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## Case study report

# The First Thousand Days within the Western Cape Whole of Society Approach: Lessons for the collaborative governance of intersectoral action for health

Ida Okeyo, Uta Lehmann, Helen Schneider

School of Public, University of the Western Cape

November 2020



## Abstract

This report is a case study of the Western Cape's Whole of Society Approach (WoSA) through the lens of the First Thousand Days (FTD) of childhood initiative, focusing in particular on its implementation in Saldanha Bay and to a limited extent the Drakenstein municipal areas/sub-districts. The case study reports on data collected by Ida Okeyo as part of her PhD, which has examined the emergence and implementation of FTD in the Province as a whole over the last 3-4 years. Experiences in Saldanha Bay and Drakenstein stand in contrast to elsewhere in the Province, where, despite original intentions, the FTD strategy has failed to take root as a cohesive intersectoral response to this critical moment in the life-course. This case study examines how WoSA (and the Better Spaces initiative before that), created an enabling context for intersectoral action within which FTD found a natural home. We spell out the elements of this enabling environment using a framework of 'collaborative governance', concluding that these elements are the necessary pre-conditions for advancing any intersectoral initiative more widely in the Western Cape Province and elsewhere. In this way, we aim to document and affirm lessons learnt through WoSA, and provide the case for its further development and institutionalisation in the Province.

## Acknowledgements

Doing this case study has been immensely rewarding for us as researchers. We would like to thank the senior managers and staff in the Western Cape Department of Health for giving us the go-ahead to conduct the case study, and the WoSA stakeholders who allowed us to be observers in their meetings and workshops, and who so willingly gave of their time for interviews.

### Abbreviations used in this report

ECD: Early Childhood Development

EDP: Economic Development Partnership

FTD: First Thousand Days

HOD: Heads of Provincial Departments

IDP: Integrated Development Plans

PICH: Parent, Infant and Child Health

PSP: Provincial Strategic Plan

PTM: Provincial Transversal Management

SBM: Saldanha Bay Municipality

SFA: Strategic Focus Areas

WoSA: Whole of Society Approach

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## Background – The First Thousand Days Initiative in the Western Cape

There is an increasing recognition of the impact of early life determinants (adequate nutrition, stimulation and responsive caregiving) on a child's health and development throughout the lifespan. The First Thousand Days (FTD), defined as the period from conception to two years, represents a period of particular vulnerability due to the rapid development processes that occur, and is particularly sensitive to early life adversity associated with poverty, poor nutrition and substance abuse. Evidence shows that intervening in this period has major benefits in improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities over the life-course (1). The FTD has thus been advocated globally as a target area for interventions focusing on nutrition, early childhood development and mental well-being (2).

Although there is no specific national policy in South Africa on the FTD, the period has been recognised in key policy frameworks such as the National Development Plan (3) and the National Integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD) Policy (4), which highlight action in early childhood as crucial in achieving broader development goals. The Western Cape Provincial Government has also recognised the significance of the FTD in ensuring wellness and enabling children to thrive and reach their full potential. Although noted to be performing better than other Provinces in South Africa, 37% of children live in poor households and 11% live in households where hunger is reported, making them vulnerable to poor developmental outcomes (5). In addition, the Province has the highest rates of drug-related crime in the country (6). High levels of alcohol and substance abuse have been identified as the main contributing factors to domestic violence and child abuse (7).

As a response to the growing number of at-risk children and major social challenges such as high levels of violence, the Western Cape Government included the FTD Initiative in its 2014-2019 Provincial Strategic Plan (PSP) under a Provincial Strategic Goal (PSG 3) to *'increase wellness and safety and tackle social ills'* (8,9). Based on concepts of nurturing care (10) adapted for the Province's context, the goal of the FTD initiative is to improve outcomes for children in terms of nutrition, health (including maternal health), education (early learning), support and parenting, and protection and safety. The FTD initiative received political and bureaucratic attention in the early stages: in 2016 it was formally launched by the provincial Ministers of Health, Education and Social Development, followed by the

appointment of a FTD Executive Committee, and the launch of road shows and communication campaigns, amongst other activities. FTD has also benefitted from the support of a well-established non-governmental collaborative network in the Province called the PICH - Parent, Infant and Child Health – Group, bringing together providers, NGOs and researchers.

However, despite high level support for FTD, the initiative lost momentum over the ensuing years, and became increasingly re-formulated as a more narrow health sector response in routine maternal-child health services. One of the key informants interviewed in the first phase of the PhD research explained the shift away from a more ‘expansive’ intersectoral idea and how FTD became displaced by competing initiatives: *‘It has fizzled out....it was an expansive idea, it was meant to be an intersectoral project but there was too little concrete to keep it going. And maybe the intersectoral collaboration killed it, or maybe that's not fair, there are just so many other confounding things with this case ...So the energy that was in First Thousand Days is quickly absorbed towards these other concepts - MEAP [Management Efficiency Alignment Project] restructuring, community oriented primary care.’*

The main focus of the PhD research by the first author (IO) has been on understanding how and why the FTD, which everyone appeared to endorse enthusiastically, failed to gain traction and be implemented in any meaningful manner. More broadly, the PhD seeks to better understand the real-life possibilities and constraints to intersectoral action for health (IAH), with the unfolding policy around FTD providing a lens through which to study these phenomena. Drawing on policy analysis methodologies and theories, this research has documented the interaction of unclear ideas regarding FTD interventions, the prioritisation of vertical health-based initiatives, capacity challenges and divergent interests amongst actors, as constraints to policy anchoring and implementation. Two recently published papers describe these challenges in more detail (11,12).

During the course of the research on FTD we became aware of the Whole of Society Approach (WoSA), its adoption of the life-course approach (through the ‘Carol and Lindi’ story-line) as a central framing idea, and FTD and early childhood development as key foci for coordinated action in WoSA sites. An embedded case study of FTD within WoSA was thus conducted, the subject of this report.

This case study report first describes how the FTD initiative emerged and was formulated within the ‘Better Spaces’ and WoSA processes in Saldanha Bay and Drakenstein. Focusing on Saldanha Bay Municipality (SBM), the report then analyses the elements within WoSA that enabled intersectoral processes of the FTD to take hold, drawing on the framework of ‘collaborative governance’ proposed by Ansell and Gash (13).

## A brief note on the methodology of the case study

Data collection for the SBM FTD case study included interviews with key informants, observations of WoSA team meetings and document reviews. Combining elements of frameworks on collaborative governance (13,14), we developed an observation tool and a semi-structured interview guide for data collection processes, which occurred between March and October 2019.

Five WoSA meetings across three WoSA governance levels were directly observed, including a workshop with front-line providers to introduce the WoSA approach, a Design and Small Team meetings (one each), an Executive Committee meeting and a cross WoSA site learning event held in Bellville, Cape Town in October 2019.

Eight in-depth interviews lasting between 45 minutes to one hour were conducted with key WoSA players linked to FTD in SBM and Drakenstein. These interviews followed an earlier phase of the PhD research where 36 interviews were conducted with actors involved in FTD policy formulation and/or implementation in the Province.

A number of documents on WoSA and the Better Spaces initiative before in SBM and Drakenstein were also available for review. These sources were invaluable in providing information on WoSA timelines, governance structures, specific FTD activities and reflection/learning points often echoed in meetings and workshops. The documents included the Draft Toolkit that provided guidance on the implementation of WoSA for heads of departments (HOD) of provincial sectors (15); previous research that had documented/evaluated the Better Spaces and emerging WoSA approaches (9); minutes of the meetings attended and, reports of the front line workshop and learning event observed; a socio-economic situational analysis report of SBM (16); and the SBM WoSA Framework of Action that specified the multi-level governance structures, roles and responsibilities (17).



Observation notes, interview transcripts and documents were imported into Atlas.ti software and analysed thematically (18). All data collection activities received prior ethics approval from the University of the Western Cape Biomedical Health Committee (BM17/10/9) and the Provincial Department of Health (WC\_201712\_026).

## First Thousand Days, Better Spaces and the Whole of Society Approach

WoSA was launched in Saldanha in late 2018. The events leading up to and after this launch in the Province and other districts are summarised in the timeline below (Figure 1).

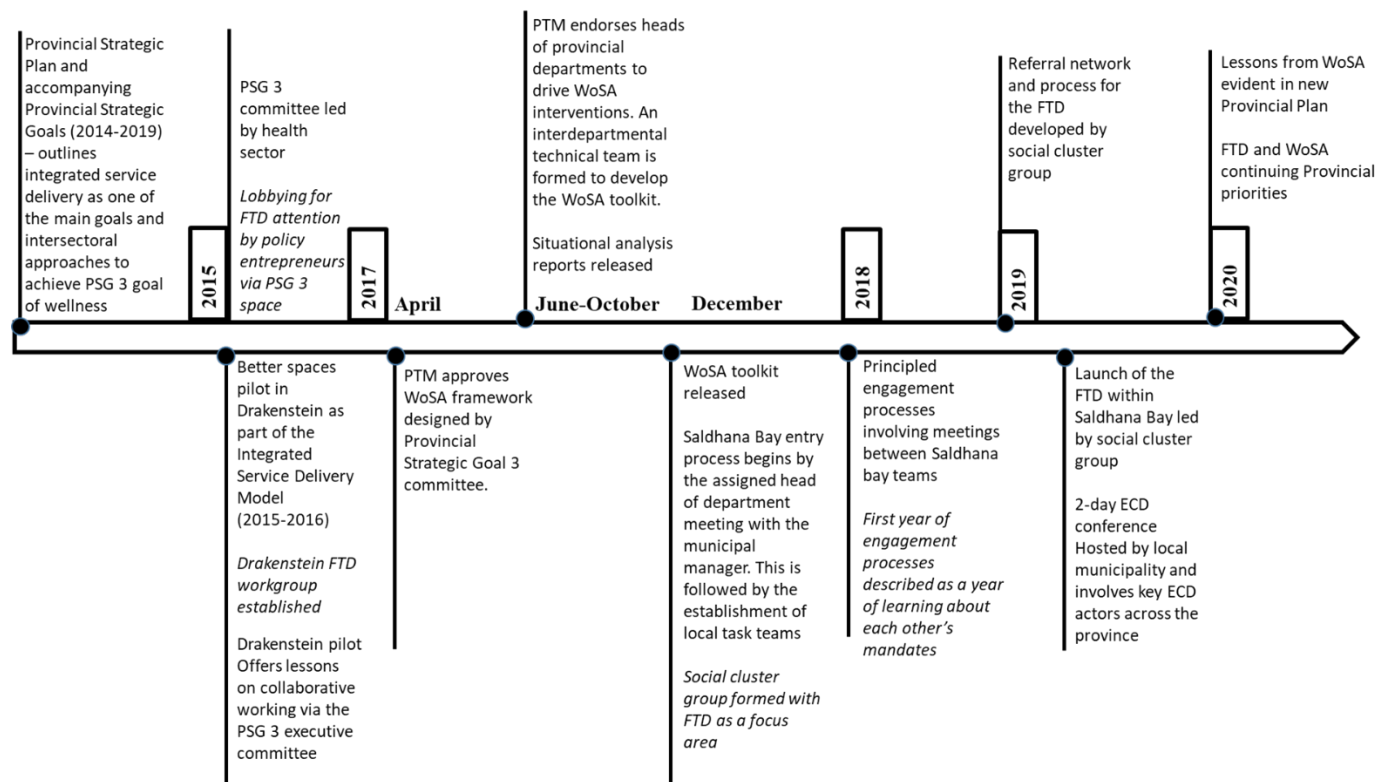


Figure 1: Timeline of FTD, Better Spaces in Drakenstein and WoSA in SBM (PTM: Provincial Transversal Management)

In 2015, while the FTD was in its early stages of policy development at the provincial level, a number of activities were unfolding in the Drakenstein Sub-District where an integrated service delivery model, known as Better Spaces, was being piloted. The Drakenstein pilot was a mechanism to operationalise the third provincial strategic goal (PSG 3), described above, through partnerships across government sectors, civil society and the private sector (8). It focused on health and social interventions and was governed by an inter- and intra-

governmental working group that included partners linked to the PSG 3 Executive Committee. The latter consisted of representatives of the Departments of Health, Social Development, Community Safety, Public Works and Transport, who were to report to the provincial cabinet through the provincial health minister (MEC) (9).

The goals of the Drakenstein Better Spaces pilot for 2015/16 included streamlining of ECD services, combating youth substance abuse, improving safety and developing programmes for the elderly (9). A Drakenstein FTD workgroup was established consisting of actors from the Sub-District's health and social development sectors, as well as representatives of the local municipality and NGOs involved in ECD-related work. This workgroup has also been linked to the PICH community and the provincial FTD executive committee and has since been involved in a range of FTD-related intersectoral activities. During the course of 2018, the workgroup along with members of the PICH community and the FTD executive committee began the process of developing the parent support package, which was seen as one of the successful FTD-related products that emerged out of the Drakenstein team. These actors were also involved in activities related to the national government's Under-5 Road to Health Booklet and Side-by-Side Campaign (19,20) in support of nurturing care.

In the meantime, the insights emerging on the opportunities and challenges of intersectoral coordination from the Drakenstein pilot were being discussed through the PSG 3 structures. These insights included the need for an intersectoral approach that goes beyond health and social sectors to address the challenges of unemployment, poverty and safety (9). As a result, the PSG 3 Executive Committee formulated a broader intersectoral approach, which became termed the *Whole of Society Approach – WoSA* - that stretched beyond the health and social sectors, and whose purpose is '*embed[ding] and institutionalis[ing] a collaborative approach to service delivery which includes local, provincial and national government, state- owned institutions, the private sector and civil society (i.e. stakeholders) to address a community's specific needs, thereby creating "public value" in the communities concerned.*' (17)

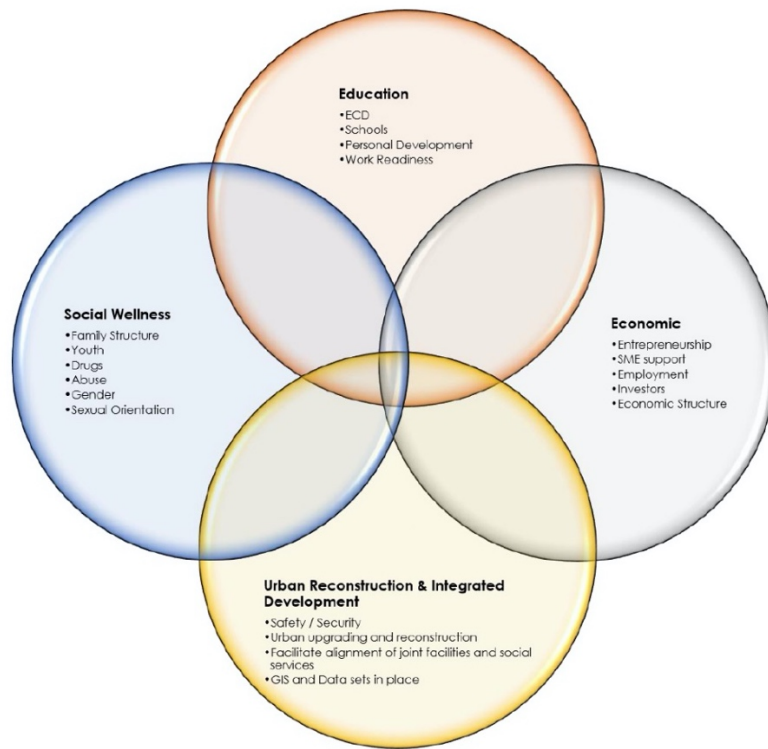
The WoSA framework was approved by the Provincial Cabinet in April 2017, followed by the development of a detailed WoSA toolkit, providing guidance on implementation in each of four prioritized geographic areas. These four areas were the two rural sub-districts of Drakenstein and Saldanha Bay and the two urban sub-districts of Khayelitsha and Hanover Park/Manenburg (15). HODs of provincial sectors were designated to lead and coordinate

other provincial sectors, forge collaborative relationships with local government, and together steer entry processes in each area (15).

The SBM WoSA process began at the end of the 2017, and was led by the allocated HOD from Health along with the Saldanha Bay Municipal Manager, having been jointly launched by their political principals, the MEC and Mayor.

One of the earliest activities in SBM was a joint situational analysis (21), followed by the establishment of Strategic Focus Areas (SFAs) and accompanying teams, documented in the SBM-specific WoSA Framework of Action (17). The SFAs were Social Wellness, Education, and Urban Reconstruction and Economic Development (17), later reformulated as the Social, Economic, Governance, Safety and Spatial Clusters (Figure 2 below). The Social Cluster group in SBM was led by a senior official from the Department of Social Development and consisted of actors from various sectors that included the Departments of Health, Social Development, Community and Safety, and Education. FTD emerged as one of the focus areas of the SBM WoSA Social Cluster and became one of the core anchoring ideas of the WoSA network as a whole.

The FTD initiative was formally launched in SBM in 2019, and was followed by the establishment of a referral pathway involving the departments of Health (across levels of care), Social Development and Home Affairs for pregnancy and early child care. This referral pathway was a co-created endeavour between four departments - Health, Social Development, Education and Community Safety - reflecting an early commitment towards intersectoral processes in the Social Cluster. One of the key proponents of the FTD provincially described WoSA in SBM as enabling a ‘...*safety net, a basket, a holding space, a safe space among all sectors to say let’s work together*’. In May 2019, the SBM hosted an ECD conference bringing together numerous actors and stakeholders interested in addressing challenges related to ECD (22). The ECD conference was widely seen as an agenda-setting moment for intersectoral relationships in SBM, both within and between local and provincial government spheres. As one of the SBM interviewees put it: *‘I think first thousand days, the fact that we have the document now saying these are the steps that we take, one, two, three and this is how we going to monitor to see whether it works. I think we are in the process of taking it a bit further. With the ECDs the momentum that we had ..there was the conference. It was a really good conference and I think that is a start’*.



Overarching Principles

- Human rights
- Citizen Centric Approach
- Social Cohesion / Diversity
- Equity / Equality
- Sustainability
- Evidence Based Decision Making
- Partnering and Collaboration
- Innovation



HAND OUT: REFLECTIONS FROM THE SMALL TEAM MEETING(S) (5 June and 12 July 2019)

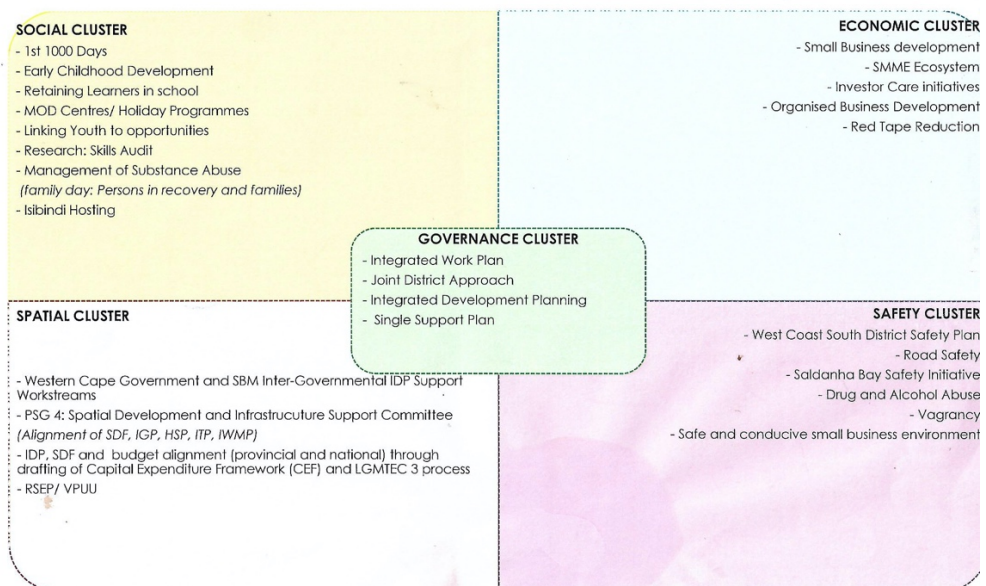


Figure 1: Whole of Society Approach Strategic Focus Areas that later evolved to Clusters (Sources: 17 and Small Team Meeting Handout)

## WoSA as the enabling context for intersectoral action on the FTD

In this section we analyse in more detail the elements of WoSA which created an enabling context for a range intersectoral collaborations within SBM, and within which FTD and ECD found natural homes. We spell out the elements of this enabling environment using Ansell and Gash's (13) 'Model of Collaborative Governance', reproduced in Figure 3 below.

Collaborative governance can be defined as *'the processes and structures of public policy, decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished'* (14).

In Ansell and Gash's model, successful collaborative outcomes (in this instance FTD implementation and 'increased wellbeing and safety and tackling social ills') emerge from a dynamic of favourable starting conditions, appropriate institutional design, facilitative leadership, and a supportive collaborative process. Such collaborative processes include reinforcing cycles of 'face-to-face dialogue', which generate 'trust', 'commitment', 'shared understanding' and 'quick wins'.

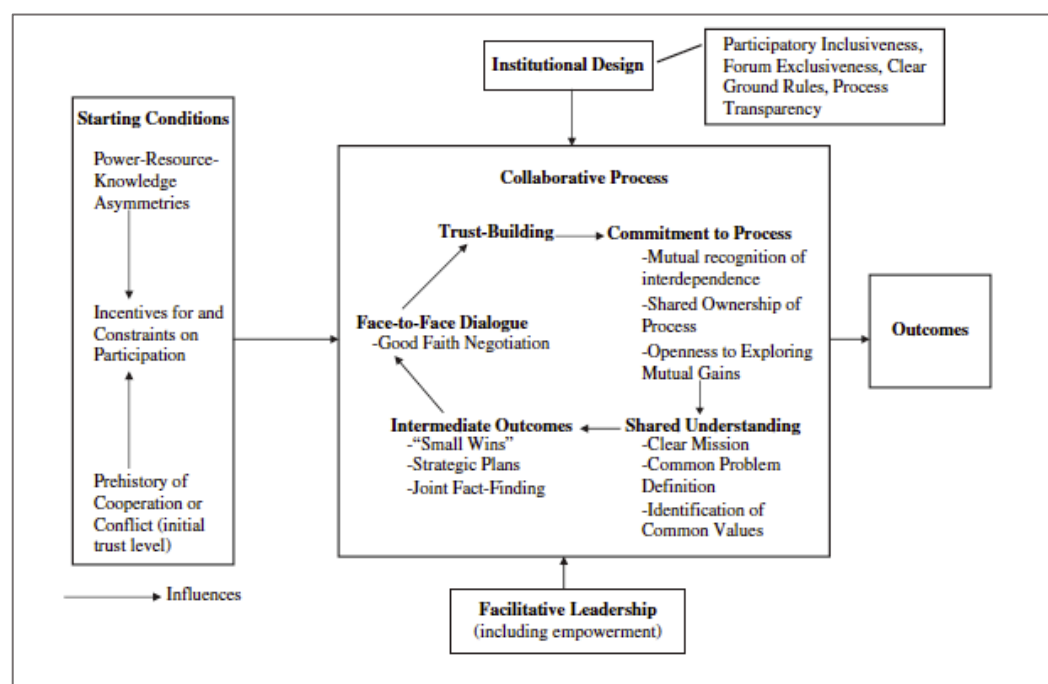


Figure 3: Ansell and Gash's Model of Collaborative Governance (Source: 13)

## Starting conditions

The impetus for WoSA and a series of other initiatives preceding it emerged from the recognition that complex and intractable social and economic ('wicked') problems could not be solved without new forms of coordinated action. As one provincial government informant put it: *'all of our departments are meeting their targets and in some cases we are getting performance bonuses and exceeding our APP targets but things aren't really getting better... if you look hard enough you will find someone doing exactly what you are trying to do and sometimes better and sometimes not.'*

Key challenges outlined in the SBM WoSA Framework document included:

*'The drug problem must be alleviated; Basic living standards need to be improved upon; Greater access to employment must be made; Racial inequality needs to be addressed; Greater access to education for children must be made; Creating a better future for the youth must be realised; Envisaged economic development in the region must be realised; Dealing with the reality of corruption, nepotism and mistrust must be undertaken.'* (17).

While the planned industrial developments linked to Saldanha Bay's deep sea harbour created economic opportunities, key informants also anticipated new social disruptions arising from an economic boom, such as a rapid increase in population, crime and violence.

The transversal goals of the 2014-2019 PSP provided the required bureaucratic mandate for greater provincial inter-departmental coordination, enabling an interface with the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) of local government. The rationale for WoSA was thus framed from the start as a necessary alignment between local, provincial, national (National Development Plan and District Development approach) and global (Sustainable Development Goals) thinking and frameworks: *'International, National, Provincial and local policy environments increasingly focus on integrated problem identification, collaborative and whole of society solutions as strong common threads'* (17).

It is important to recognise that experiments in 'joined up government' are not new in the Western Cape (or elsewhere), and that WoSA did not emerge from a blank slate. The evolution from Better Spaces to WoSA has been described above. Other collaborative endeavours in provincial and local government that informed the approach and design of

WoSA were the Regional Socio-Economic Programme (RSEP), the Mayoral Urban Renewal Programme (MURP), Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrade (VPUU), and a variety of other smaller sector-specific and place-based initiatives. In particular, lessons from the MURP experience and others offered insights into navigating collaborative relationships and tensions that WoSA should anticipate. This included the difficulty of community engagement, sustaining attendance and involvement of stakeholders and the time and effort it took to achieve set targets. These prior initiatives also offered pre-existing platforms and developed networks of stakeholders, providing momentum and energy which WoSA could leverage.

Interviewees with a longer history in government reflected on their experiences with prior local or provincial collaborative initiatives, which even if politically endorsed and authorised through mechanisms such as the PSP and a Provincial Transversal Management System, failed to gain traction on the ground. They described an overwhelming imperative towards siloed functioning (within and across spheres of government), often driven by Annual Performance Plan (APP) targets and the spectre of Auditor-General reports, and where competing understandings impeded attempts at local coordination. For example, *'so often when we have these kind of engagements where we say we [are] coordinating and collaborating, and I am informing you I am building a school here and you are informing me you are building a clinic there and then there is a whole, not fight, but sort of tension between this is what is informing ... this is the intelligence that has informed my decision making and that is yours and who is more right? And then often the citizen doesn't always come out on top in that scenario.'*

WoSA in SBM was universally regarded by interviewees as a qualitative departure from prior attempts at collaborative governance in the area and more widely, which they attributed to a combination of the design of WoSA, the actors driving the initiative and a carefully thought through process of engagement, deliberation and relationship building in WoSA. We describe these factors in the sections which follow, also summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of collaborative governance elements in SBM WoSA

Collaborative governance elements	Main themes
Starting conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Complex socio economic problems required new forms of coordinated action</li> <li>○ Existing policy frameworks provide the bureaucratic mandate to collaborate and interface with Integrated Development Plans, the National Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals</li> <li>○ Previous collaborative endeavours (Regional Socio-Economic Programme, the Mayoral Urban Renewal Programme among others) provide lessons and networks</li> </ul>
WoSA design features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ WoSA viewed as different to previous collaborative endeavours</li> <li>○ Clear governance processes, enabled by hard and soft authorising</li> <li>○ Allowing for emergent approaches that were different to normal decision-making in government</li> <li>○ Values and principles of learning, distributed leadership, relationship-building and co-creation of knowledge and strategy</li> <li>○ Common frames and monitoring and evaluation framework enable shared understandings</li> </ul>
Leaders, brokers, champions and boundary spanners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Senior provincial managers viewed as committed and skilled drivers of WoSA</li> <li>○ Facilitative and brokerage roles of top managers</li> <li>○ Presence of champions, connectors and boundary spanners amongst middle and frontline managers</li> <li>○ Independent facilitation by the Western Cape Economic Development Partnership</li> </ul>
The WoSA collaborative process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Initial face to face engagement processes enable learning and identification of points of mutual connection</li> <li>○ WoSA meetings considered safe spaces for honest conversation about implementation challenges at service delivery level and discussing failure</li> <li>○ Engagement processes align to principles of respect, equality of voice, distributed leadership and co-creation</li> <li>○ Emerging relationships and trust create organic networks that assist in decision-making processes, quick wins, everyday problem solving and other collaborative spin-off activities</li> <li>○ Common terminology across participants demonstrates shared understandings</li> </ul>

## The design of WoSA

As outlined in various documents (15,17), WoSA has distinct design features, which drew on the lessons from previous intersectoral initiatives. These include:

- a place-based approach, centred on a sub-district/local municipality, seeking to mobilise a holistic and integrated response to local community needs, and moving away from specific initiatives and projects as starting points
- mobilising the range of public, private and community stakeholders, paying particular attention in the first instance to a ‘whole of government approach’ within and between provincial and local government



- clearly outlined multi-level governance and procedural arrangements that engage the political and bureaucratic spheres (Figure 5), and enable clear ‘authorising’ mandates for local actors, from the top of the system
- designating responsibilities and accountabilities, with a provincial HOD responsible for each of the four WoSA areas, and WoSA integrated into departmental performance agreements and reporting structures
- an emergent approach to programming centred on mutual discovery and locally determined strategy, rather than projects and programmes defined elsewhere
- centering processes of relationship building, learning and adapting as key design principles
- a common, people-centred frame in the ‘Carol and Lindi’ story and the life-course approach; and the development of shared understandings through joint compilations of routine information and definition of strategic focus areas or clusters

Interviewees made frequent reference to these features as key to the success of WoSA. As one put it: *‘So yes, I think WoSA has made a very big difference and I want to stress it is not that we didn’t work [in an] integrated [manner] before, but not so formalised and with the higher structures being involved... if there is acknowledgement that somewhere my senior is in agreement with me working together at local level with other people, then people are always calmer in terms of doing things.’*

The place-based approach in particular localities, effectively created spaces of exception to usual bureaucratic functioning, enabled by a combination of both ‘hard and ‘soft’ authorising from above (starting with the Premier’s office). Hard and soft authorising were explained as follows: *‘The hard [authorising] is the letter - it is in my job description or it is in my performance agreement for the year. The soft authorising is I have got an understanding with my director that if there is work that I need to do, that is WoSA related ... I have the freedom to attribute time to that and not have to justify each and every second I spend here.’*

Authorisation from above provided a ‘space to play in’ where WoSA could experiment with a different way of doing things and ‘push the boundaries’, allowing for an emergent approach to strategy. This was regarded as very different to the normal approach to governmental decision-making: *‘this is not how we [normally] work in government. We have a plan and you implement’.*

WoSA activities consisted of face to face meetings between actors in the newly established multi-level governance structures (Figure 4). Participants in the meetings of these structures represented a range of government sectors including the municipality, private sector actors and civil society. It was evident through the observation of WoSA meetings that there was a considerable overlap of actors who attended meetings at various governance levels.

The multi-level governance structures which deliberately engaged middle and frontline managers were considered very important: *‘So we have learnt that once you put people that are working in the area and sometimes even staying in the area together in the same room, they have a greater sense of what the challenges are and they have a sort of greater encouragement to work together.’*

As another interviewee put it:

*‘the structure is working because those linkages are being made and it is on a practical and operational level; I think we all around the table realise that this is the only way to really put our resources, our manpower, everyone together because we can now see how it fit into each other’s domains and to be able to at the end of the day address the communities holistically.’*



WoSA governance levels and meeting frequencies

Figure 4: Multi-level governance structures in the SBM WoSA Framework of Action (Source: 17)

The value of learning and knowledge generated within WoSA teams was highlighted as one of successes of WoSA. Knowledge of other sectors – their resources and mandates - was generated through the frequent, structured meeting processes that allowed for reflection,

learning and sharing from a range of stakeholders. These processes enabled participants to identify what they termed ‘*potential linkages*’ across different sectors to solve complex problems, and created the ‘*safe spaces*’ to ask for assistance on issues they faced within their day-to-day mandates. This provided the basis for a bottom-up process of setting priorities for the various clusters, which was then reported to higher level executive and political structures for endorsement.

Relationship-building, learning and adapting featured explicitly in the design principles of the SBM WoSA Framework (17) and were also re-iterated at WoSA learning events (23).

The ‘Carol and Lindi’ story of a mother and child living in an ideal state with the necessary tools, opportunities and appropriate services to cater for their needs over the life-course (Figure 5 and Appendix 1), provided a powerful common joint frame that stakeholders readily bought into. Interviewees often repeated the story as symbolising a new collective mindset focused on communities and citizens rather than an inward looking, sectoral approach. *‘In the past I used to say I am servicing schools and now I am no longer. If you hear my language, I am not talking schools. I am talking citizens and talking communities because a child belongs to a community so it doesn’t matter whatever that I am doing.’*

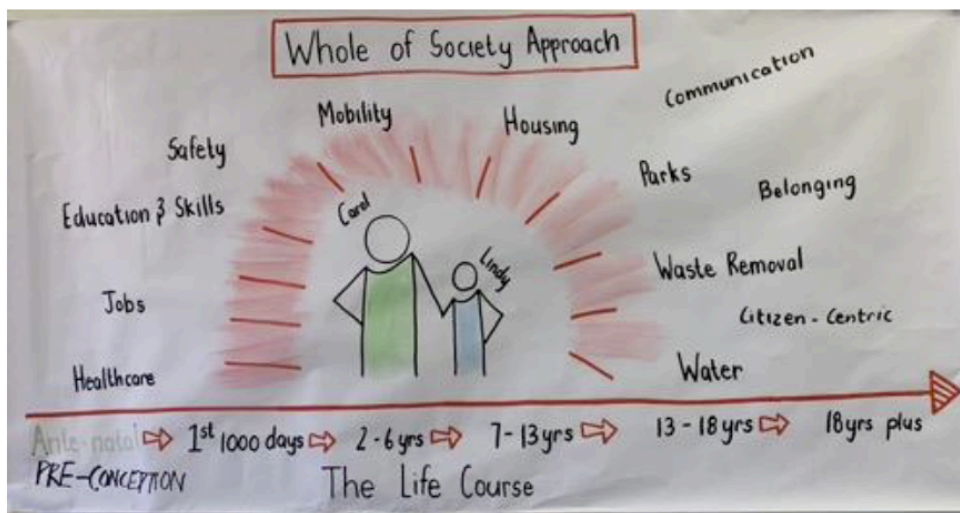


Figure 5: The Carol and Lindi Story (Source: 23)

An early design feature of WoSA plans was the development of a common monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework involving ‘*integrated data processes that cut across spheres*’ (17) with the goal to develop a common data repository that compiled indicators from a

number of sectors. This was intended to build shared understandings amongst stakeholders and illuminate challenges that frontline workers and communities were facing.

### Leaders, brokers, champions and boundary spanners in WoSA

Both interviews and observations highlighted the crucial leadership, championing and boundary spanning roles played by a core group of facilitating actors in advancing WoSA in SBM, who through their commitment, energy and style mobilised the willing participation of many other players.

Senior provincial managers responsible for the SBM were seen as visible, committed and skilled drivers of the WoSA initiative, described by one interviewee as *'very enthusiastic and very focused'*. These top managers attended meetings without fail and brokered relationships and support at political and top management levels, while sustaining momentum in local WoSA teams. This brokerage role required willingness to invest considerable time (in the face of numerous other competing commitments) and resources, combined with a particular set of facilitatory skills. As one interviewee pointed out: *'I think key is whoever is the HOD that represents that space, provincial government and the municipal manager and his delegated or designated person...'*

The quality of leadership - approachable and listening - was also regarded as important. Less senior officials felt that access to senior managers within WoSA structures was different to their usual experiences of government hierarchies. Middle-level managers were able to interact with *'another level that we normally don't engage with. They are [normally] just the decision makers [that] sign off - I call [this level] 'heaven' but now we are getting the opportunity to engage and from my side they are actually listening.'*

An initial high turnover of Municipal Managers in SBM was regarded as a constraint, but was to some extent mitigated by enthusiastic championing of WoSA by other senior managers within SBM. These players were able to draw on their own agency and social capital to obtain the participation of a range of other local government players, mobilise resources, design new approaches to IDP processes and organise and hosting the ECD conference.

District level sectoral managers, especially in the social cluster, were considered particularly effective stewards of WoSA in SBM. This cluster was led and actively championed by a senior official from the social development sector. They and others were the 'connectors' –

*‘someone who makes sure that the glue is put in place and if the glue dries then we need to put a new coat of glue again to make sure that people are together.’*

The facilitative role of these key actors was also enhanced by a number of other supportive actors, who kept the momentum going through various activities including building networks between WoSA sites and teams, keeping up with deadlines and activities, arranging meetings and venue spaces and holding stakeholders accountable for activities. These boundary-spanning actors, who were termed ‘learning champions’ in WoSA spaces included actors linked to the other WoSA sites in the metro area. The Western Cape Economic Development Partnership (EDP), an independent non-profit (<https://wcedp.co.za/>), provided valuable facilitating roles for a number of engagements, especially amongst front line providers and for cross site learning events (23).

### The WoSA collaborative process

Following the endorsement by the provincial cabinet and top management, the WoSA framework was presented at the Premier’s forum with mayors and municipal managers, *‘so they had buy in at a very high political level so that the engagement at local level would be easier.’* In SBM, this was followed by meetings at an executive level between the designated provincial HOD (Health) and SBM Municipal Manager, and the development of a shared inventory of data compiled across sectors and spheres.

Much of the initial period of WoSA in SBM was, however, centred on what Emerson and colleagues refer to as ‘principled engagement’ (14) – face to face meetings between mid-level managers within and across SFAs/clusters designed to enable processes of mutual discovery, building relationships of trust and generating consensus on problems. Over the course of 2018 and early 2019 stakeholders spent *‘lots of time learning about each other’* so that *‘we all see each in this approach’*.

Key informants viewed these engagement processes as a necessary first step of figuring out how the various sectoral roles could fit together in the bigger picture: *‘For me we are one piece of a puzzle and everyone fits in that block of puzzle. We are pieces and it took some time last year to really listen to how you fit in, because we all do have our core business but how you fit in....’*

However, some did express impatience with the duration of the ‘getting to know each other’ process, indicating that *‘some of us who are closer to the operations work were really*

*pushing for us to get our hands dirty and start doing things*, even if others could see in hindsight that *'it was necessary and now we can see the positive spin off of that.'*

Interviewees foregrounded the WoSA meeting spaces as particularly generative and enabling. This was in part related to the way meetings were chaired in a *'focused'* and *'directed'* manner, but also to the clarity of roles and expectations of each member (*'the chairperson makes it quite clear to everyone how you fit in the picture'*), accompanied by the opportunity for each to contribute ideas and insights. The WoSA meetings embodied the 'design principles' of respect, equality of voice, distributed leadership and co-creation outlined in the SBM WoSA Framework (17). The larger and more powerful sectors (such as Health and Education) were no longer perceived as *'this big brother that comes in here and tells everyone else what to do'*.

Numerous interviewees referred to WoSA meetings and engagements as a *'safe space'*, which allowed for honest conversations, admitting failure in ways that are *'not often tolerated in provincial government'*. An example given was the *'bold'* and *'mature'* discussion of the community protests which led to the burning of Diazville Clinic, where stakeholders were able to reflect collectively on events without blaming or shaming. Similarly, a series of frontline workshops, facilitated by the EDP in the WoSA priority communities, was the first time frontline teams had been able to articulate complex implementation challenges, voice their *'concerns'* and *'be frank'*. The workshops were designed to elicit and reflect on ground realities of service-delivery, while getting to know and connect with others in their area and build a common purpose (through, for example, the 'Carol and Lindi' story).

The WoSA processes were universally regarded as energising and as stimulating commitment and enthusiasm for WoSA activities. WoSA became a process where you could 'de-stress': *'with the WoSA that is where you de-stress yourself because there are people that have ears and eyes and are not there to judge you but are there to support you so that you can have solutions.'* If attendance at meetings was initially about compliance, with time processes *'started building trust, [and] it [became] I actually want to go and it is an exciting environment and it is dynamic and it is about making change.'* Emerging trust relationships enabled the formation of *'organic networks'* engaged in new forms of everyday problem-solving that were seen to add immense value to the lives of managers, and in the process, further reinforcing trust and collaborative processes.

In this regard, interviewees cited a number instances of ‘*quick wins*’ enabled through the new relationships forged. An example of this was the rapidity and ease with which a new temporary venue for the Diazville Clinic was identified after it burnt down:

*‘we ... decided [we wanted] to get the site back in Diazville ... and only a phone call and email later, [the] municipality allocated a site... So in the past I could guarantee you it will not happen [but] because of us working now so closely ... it was as easy as pie to get a piece of land [on which] we can temporarily build our structures.’*

WoSA relationships provided the ‘*currency*’ that allowed collaborative spin-off activities outside primary WoSA activities. One of the other resulting outcomes linked to understanding each other’s mandates included reducing duplication of interventions targeting similar communities. For example, school visits, which were previously conducted by individual sectors, became a combined endeavour between the Departments of Education, Social Development, and Cultural Affairs and Sport. Moreover, stakeholders also felt comfortable in going beyond their primary mandates to assist their fellow team members in the network. This included venue sharing for workshops or meetings, co-ordinating transport across sectors for providers accessing the same communities, and facilitating access to the networks of individual sectors.

Shared understandings among WoSA participants was evident in the common terminology and language used – such as the reference to WoSA as a ‘*philosophy*’ or ‘*mindset*’ and a way of doing things, rather than a specific intervention. The Carol and Lindi story featured regularly in WoSA meetings and events and became an anchoring idea, foregrounding social and people-centred goals, and the need to align economic and infrastructural development to these primary goals (rather than the other way round).

At the time of the interviews, meaningfully engaging communities was identified as the next key challenge facing WoSA. While this had always been ‘*central in the conversation*’, stakeholders acknowledged that this could only be done once whole of government approaches had been institutionalised. In the meantime, middle managers in provincial sectors started reaching out and making links with local councilors, while SBM managers started experimenting with a more participatory IDP planning process.

The relationships, knowledge, networks, everyday problem solving and quicks wins of WoSA had created a local culture shift that was seen as widely anchored in SBM. However,

several challenges to sustainability were raised. One of these related to the possibility of key champions retiring or moving on, with loss of institutional memory and momentum. One manager pointed to the fact that although there had been gains, there was *'still a lack of really concerted integrated planning and I think there we can improve'*. Another major challenge related to uneven sectoral and senior manager support and even resistance to the initiative beyond the WoSA sites: *'we say we are going to work together and they roll their eyes'* *'people put up their shields and say I will play it safe and I will keep on doing what I am supposed to be doing and what the auditor general expects me to do and I will protect my department and obviously my own... livelihood'*.

Of note, however, is that WoSA has been carried into the 2019-2024 PSP (24) as the core methodology for achieving its reformulated 'Vision Inspired Priorities' (VIPs): *'For a number of years, the WCG has been using a "Whole-of-Society Approach" (WoSA) to run initiatives across the Province. ... This approach is carried into the VIPs in each chapter, as critical stakeholders have been identified who are key to implementing the initiatives and reaching the envisaged impact.'* (24).

## Conclusion

This case study has shown that intersectoral action on the FTD (and other health and societal challenges) is possible, but requires a favourable context and institutional capabilities. Unless these conditions exist, interventions and initiatives such as FTD will have difficulty overcoming the inherently siloed functioning of government. These initiatives are likely to end up in a set of parallel, unconnected activities that compete for the attention of communities and beneficiaries; or, as is the case with FTD, become co-opted into one of the more powerful sectors.

WoSA has demonstrated that it is possible to create the necessary institutional capability for intersectoral action. Building on more long standing experiences of transversal governance in the Western Cape, WoSA combines a number of features – a place-based approach, underpinned by strong founding principles and values, facilitative and distributed leadership, multi-level governance systems and processes of implementation that focus on building trust relationships. WoSA in SBM has so far proven to be a successful model of collaborative governance, but has required substantive investments of time by skilled and highly committed senior managers, with relatively localised (even if deep) impacts. Widening and



sustaining WoSA – as proposed in new strategic plans - will no doubt confront new challenges, and monitoring this over time will be crucial.

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## Appendix 1: Carol and Lindi's Story (Source: 17)

Lindi was born at the Vredenburg Hospital. Soon after her birth, Lindi's mother, Carol, a high school dropout and unskilled labourer who was struggling to find gainful employment, lost contact with her father, an unemployed drug addict, who had been jailed for petty crime. Carol was thus dependant on a social grant to raise her daughter and forced to rely on the help of her retired and very old parents whose sole income was their pension grants, but could provide a safe and caring home.

As soon as Carol was able to, she enrolled Lindi at the local registered ECD centre, which has nutritional and educational programmes funded by Provincial Government. Lindi happily plays and learns while Carol attends the recently opened FET College in attempt to gain a skill that will increase her chances for employment. Over the course of time Lindi grows up to be a happy, healthy and inquisitive child who is ready for the foundation phase of her education.

Lindi eventually starts her formal schooling at a local primary school, barely 10 minutes walking distance away from her home. On most week days, Lindi and Carol wake up well rested and refreshed at 6:30 am and get ready. Lindi leaves the house at 07:15 am and together with her friends and parents, form a walking bus which ensures that all learners reach the school safely by 07:30am. Lindi enjoys her schooling immensely and demonstrates, like many of her fellow students since the implementation of a Provincial wide focused foundation school phase curriculum, an aptitude for math and languages.

Meanwhile, Carol, who now works in a local aquaculture factory, established as one of the Transport National Ports Authority Ocean Economy projects, cycles to work on one of the many, safe, interconnected sidewalks. While cycling, she takes the time to reflect on the 6 years since she gave birth to Lindi. Unbeknownst, to small Lindi, shortly after her birth, Carol had suffered from post-natal depression, which briefly led to a pain killer addiction. Luckily, through help received from nurses at her local clinic, her local social worker as well as the Vredenburg Local Drug Action Committee, Carol was able to receive the treatment she so desperately needed. After a full work day, Carol picks Lindi up at 4pm at the neighbourhood aftercare play group. On their way home, Lindi excitedly reminds her mother that in a few years, she will be old enough to join the MOD Centre at her school and participate in the various sport, arts and cultural activities being offered.

The next day, is a Saturday, and thus Carol and Lindi decide to spend the day having a picnic at their local park, but only after (as Carol reminds Lindi) they have completed a list of errands which includes paying municipal accounts and doing some research for one of Lindi's school projects. Fortunately, all these errands can be completed at the nearby Vredenburg government precinct, which offers a range of services including a library with high speed internet.

On their way to the park, Carol and Lindi stop by a few of the many small mobile businesses that have sprung up along the newly built pathway to the park. While relaxing under shade of large trees and watching Lindi play with other kids, Carol engages with Lindi's father, a now reformed addict working on maintenance in the park as part of programme that rehabilitates and reintegrates ex-prisoners back into society. Carol reflects on how dangerous and dirty this park used to be and how in the short space of 6 years, her life and those of her fellow Vredenburg residents has improved immensely.