for participation by representative citizens in service delivery improvement.

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Citizens' Forums: The Concept and Practice

- For our purposes a forum can be described as:
 1. A place of assembly for public discussion
 2. A meeting to discuss matters of public interest
- Common to 1 and 2 above is that they relate to or affect the people (or citizens) as a whole and not restricted to any particular group or class.
- Citizens' Forums are therefore the engagement of citizens on matters of interest to them.
- Conception evolved as a unique development whereby institutions independent of the executive participate jointly with citizens in proposing practical measures to improve service delivery.

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Citizens' Forums: The Concept and Practice (cont'd)

- Uniqueness :
 - Programme specific – not Dept as a whole
 - Participants must give practical recommendations in dealing with identified challenges
 - Not only a problem seeking but also a solution seeking consultation
 - Collective recommendations by citizens for decision-making by Department and agreed upon implementation target dates
 - Educational, informative and empowering
 - Entails a partnership between citizens and Department
 - Addresses the challenge of cultural diversity

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Citizens' Forums: The Concept and Practice (cont'd)

- Piloted in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga 2002/2003
- Responses from these provinces:
 - Forums created opportunities to give inputs aimed at improving service delivery and peoples lives.
 - Continuity of the practice of Citizens' Forums should be ensured as they are empowering and serve as a tool for objective deliberations at grass roots level.
 - Forums improve communication between government and the people towards improved service delivery.
 - Value of partnership with the relevant Department and proper feedback to the citizens.

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Citizens' Forums Toolkit

- The Toolkit was developed based on the PSC's experiences from the pilots conducted in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga.
- The E Cape pilot focused on the Poverty alleviation programme of the Department of Social Development, while the Mpumalanga pilot focused on the Primary Health Care programme of the Department of Health.
- The Toolkit was developed to serve as an easy-to-use guide so that many other stakeholders could be empowered to conduct Citizens' Forums.

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Citizens' Forums Toolkit (cont'd)

- The Toolkit provides an overview of what Citizens' Forums are, and how to conduct them.
- It consists of:
 - A report on the pilot studies conducted in the Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga;
 - A step-by-step guide on how to conduct Citizens' Forums; and
 - An instructional CD which, through narration and actual footage from the E Cape and Mpumalanga pilots, complements the step-by-step guide.

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Key Considerations**

- Forums need to be organized as a partnership between facilitating agencies such as: Standing Committees, National Portfolio Committees, NGOs and any structure involved in improving governance through monitoring and evaluation processes.
- Affected departments should be involved at an early stage for them to be encouraged to take ownership.
- Everyone affected by or who uses a service should be afforded a chance to participate.
- Community Based Organizations are a potentially useful point of contact and should be invited to participate.

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Key Considerations (cont'd)**

- Citizens' Forums are time consuming and labour-intensive.
- Clear information on the subject to be discussed must be given before the forum starts.
- Enough time to deliberate over the identified subject must be allowed so that participants can make informed decisions.
- It is important that the loop be completed i.e. from initiating Forums to feedback session.
- Commitment from top structures must be ensured.

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Key Considerations (cont'd)**

- Skilled and experienced facilitators are needed to successfully host Forums and ensure that everyone participates.
- It should be ensured that the language used is user-friendly.
- Places that people find easy to access must be chosen.
- Since people are contributing their time to the process, it may be a good idea to provide transport if possible.
- Meals and refreshments should also be served.

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Steps to be followed**

Step 1: Preparation

- Consultation with the affected political structures e.g. Executive Committee, relevant Portfolio or Standing Committee, to present the concept
- Consultation with relevant MEC and HoD to agree on specific subject for consultation and site for Citizens' Forums
- Steering committee consisting of: the affected department, local government, facilitating agency, and perhaps the Premier's Office to be established

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Steps to be followed (cont'd)**

Step 1: Preparation (cont'd)

- Pre-consultation at community level – community to be informed about the concept of Forums and briefed about specific subject/programme for discussion.
- Community to identify issues of concern regarding the subject for discussion.
- Activities should be undertaken to promote the Forum e.g. radio talk shows, advertisements in local press and other promotional methods.

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Steps to be followed (cont'd)**

Step 2: Holding a Forum

- A panel of not more than five members to be appointed including representatives from the facilitating agency, involved department, and relevant standing committee.
- Facilitating Agency should chair the Forum
- Forums usually take place over 2 days:
 - The first day is dedicated to hearing submissions and presentations from the community. The session usually lasts for eight hours.
 - High degree of participation to be encouraged on the first day.

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Steps to be followed (cont'd)**

Step 2: Holding a Forum (continued)

- First day to end with identification of themes so serve a framework for discussion the next day.
- On site visits recommended at the end of first day, where possible.
- Second day should start with a recap of the previous day's discussion
- Participants to be divided into small groups with each group discussing one of the themes.

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Steps to be followed (cont'd)**

Step 2: Holding a Forum (continued)

- Positive and negative features of the theme to be identified.
- For each identified negative feature, a practical recommendation for improving performance should be made.
- A plenary report-back session to be held where each group's recommendations will be presented.
- The final session of the Forum involves identification of actions for service delivery improvement that will be included in the monitoring agreement.

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Steps to be followed (cont'd)**

Step 3: Drawing up a Citizens' Report

- Facilitating agency to compile a detailed report on the Forum.
- Draft report should be sent to participants for comments and validation.
- Draft report to be used for reporting back to higher political structures e.g. MEC, Provincial Executive Committee

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Steps to be followed (cont'd)**

Step 4: Identifying agreements with the Department

- Workshop to be held with the concerned Department, where recommendations contained in the Citizens' Report will be individually considered.
- Decision to be made whether each recommendation is rejected or accepted.
- For accepted recommendations timeframes should be determined and responsible structures identified.
- Reasons should be given for rejecting any recommendation.
- Final agreements between the department and the facilitating agency to be formatted into a formal plan than can be easily monitored.

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Steps to be followed (cont'd)**

Step 5: Feedback to the community

- Feedback on reached agreements should be given to the community.
- People from the Department should give feedback.
- Communities should be invited on time, at least two weeks before the feedback session.
- Only people who attended the forum before should be invited for continuity purposes.

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**Conducting Citizens' Forums:
Steps to be followed (cont'd)**

Step 6: Monitoring and evaluation

- Facilitating agency to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the recommendations to which the department has committed itself.
- It is advisable that the recommendations reached at the forum must be linked to departmental service delivery improvement plans.
- After a reasonable time has elapsed (at least 12 months) after feedback session, the facilitating agency should return to the communities to check whether commitments have been kept.
- Departments should also be visited to determine changes after implementing Citizens' Forums recommendations.

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Potential Risks to be Managed

- The size of the involved group should not be too large to manage.
- Forums should not be allowed to become complaints sessions.
- Forums should not be hijacked or become a floor for party political talk.
- Forums should not be conducted in such a manner that expectations amongst the public are raised leading to later disillusionment.
- Lack of community cooperation.
- Lack of follow up on the proposals made

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Conclusion

- Citizens' Forums are in an infant stage of development.
- They have been enthusiastically embraced by the communities exposed to them during the pilot.
- The toolkit seeks to further enhance the roll out of the practice towards the effective, economical and efficient rendering of services to the citizens.
- Training will be provided to departments nationally and provincially, on the use of the Toolkit.

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Conclusion

- The PSC will provide advice and to the extent possible, technical assistance to Departments that would like to conduct Citizens' Forums
- The PSC will also use the Toolkit for its own purposes to conduct Citizens' Forums. However, given the labour intensive nature and capacity requirements of the Citizens' Forum, the PSC will clearly be able to shoulder the responsibility of organising the Forums throughout the country and acting as the Facilitating Agency for each and every Forum conducted.
- It is hoped that the Legislature will, through its various Portfolio/Standing Committees, also facilitate the roll-out of the Toolkit given that it has proved to strengthen their oversight role as well.

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Thank You!
