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**Hybridising governance for resilience in a time of crisis: Learning from Community-based organisations in Cape Town and Cali**

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## Abstract

Through the lens of food security this paper explores how community-based organisations (CBOs) in low-income neighbourhoods in Cape Town and Cali responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. In understanding how they engaged with and operationalised governance in times of crisis we are able to critically engage with hybrid governance practices in these contexts, and explore their potential to support equitable resilience. The findings are based on 12 months of qualitative research in both cities including interviews and focus groups with community leaders, and weekly digital diaries with local residents. We show how CBOs were able to supplement the state, build partnerships through boundary spanning, and act as mediators and brokers by leveraging their trust based networks to support distributive, procedural and recognitional resilience in their neighbourhoods. In contexts of vulnerability and rapidly changing conditions, however, we argue that hybridising governance is a more appropriate way to understand these processes, which may result in contested rather than integrated outcomes. Moreover, we find that while CBOs are highly effective first responders in times of crisis, without effective state partnership – in other words, hybridity that includes the state – their potential for longer term systemic, equitable resilience remains limited.

## 1. Introduction

> I don't know what the government did, but it was all these small NGOs that were taking part in making sure that…no one would say that they were hungry during lockdown (CBO leader, Cape Town, 2022).

Research on the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated, across a range of contexts, the importance of community-based organisations (CBOs) as first responders to the needs of low-income communities in times of crisis (Regnier-Davies et al, 2022; Porio, 2022). This is not surprising given the embeddedness of CBOs in neighbourhoods in which they work. While the significance of CBOs for community resilience is increasingly recognised (Ziervogel et al, 2018) the focus of this paper is to explore *how* CBOs participate in governance during a crisis and what impact this has for *equitable* resilience.

It is well recognised that the state is not the only urban governance actor and that there are complex relations of hybrid governance that involve a multiplicity of actors in low-income neighbourhoods. In this paper, we critically engage with debates around hybrid urban governance to offer a detailed and nuanced understanding of CBOs' practices in the context of urban crisis, which are underpinned by localised agency and dynamic processes. Drawing on research in Cape Town (South Africa) and Cali (Colombia) we explore CBOs' participation in urban governance during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically we look at how two CBOs in these cities supported food security through hybridising processes of institutional multiplicity, boundary spanning and mediated citizenship, in order to identify residents' needs, and leverage new and existing partnerships with external stakeholders to meet them.

We argue that the localised, agentic and dynamic nature of these governance processes, particularly in conditions of resource constraints and crisis, is best captured by the notion of *hybridising* governance. Additionally, we discuss the relationship between these processes and equitable resilience, arguing that hybridisation is necessary for equitable resilience, underpinned by distributive, procedural and recognitional justice. In this way, we suggest that moments of crisis such as the pandemic may push organisations in their role as first responders to embrace hybridising forms of governance, with the potential for improved resilience, but that contextual factors are also significant, including the position of other governance actors at neighbourhood, city and regional scales.

## 2. Governing the urban: hybridity and resilience

Urban governance is a multifaceted concept representing what is, in practice, a 'meshwork' (McFarlane, 2012) of different institutions and forms of engagement between state and society in order to exercise authority and power over residents in urban areas. While traditional

political science analysis foregrounds the role of the state in governance, it is now well accepted that the state is only one of many actors and institutions involved in governing urban areas. In low-income or informal neighbourhoods the state may not even play the most dominant role in framing norms and processes that residents follow (Drivdal, 2016). Thus any analysis of how a city is governed must also include informal institutions, actors and practices that may not receive wider public recognition and threaten assumptions about governance as formal partnership. The challenge addressed by this paper is to surface how these complex forms of governance work during times of crisis, and what they can tell us about governing for resilience. The first part of this section provides a conceptual overview of hybrid governance in relation to low-income neighbourhoods, with a focus on concepts which are particularly relevant to our study, while the second part starts to explore how hybrid governance might relate to urban resilience.

**Hybrid urban governance**

We start from the knowledge that the state-society interface is not binary. The concept of hybrid urban governance helps to explain how state and non-state actors engage and negotiate public order in the context of reduced state capacity (Boege et al., 2009; Booth 2012; Meagher, 2014). Here, we explore debates around this concept and related ideas which help to make sense of the localised, power-laden and dynamic relationships in our research contexts, including 'institutional multiplicity' (Goodfellow and Lindemann 2013), 'boundary spanning' (Van Meerkerk et al, 2014) and 'mediated citizenship' (Piper and von Lieres, 2015).

In research on the global South, 'hybrid governance' is a response to understanding political order in apparently 'fragile' states, supporting a focus on everyday governance and the formation of political communities beyond the state (Boege et al. 2009). Where state capacities

are limited, hybrid governance may support service provision involving other actors, despite bringing clear risks in terms of legitimacy (Meagher, 2014; Kapidžić, 2018). In such contexts, hybrid governance moves from the idea of partnership for governing with the state, to partnership for governing *despite* the state, which may include international institutions, development agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), religious groups, CBOs and chieftaincies among other actors. Hybrid governance thus broadens analytical research beyond a focus on state and national-level elite actors to engage meaningfully with the agency of non-elites or local elites (Albrecht and Moe, 2015:4; Anciano and Piper, 2022). It offers a view of the 'multiple sites of urban governance' (Lindell, 2008: 1879) where non-state actors or citizens exercise public authority. It is especially relevant in urban contexts where the state is frequently unable to assert sovereignty (or monopoly over the means of violence), including in low-income neighbourhoods.

While the concept captures the multiplicity of actors, institutions and practices involved in urban governance, Goodfellow and Lindemann (2013) highlight its 'looseness', suggesting that the synthesis or integration it implies may not always occur. Instead, they suggest that 'institutional multiplicity' may more accurately capture the coexistence of multiple governance actors, where 'multiple rule systems' and diverse incentive structures are in place (ibid, 7). This also suggests that hybridity is not a foregone conclusion and that outcomes of these processes may be contested. In fact, in dynamic contexts characterised by high levels of inequality and informality, we suggest that *hybridising* governance may more accurately capture the processual nature of relations, which are not static or institutionally integrated, but which are mutually influencing in some way.

The emphasis on process and the agency of local actors suggested by the above debates is complemented by the notion of 'boundary spanning', referring to practices where actors span boundaries (which may be geographic, organizational, or cultural) through mediating, bridging and brokering knowledge within and between communities. 'Boundary spanners' mediate between communities and state (or non-state) actors and institutions (Van Meerkerk et al, 2014) to co-produce urban processes such as regeneration (Goodrich et al, 2020) or service provision. While boundary spanning is frequently used to refer to non-state actors working with the state, we are interested in its potential to refer to activities outside of direct state engagement. This links to the idea of mediated citizenship, understood as an informal representational practice operating outside the formal election of officials or participatory institutions.

Mediated citizenship is typified by a 'third party', which may include local leaders, intervening in the representational gap between state and society. It is characterised by bargaining and negotiation by representatives who 'speak for' the poor and marginalised across a political divide (Piper and Lieres, 2015: 5). In the context of low-income communities of the global South, 'community leadership' often refers to local leaders who emerge from the neighbourhood in which they live, and may play a brokering role between residents and government (Drivdal, 2016; Ngwane, 2021). Leaders may form or be part of institutional structures such as committees, that operate alongside a range of other state-sanctioned local organisations (Ngwane, 2021).

While these accounts underscore the importance of local agency in hybrid governance, Benit-Gbaffou and Katsaura (2014) surface the tension community leaders face between managing processes towards 'the top' (formal institutions) to get recognition and support from party and state, and towards 'the bottom' (their followers) where they are building their

constituencies. As Gaventa (2004:13) explains, community representatives also have to deal with questions of accountability as they are not formally elected and have no legal democratic constraints. Piper and Lieres (2015) agree that the politics of mediation generates significant challenges for the democrat, as under certain conditions it may be acceptable or even necessary for third parties to speak for poor and marginalised groups. Representation by community 'leaders' can also become problematic when it is not clear what 'the community' means: 'too often, the notion of 'community leadership' relies on the notion of a relatively-homogenous, geographically bounded community that can be led' (Gaventa, 2004:16). Hence there is a need to constantly construct legitimacy towards 'the bottom' by constructing a sense of community around an issue or an objective (Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura 2014), pointing to the processual aspect of these forms of governance, which are constantly being remade and co-constituted.

The emphasis on the local, the agency of actors involved, and the dynamic nature of governance informs our analysis of how CBOs participate in governance in times of crisis. While the concepts discussed highlight the increasing role of non-state actors in urban governance processes, they also emphasise the active role of the state in maintaining and exercising its mandate through various arrangements and continuous (re)negotiations. Through these interfaces, boundaries between the state and society are blurred and the state is continuously (re)constructed as the everyday practices of non-state actors penetrate state processes (Das and Poole, 2004). This suggests the significance of *hybridising* rather than hybrid governance, which is a process leading to outcomes which cannot be predetermined and may be contested. The Covid-19 pandemic presents a specific moment of crisis in which to explore CBOs' participation in hybridising governance, and how this supported or eroded resilience in contexts characterised by resource constraints and inequality.

## Equitable urban resilience

The concept of resilience has become increasingly popular in local government discourse and in academic research. This coincides with growing climate change concerns, building on established debates and practice around disaster risk management. Resilience, as a concept, originated in engineering and science disciplines; however, it has more recently been seen through the lens of social ecological systems. Resilience relates to the ability of a given system to withstand shocks and hazards, based on existing resources, by adapting them to new conditions (Cannon, 2008). Urban resilience focuses on systems, in particular the ability of a city-wide system, to transform and adapt to shocks that fall outside the range of normal and expected disturbances, be they climate-related or other forms of crisis (Meerow and Newell, 2016; Kapucu et al., 2023).

Recent conceptions of resilience, especially relevant to research on neighbourhoods in the global South, highlight its potential to address inequality and vulnerabilities, and to overcome barriers to developing adaptive capacities in the context of shocks (e.g. Meerow et al. 2016). Community resilience is localised, place-based and incorporates multiple dimensions, including social, economic and infrastructural (Cutter et al. 2008). Cities are sites of potential to foster more resilient outcomes, and resilient cities are conceptualised in the New Urban Agenda as complex and dynamically adaptive systems. Local knowledge is central to formulating collaborative strategies for future resilience, based on alliances of the local state, civil society and other key actors (Sverdlik and Walnycki, 2021:18). In this context, the role of CBOs is increasingly recognised as supporting community resilience.

A particular concern with ecological and disaster-oriented resilience frameworks, however, is their inadequate engagement with questions of structural inequality, power imbalance and

social justice (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013). To address these concerns Matin et al (2018, 198) developed the idea of equitable resilience. They define this as a:

> 'form of human-environmental resilience which takes into account issues of social vulnerability and differentiated access to power, knowledge, and resources. It starts from people's own perception of their position within their human environmental system, and accounts for their realities, and of their need for a change of circumstance to avoid imbalances of power into the future'.

In an equitable resilience framework, resilience strategies must incorporate a deliberate focus on whom they aim to benefit, while concurrently promoting meaningful participation in decision-making, the fair distribution of social and material resources, and the recognition of social, cultural, and political diversities. When thinking through urban resilience planning, it is crucial to consider distributional, recognitional, and procedural equity (Matin et al, 2018). While the fair distribution of resources may be considered in some urban contexts, there is room for improvement in acknowledging and addressing the structural factors that perpetuate inequalities. If resilience is to be equitable it is necessary to ensure the active involvement of marginalized groups in decision-making processes.

In the analysis that follows, we explore the potential for forms of hybridising governance to support equitable resilience, through a focus on CBO responses to crisis (specifically, Covid-19) in Cape Town and Cali.

## 3. Methodology and case studies

This paper draws on research from two cities in the global South. In comparing cases we ensured that the cases have 'some typicality' and 'offer opportunity to learn' (Stake, 2000:446). In terms of similarity we juxtapose two highly unequal urban contexts with experience of

previous pandemics (e.g. HIV-AIDS in South Africa, Zika in Colombia). In both countries, existing social inequities intersected with Covid's effects to reveal social and racialised dimensions of inequality. Both contexts have also had experience of relatively recent processes of peace, truth and reconciliation, linked to Constitutional reforms that embed participatory democracy in their governance framework. Yet both cases are under-researched regarding links between governance, democracy and crisis response at the urban scale.

The data we use in this paper is qualitative and drawn from a project conducted between 2022 and 2023[1]. In this paper we draw from the work we did with two organisations: Sakhisizwe Youth Development Program and Asociación Mejorando Vidas (Asomevid). Sakhisizwe is based in the informal settlement of Imizamo Yethu in Cape Town. It was launched in 2016 and offers mentorship, academic support and leadership support to over 100 young people (13-25 years). Its mission is to empower and develop young people, helping them stay in school and graduate. Asomevid is based in Cali's Aguablanca district, a densely-populated and marginalised area housing one third of the city's population of 2.2 million, including many Afro-Colombian communities. It is a grassroots association assisting vulnerable communities to obtain basic services including access to health, education, housing and culture, which operates primarily in Charco Azul neighbourhood. The organisation has focused particularly on working with young people in recent years, in response to local violence dynamics and unemployment. We explore these research contexts in more detail in the next section.

We gathered qualitative data through interviews with leaders and staff of the CBOs, and conducted multiple focus groups with members and beneficiaries of the CBOs and residents in

[1] The larger project, funded by the Urban Studies Foundation, focussed on learning from and with CBOs based in five low-income neighbourhoods across the two cities, exploring their responses to the pandemic through a social infrastructure lens examining food, care and digital inclusion initiatives.

the neighbourhoods they work. We also conducted research through WhatsApp diaries with 25 residents of case study neighbourhoods in each city, asking three prompts a week over three months relating to their experiences before, during and after the pandemic. The paper further draws on 16 weeks of WhatsApp diaries conducted with 70 residents in Cape Town during the initial stages of the pandemic, from March 2020 to July 2020, and previous research in Cali on the construction of peace in the period immediately preceding and during the pandemic.

The participatory nature of the research engenders some additional considerations, particularly as the organisations under study and their beneficiaries are key sources. On the one hand, the data offers us a citizen-centric perspective in this paper, following the practice of grounding urban models of governance in citizens' experiences (Anciano and Piper 2022). On the other hand, the limitations of participatory research, including critiques of bias, have long been debated (e.g. Cornwall and Jewkes 1995). Certainly, this suggests paying close attention to the reproduction of specific discourses by the actors involved, and the agendas underpinning them, for example by triangulation with additional sources where possible. Nevertheless, engaged research which foregrounds the perspective of communities living in marginalised conditions (and leaders and organisations from the same context) is critical 'to capture a granular portraiture of the city's interstices and often invisible corners and invisible forms of labour and dwelling' (Thieme et al 2017, 130).

## 4. CBOs and food security during Covid-19

In this section we look closely at how the CBOs navigated relationships with state and non-state actors during Covid-19 lockdowns in relation to food security. Food security, relating to 'access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life' (World Bank, 1996: v) represented the most immediate need for many low-income urban communities during

the pandemic, due to disruption to livelihoods, supplies and income. Providing food security was one of the primary areas for 'solidarity and grassroots activism', including food donations, delivery, and community kitchens (Leach et al 2021, 7). Our research focused on food *security*, relating to the availability of food, as opposed to food sovereignty, relating to communities' control over food access, production, and distribution (Patel, 2009); although the latter is important for equitable resilience, it is often less feasible in urban settings. While the state is not directly responsible for food provision in market economies, in the context of the pandemic, food security was directly affected by the state's lockdown measures, and the subsequent inadequacy of its support responses to residents in this context, as we show below.

## Sakhisizwe Youth Development Programme: Food security in Imizamo Yethu, Cape Town

In South Africa, a three-week national lockdown started on 26 March 2020, was extended for a month, and continued on and off for the rest of 2020. The lockdown was one of the most restrictive in the world where even buying cigarettes and alcohol was banned. South Africans could only leave home to buy essential goods or for medical reasons (Stiegler and Bouchard, 2020). To counter the impact of wage losses and precarity the government instituted a Social Relief of Distress grant (£13/month) but not everyone could access it and it offered limited financial support. While food insecurity in Imizamo Yethu was present before the impact of a pandemic lockdown, the lockdown exacerbated these conditions, creating anxiety and fear amongst residents.

Imizamo Yethu ('our struggle' or 'our collective efforts') was formalised as a settlement in 1991 on a 34-hectare piece of land belonging to the state. According to the 2011 census it has an estimated 1,800 formal and 5,000 informal dwellings (Stats, S. A, 2011). Many residents in

the settlement have migrated from other parts of the country, or from neighbouring countries. Notably, in relation to boundary spanning, Imizamo Yethu is located within the wealthy suburb of Hout Bay. Sakhisizwe is centrally located in Imizamo Yethu, and had for many years provided food to the youth attending their programmes. As the hard lockdown started, the organisation was forced to close and ceased all activities. However within a few weeks they were approached by the NGO *Love in a Bowl* to distribute food parcels. *Love in a Bowl* had been running a small vegetable farm near the settlement and delivering vegetables to twelve Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres in Imizamo Yethu, and Sakhisizwe. They learnt of the food security concerns of residents and reached out to businesses and residents in the wealthy suburb neighbouring Imizamo Yethu to donate funds that they would use to source bulk vegetables from farmers. The call to action was successful and an estimated 90 tons of vegetables was collected every week during the lockdown through direct donations or through financial contributions which were used to negotiate the purchasing of food.

When asked why they chose Sakhisizwe as a CBO partner to distribute food, *Love in a Bowl* explained that while they had worked with numerous ECD centres the head of Sakhisizwe was the obvious person to partner with given the levels of trust already built and her reach into the community. The head of Sakhisizwe explained that her background was community development and, "so I've worked with different NGOS way back" and that *Love in a Bowl* "wanted some NGO that they could trust and direct them and research what was happening". According to *Love in a Bowl*:

> [the head of Sakhisizwe] was probably one of the most important people in IY during the peak of COVID when it came to someone reaching out to the other Mamas[2] and

[2] Mamas' primarily refers to the women who run the ECD Centres, but can include other mature informal female leaders in a block or street.

> creating a large group, who would collectively decide where all the food needed to go…she actually took a lot of leadership in ensuring that the distribution network was made larger.

The process of distributing food donations was a multi-step process. First, donations were collected at a designated parking lot near a large supermarket. Food was then packaged for distribution directly to households in the form of parcels. A transport business from the adjacent wealthy suburb offered free transportation of the food parcels to Sakhisizwe's office, and individual volunteer drivers would also assist. Once the parcels were delivered, Sakhisizwe was responsible for allocating the parcels to households. Not all the food donations were allocated to Sakhisizwe to distribute, some were given to local block leaders as discussed below.

Sakhisiwe initially allocated parcels to the families with children in their programme. They used their database to contact families via WhatApp. Sakhisizwe also had a trained social worker who contacted their registered families to ascertain their needs and concerns during the lockdown. If there were parcels remaining they would be distributed to other families that had historically been involved with Sakhisizwe. As to be expected during a time of high stress, there was some conflict in Imizamo Yethu about the distribution of parcels. Several residents had the impression that the food Sakhisizwe had should be for the whole community and were querying how distribution decisions were made. This conflict was alleviated when the CBO shared their electronic registration database and how food was earmarked for, and distributed to, families in their programme.

Conflict was further eased when the amount of food donations into IY increased. Potential tensions between different organisations in IY that wanted to be viewed as best placed to assist their members were mitigated as donations increased. By the second half of 2020 Love in a Bowl explained they were "distributing vegetables to nine and a half thousand homes for ten weeks in a row", and although they were the largest, they were not the only organisation facilitating donations.

At this stage Sakhisizwe worked with informally elected block and street leaders to distribute pre-packed parcels. Many of these local leaders were part of a longstanding civic organisation called SANCO, and thus had external legitimacy. The head of Sakhisizwe described how she had a team of 14 assistants and had to also organise 45 street committees. Several committee bloc leaders confirmed that the leader of Sakhisizwe played an important role in facilitating the organisation of community wide food parcel distribution. Love in a Bowl too explained,

> She would send me a list once a week of the number of households that were without food in IY and the Mamas that were responsible for that would actually go up and down their block, find out how many families needed the food, they would all report back to one woman who then sent me the final list.

As the pandemic eased so too did the scale of food donations available, however, there is little doubt that the role of the CBO was central in providing food security during a time of crisis. As the leader of Sakhisizwe explains,

> NGOs really played a huge role in the community...I don't know what the government did, but it was all these small NGOs that were taking part in making sure that…no one would say that they were hungry...In fact, it was like Christmas.

## Asociación Mejorando Vidas: Food security in Charco Azul, Cali

The Colombian national state's pandemic response was widely criticised, with Colombia the third worst affected country in Latin America, after Brazil and Mexico. Colombia's first case was detected on 6 March 2020, and on 20 March, a national lockdown was announced, including a mandate for citizens to stay at home except for accessing essential supplies (food, medicine or financial services). The lockdown was initially in place for 19 days, but was extended multiple times, eventually ending on 1 September 2020. As a result, Colombia experienced its first economic recession in decades, with falling GDP and incomes, and rising unemployment (Sergio et al, 2022). At a national level, measures restricting mobility such as curfew and quarantines were initially more prevalent than social policy responses; while national initiatives were subsequently implemented such as 'Ingreso Solidario', an unconditional monthly emergency subsidy implemented in April 2020, their coverage was limited. An increase in food insecurity, which in 2015 was measured at 52%, was visibilised by the display of '*trapos rojos'* (red rags) in the windows of houses suffering from hunger in Bogota and other cities (Castro et al 2022).

In Cali, the pandemic accelerated pre-existing issues of spatialised poverty, racial segregation, and youth exclusion from education and employment (Urrea-Giraldo 2021), particularly in low-income neighbourhoods. While existing government food programmes such as Community Cafeterias or '*Comedores Comunitarios*' targeted these areas, they suffered from lack of sufficient resources[3]. Meanwhile, other municipal initiatives during the early months of the pandemic, such as digital food vouchers for particular supermarket chains, were hampered by residents' lack of access to the internet, phone or specific shops in low-income areas. Respondents in our research gave a generally negative assessment of elected municipal

[3] Comedores Comunitarios is a national programme administered locally in Colombian cities. In Cali, it attends to an estimated 80,000 urban residents via 762 'cafeterias'; however, budget restrictions limited its operation to between eight and ten months annually between 2020 and 2023 (https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/cali/asi-se-logro-el-convenio-para-el-regreso-de-operacion-de-los-762-comedores-comunitarios-3325741).

politicians in Cali, with limited experience of food distribution campaigns or their effects, although officials' role in food distribution via specific agencies with local presence, such as the Colombian Wellbeing Institute (*Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar*) was acknowledged. Given the limited state response to increased food insecurity during the pandemic, long-established practices of collective action played a significant role.

The Asociación Mejorando Vidas, or Asomevid, is based in Charco Azul neighbourhood, which is representative of Aguablanca District where it is located. Charco Azul has around 8,000 residents living in 1,850 households, the majority of whom are AfroColombian. It was founded in the 1980s by migrants and displaced people from Colombia's Pacific region, who were given permission by a local caretaker to establish housing on abandoned agricultural land at the edge of Cali. Despite the threat of eviction from landowners, residents established and improved housing and services over time, leading to the neighbourhood's formal recognition by the municipality in 1990. According to Colombia's national socioeconomic stratification system, the neighbourhood was initially classified as *estrato* 1, meaning its residents are recognised as low income. Subsequently, some houses have been redesignated as *estrato* 2, due to consolidation through improved housing and service provision (Lombard et al 2020). Nevertheless, the neighbourhood has continued to suffer from high levels of unemployment and violence in recent decades, compounding its marginalisation.

In neighbourhoods like Charco Azul, the effects of the lockdown exacerbated existing food insecurity. The disruption caused by lockdown restrictions to already precarious and informal livelihoods meant that household incomes were restricted and families were unable to buy essential goods, including food. Additionally, the effects of scarcity and supply chain disruption on predominantly small-scale food sellers in Aguablanca led to rapidly increasing

prices which were unaffordable to many: for example, one respondent recounted how the price of a pound of rice increased from 1,500 Colombian pesos to 2,500. In this context, coping with the pandemic often consumed household savings.

Asomevid had little previous experience of working on food issues in Charco Azul. However, the urgency of the issue in the neighbourhood motivated the organisation to participate in food distribution, drawing on their knowledge about the community and its needs, as well as wider local and national practices. In the early days of the pandemic, the organisation installed 'Tables of Hope' in the neighbourhood. These tables had a variety of food items, initially provided by the organisation. They displayed signs asking residents to take what they needed or contribute what they could. As a local resident and organisation member recounted,

> This strategy of implementing community tables was called *'Mesas de la Esperanza'* (Tables of Hope), bringing food for people in need and for others to contribute … it assisted the community and encouraged others to do the same.

To some extent, this drew on established practices of bartering (*trueque*), which during the pandemic were observed in other regions of Colombia, with farmers bringing their produce to the nearest town to exchange with other producers (Castro et al 2022).

One of the leaders directly involved in the initiative explained its rationale in more detail:

> Charco Azul is separated into 6 sectors and we worked in each zone. For the first 15 days we did *Mesas de la Esperanza* on a daily basis, we did them every day, and we had several tables in different areas…We also began to articulate ideas among ourselves and to look for contacts, from friends outside the neighbourhood, from institutions, from other organisations that could donate food.

After the initial two weeks of the lockdown, the regularity of the initiative decreased to once every three days, and then every week, enabling assistance to around 1,400 households in total.

The above responses indicate on the one hand, the strategy of reciprocity employed in this initiative, based on a request for households to donate food where possible; and on the other, the significance of donations from external actors, including the local state. The former drew on community practices of *trueque*, while also recognising the capacity for self-help within the neighbourhood, as one leader explained: 'Some families might have had certain products, so they could come and exchange them; for example, leave some lentils and take some rice, or some oil'. The latter mobilised Asomevid's existing network of contacts which included local individuals and organisations, who were willing to donate but lacked local presence or knowledge (discussed further below). Additional to the 'Tables' initiative (also used by other organisations in other areas of Aguablanca), the organisation further used its networks to source vouchers for households in need to use at local shops. However, attempts at more strategic articulation were limited by the urgent 'day-to-day' needs of the community, as well as the limited reach of the organisation.

## 5. Hybridising governance during the pandemic

The idea of hybrid governance reveals the complexity of urban governance involving multiple state and non-state actors. In this section we apply this lens to further explore how the case study CBOs supported residents in their neighbourhoods during the pandemic through leveraging old, and building new partnerships, with both state and non-state actors. We focus on processes of institutional multiplicity, boundary spanning and mediating between citizens and other institutions, to respond to food insecurity during the pandemic.

### Hybrid governance or institutional multiplicity?

Both case study CBOs engaged more with non-state actors than with the state to facilitate food security. In Imizamo Yethu there was little visibility of state agencies (aside from the police) in the neighbourhood during the first lockdown and it was not clear what role government agencies played in relation to food security during the pandemic, as most of the residents we spoke to were not aware of where the food donations they received came from. One respondent indicated that the government only provided food to the elderly and those with disabilities. Through triangulating research data it appears there were very limited food parcel donations from any government agency, and that most of the food distributed in Imizamo Yethu was via the programme started by *Love in a Bowl* and other NGOs in wider Hout Bay. The Ward Councillor for the area did also distribute some food parcels on a sporadic basis, and the Covid-related grant of $13/month would have allowed some residents to buy food. However the footprint of Sakhisizwe was far larger in terms of physical food distribution than that of the state.

In Cali, the narrative of state absence was clearly present in interviews. As a CBO leader explained:

> The state, it was disappointing, because there was no direct coordination or support, really the state should have been doing what organisations did, I mean the municipality, local government, but with them it was very difficult coordinating activities… We have all had experience of the absence of the state, in fact this is our raison d'etre… in some ways we are standing in for many of the things that the state should be doing.

The mistrust which characterises the relationship between CBOs and the local state in Cali, evident in the quote above, was apparent in leaders' accounts of official pandemic response. For example, during lockdown the municipal government announced that it had distributed

1,200 food parcels in the neighbourhood via Asomevid. However, the organisation's leaders had no knowledge of this distribution. This situation left the organisation vulnerable to suspicions of corruption in the neighbourhood, potentially damaging local relations of trust, while begging the question of where the food donations had gone. Meanwhile, state agencies appeared more concerned with publicising their response than the quality of the response itself, demanding photo opportunities in exchange for donations, which Asomevid was reluctant to agree to in a context with high levels of stigma.

A further example of the state's insensitivity to the needs and vulnerabilities of the community is seen in the distribution of food packages by the local government. Asomevid's leaders recounted how early one morning, at around 3am, they received phone calls from the municipality announcing this unexpectedly and requesting their help. Municipal representatives turned up in the neighbourhood at 4am, along with the police and the army to deliver food packages. They asked leaders to accompany them and banged on residents' doors to announce the distribution, a highly insensitive approach in a context where associating with police is seen as risky. As one resident told a leader afterwards, 'Don't ever do that again because it put me at risk, if you're going to come to my house don't come with the police, because of that you've now marked out my house'. This narrative suggests that state intervention during the pandemic was selective and fragmented, and responded more to the needs of the state than the community.

The sporadic presence of diverse and multiple state actors in marginalised areas (including the police, the army and the municipality, alongside longstanding government agencies) is suggestive of institutional multiplicity (Goodfellow and Lindemann, 2013). Meanwhile, the narrative of 'state absence' points to the critical perspective of residents and community leaders

towards this situation, suggesting that such governance actors operate alongside, or in competition rather than in collaboration with CBOs such as Asomevid. While they may represent a more formally legitimate authority, they apparently lack detailed knowledge of the neighbourhoods where they seek to intervene, thus potentially exacerbating rather than resolving crisis situations. The context in Cape Town reflects a less contested form of state-CBO engagement, but nonetheless demonstrates a multiplicity of institutional governance rather than any co-ordinated effort at support.

This underscores the more general difficulty that organisations like Asomevid and Sakhisizwe face when engaging with local government. While this may relate to the exclusionary politics of specific administrations, it also highlights the inadequacy of local participatory governance structures, in which existing spaces of decision making and resource allocation are already captured by groups, as in the case of Cali, or where there is a representative gap at the neighbourhood level, as in Cape Town, where the lowest level of representation is for approximately 30,000 residents. The above discussion shows firstly, how institutional multiplicity exists in both cases, with multiple organisations interacting with each other and the state – in some cases superseding state-led crisis response – in ways that are contested and even competitive, albeit to different degrees. This points to a second important point, namely that hybridisation is dynamic and context-dependent: in Cape Town, inter-CBO competition is more salient, while in Cali, CBOs compete with state institutions to respond.

## Boundary spanning: CBOs and non-state partnerships

A notable form of partnership building demonstrated by the CBOs was that of working with non-state external supporters, including both NGOs and the private sector. At the start of the pandemic, neither organisation was focussed on food security; however, they were able to

'boundary span' (Van Meerkerk et al, 2014) in an innovative approach to working with different types of organisations that were well-placed to support residents' needs. Both organisations were also able to work across socio-economic divides, drawing support from wealthier groups in their city.

In Cape Town Sakhisizwe leveraged their existing relationships with donor organisations to ensure access to food, transport, pandemic-related supplies such as masks, and to a lesser extent shopping vouchers. The latter were donated by businesses and individual donors. Sakhisizwe in particular played a pivotal role in linking wealthier donors in the neighbouring suburb of Hout Bay with residents in Imizamo Yethu, largely, but not only through their relationship with Love in a Bowl. As a diary respondent explained,

> people worked together here [to support food security]. No one had their arms folded. Everyone's arms were open in the area of Hout Bay…everyone worked to band together in an amazing way, the Whites and Blacks. There was no nation that was not working together.

Asomevid too relied heavily on the mobilisation of its organisational networks to generate resources for food distribution during the pandemic. Based on Asomevid's use of social media networks in the early days of the lockdown, external donations arrived in the form of food items as well as money or vouchers. In this way, Asomevid generated resources for the Tables of Hope, initially based on its own means and then through its networks of friends and associates, including private individuals and companies, and civil society organisations, acting in 'solidarity'. For example, a local priest heard about the initiative via social media and donated bags of rice. Much of the organisation's activity around food security therefore depended on leverage of its external networks, cultivated over many years through a strategy

of negotiation and collaboration with interested parties, as a means of maximising benefits for residents of the neighbourhood and Aguablanca more broadly.

## Mediation and brokerage

Boundary spanning through building partnerships and working effectively across socio-economic divides require a 'community leader' in the form of an institution or individual that can broker relations between external and internal stakeholders (including between civil society organisations). This resonates with the practice of mediated citizenship where local leaders 'speak for' the poor and marginalised across a political divide (Piper and Von Lieres 2015). Central to the idea of an effective broker or mediator is the notion of trust as it facilitates conflict resolution, making it easier for people to work together' (Folke et al, 2005:451).

In practice trust-building is often linked to specific individuals; indeed both Sakhisizwe and Asomevid are organisations run by well-regarded leaders. In Cape Town most of the respondents we spoke highlighted the leadership skills of the head of Sakhisizwe, which were central to both working effectively with external donors and ensuring that within Imizamo Yethu, conflict about food parcel distribution was limited. A similar level of leadership skill was attributed to Asomevid. Respondents in Cali noted how the external networks central to the pandemic response were often linked to individual leaders. This figure of the leader was presented as pivotal in brokering relations between external stakeholders, and the organisation and the residents it represents, in stigmatised neighbourhoods.

The strong leaders of the CBOs, and their track record of success, were key factors in their ability to build institutional trust. This trust is notable among their own members and with residents in the neighbourhoods more widely. In the case of Asomevid, respondents suggested

how their ongoing work on violence prevention with young people had fostered trusting relationships within the neighbourhood, but also raised the profile of the organisation in the wider context of Aguablanca District and the city of Cali. At the same time, the pandemic was also seen as an opportunity for creating new relationships of trust: for example, exchange was key for the in Tables of Hope, with initiatives being framed as *'trueque'* (barter) rather than charity, emphasising the ability of residents to support others more vulnerable than themselves. The initiative thus played an important role in bonding residents socially, alongside its material and nutritional aspect.

For Sakhisizwe, the students and their parents were quick to point out how effective the organisation was at bringing their members together, facilitating conversations and ensuring a sense of belonging and support. Within the neighbourhood too, Sakhisizwe were able to link the multiple levels of local leaders in the neighbourhood to support food distribution. The CBO facilitated the set-up of WhatsApp groups between block and street leaders who were responsible for distributing food parcels to those who needed them in their areas. Sakhisizwe actually grew its membership base during the pandemic. Families saw how effective it was as a supportive institution during times of crisis and parents encouraged their children to join the programmes. The strength of these bonds, however, did not last at the level staff had hoped they would. A year after the end of lockdowns, student enrolment numbers had dropped. This raises questions about the nature of organisational resilience beyond a crisis.

This section has demonstrated the ways in which complex forms of urban governance, explored here in terms of institutional multiplicity, boundary spanning and mediated citizenship, rely on localised agency and dynamic and flexible processes. However, just as these processes are highly dynamic in response to the uncertainties of their contextual conditions, so their

outcomes are not fixed, and are often context dependent. While organisations in both cities spanned geographic and socio-economic boundaries, in Cape Town this relied more on mediation and inter-organisational coordination, while in Cali, it involved contesting and in some cases superseding the role of the state. As well as highlighting the significance of contextual factors which may limit the scope of organisations' and leaders' agency, this suggests the importance of paying attention to processes as well as outcomes, including resilience to which we now turn.

## 6. Hybridising governance and equitable urban resilience

In the context of urban crises such as the pandemic, building resilience is seen as critical. In this penultimate section, we briefly discuss whether the practices of hybrid governance described above supports equitable resilience. To do this, we draw on Matin et al's (2018) framework which highlights vulnerability, power and perception, and applies the categories of distributive, procedural and recognitional justice.

Distributive justice relates to equitable outcomes, highly salient in contexts of vulnerability, seen in both CBOs' focus on equity in food distribution processes. This was especially important in Cali as the distribution of food support by the state was problematic; in one instance the municipality overlooked vulnerable residents as it used a visual assessment of housing to determine food distribution, unaware that some of the neighbourhood's poorest residents lived in apparently well-maintained houses which were actually subdivided into overcrowded apartments. CBOs sought to address this inequity to some extent: both Asomevid and Sakhisizwe based their distribution of food on necessity and vulnerability, which arguably led to more equitable outcomes. In both cases, institutional multiplicity (the involvement of multiple and sometimes competing entities in governance) supported distributional justice.

The organisations facilitated these processes based on their in-depth and prior knowledge of their neighbourhoods. Asomevid's ongoing violence prevention work with young people and families meant leaders had a good understanding of that population's needs:

> We are all working with young people in their homes that we have known for years, we know their needs, we know their problem, what stops them accessing support…Doing this daily work of [violence] prevention helped us to identify these young people's needs [in the pandemic].

Sakhisizwe work in a similar context with first-hand knowledge of which families in their programme have the greatest need. To facilitate equity beyond their own membership database they worked with trusted 'mamas' and existing community leaders set up in neighbourhood blocks. This suggests that in Cape Town, boundary spanning was also significant for distributive justice.

Meanwhile, procedural justice focuses on ensuring that decision-making and conflict resolution processes are fair, significant in contexts characterised by highly unequal power dynamics. Within their neighbourhoods both CBOs dedicated significant time and attention on ensuring processes were transparent and, as far as possible, fair. In a rapidly-changing context where it was difficult to get reliable up-to-date information, Asomevid opted for Tables of Hope instead of door-to-door distribution:

> We said to ourselves, if 100 food parcels arrive and we distribute them, we're not going to be able to check who really needs them…and we don't want to end up with only some satisfied or some getting more things, so we said better to put some tables out and we'll do it via networks, we'll spread the word all over the place so that people know

> that there's a space where they can come and take something, and really take what they need.

Sakhisizwe too, were able to prevent fighting over perceptions of unfair food distribution by sharing their electronic records of distribution and by working closely with other community leaders. While our case studies show that CBOs are well-placed to facilitate local level decision making, they have no formal authority to do so. This is a tension to recognise in reflecting on the role of CBOs is supporting equitable resilience. While noting this *de jure* limitation, in practice both CBOs demonstrated a high ability to govern through their mediating role, which included addressing conflicts.

Finally, recognitional justice relates to the idea that everyone is treated fairly and without discrimination regardless of their identity, values or associations, particularly important where racialised stigmatisation is prevalent. In the South African case, one notable form of recognitional justice is that food distribution did not require any formal registration which was essential for not excluding migrants who may not have legal paperwork. As *Love in a Bowl* explained:

> We actually had people…when they heard they might have to give up their address and their ID number to receive food, they felt vulnerable as a person who is in this country as a visitor…they felt they could become targets with these lists. It was important…no one feels further victimized or put in danger just for the need of getting, you know, food into their stomachs.

Similar to the South African case, in Cali distribution did not require any formal paperwork or audit trail but relied on leaders' and the organisation's local knowledge. This aspect of

recognition is central to CBOs' work in Cali, and links strongly to self-identified characteristics of resilience that have been the backbone of the organisation's work. Indeed, one leader characterised resilience as, 'Enduring and enduring and knowing how to endure all this adversity, and continue enduring this adversity, knowing how the struggles of Asomevid have been to claim rights, to improve conditions'. To some extent this reflects the view that building urban resilience includes building the capacity of institutions, communities, individuals and systems to absorb external shocks, adapt and 'build back better' (Kapucu et al., 2023). However the more significant challenge is whether these processes could lead to long term equity, or facilitate systemic social justice, which equitable resilience ultimately demands.

## 7. Conclusion

The issue of food security in the crisis context of Covid-19 in low-income neighbourhoods in the global South is strongly relevant to governance debates not just because of its acute effects for already vulnerable residents, but also because it resulted from state actions (such as lockdowns) and the inadequacy of state responses to resolve gaps in basic needs resulting from these (characterised by some respondents as state 'absence'). CBOs in low-income neighbourhoods were central to supporting vulnerable residents during the early days of Covid-19 and its associated lockdowns. As our research has shown, they leveraged multiple forms of governance practices to support those in their local community. CBOs Sakhisizwe and Asomevid were first responders in this crisis setting, due to their temporal and spatial embeddedness in these neighbourhoods and communities, relating to both the organisations themselves, and individual leaders.

In the case study neighbourhoods in Cape Town and Cali, CBOs' processes and practices associated with hybrid governance were observed to different degrees, including institutional multiplicity, boundary spanning, and mediation, highlighting the localised agency of these

organisations. They mediated conflict and at times represented their constituency's needs to external actors (both state and non-state). Mediation during a crisis is intertwined with perceptions of trust associated with the leaders, built over time, and based on deep local knowledge. The leaders of Sakhisizwe and Asomevid had invested years in working with local residents and external stakeholders and were thus able to pivot quickly from their core CBO functions to address the more immediate issue of food security. Both CBOs were also trusted because they were sensitive to the conditions of their neighbourhoods, such as residents' vulnerability due to poverty, which might for example mean they felt a sense of shame in receiving food aid.

However, outcomes of these processes were often contested rather than integrated or predetermined (including the potential for meaningful change in the practices of both state and non-state actors). We therefore argue that the notion of hybridising (rather than hybrid) governance seems to better capture these dynamic, contested and uncertain processes by which non-state actors engage with state and/or other actors to respond to gaps in basic needs during crisis. For example, both CBOs demonstrated institutionalised forms of trust, but where a leader is central to building and maintaining resilience, the sustainability of the CBO will always be a factor.

We also argue that in conditions of vulnerability and rapid change (including crisis), hybridising governance involving CBOs may help to develop community resilience, which is localised, place-based and multi-dimensional. While these processes may also support different forms of justice (whether distributional, procedural or recognitional), the question of whether they can lead to equitable urban resilience, through sustainable, scaled up, systemic change, is dependent on contextual factors such as levels of poverty and violence at neighbourhood level, the willingness of the local state to collaborate, and resource levels. The different approaches

across the two case studies, revealed in the coordination between competing organisations in Cape Town with little intervention from the state, compared to the contestation between the CBO and the state in Cali, points to the significance of contextual factors, and the need for more comparative work in this field to further explore these.

Nevertheless, in both cases, CBOs' practices by necessity focused on dealing with the effects of lockdowns and the pandemic, rather than addressing the structural causes of precarity in their constituency neighbourhoods. Insights from our research point to why this may be the case. Firstly, CBOs work with limited resources and are not well placed to scale up their initiatives. To some extent this is mitigated by communication technology, which is used to expand networks (both CBOs successfully used WhatsApp and social media such as Facebook to expand their reach). However, other significant constraints which limited CBOs' ability to support equitable resilience, even within a local context, included an increased workload during the pandemic, the constant and emotionally draining mediation of conflict and misinformation, and the challenge of engaging in 'double dealings' (Bénit-Gbaffou and Katsaura, 2014), managing relationship upwards with the state and downwards with residents.

Perhaps most importantly, systemic change ultimately requires at least partnership with, and ideally intervention by, the state. Indeed, many of our respondents across both cities suggested the need for better state support during Covid-19, including residents but also representatives of CBOs, particularly as consequences of the pandemic are still felt (in health and education, for example). This underlines the importance of the state working with organisations in both crisis and day-to-day settings. Hybridising governance cannot only include non-state actors, powerful as this is in times of crisis. We therefore suggest that while CBOs may effectively respond to crisis through spanning boundaries, mediating, and working with multiple actors, in turn state representatives should be supported to work more carefully with CBOs, from

facilitating more sensitive needs assessment, to collaborating more closely with them in times of crisis.

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