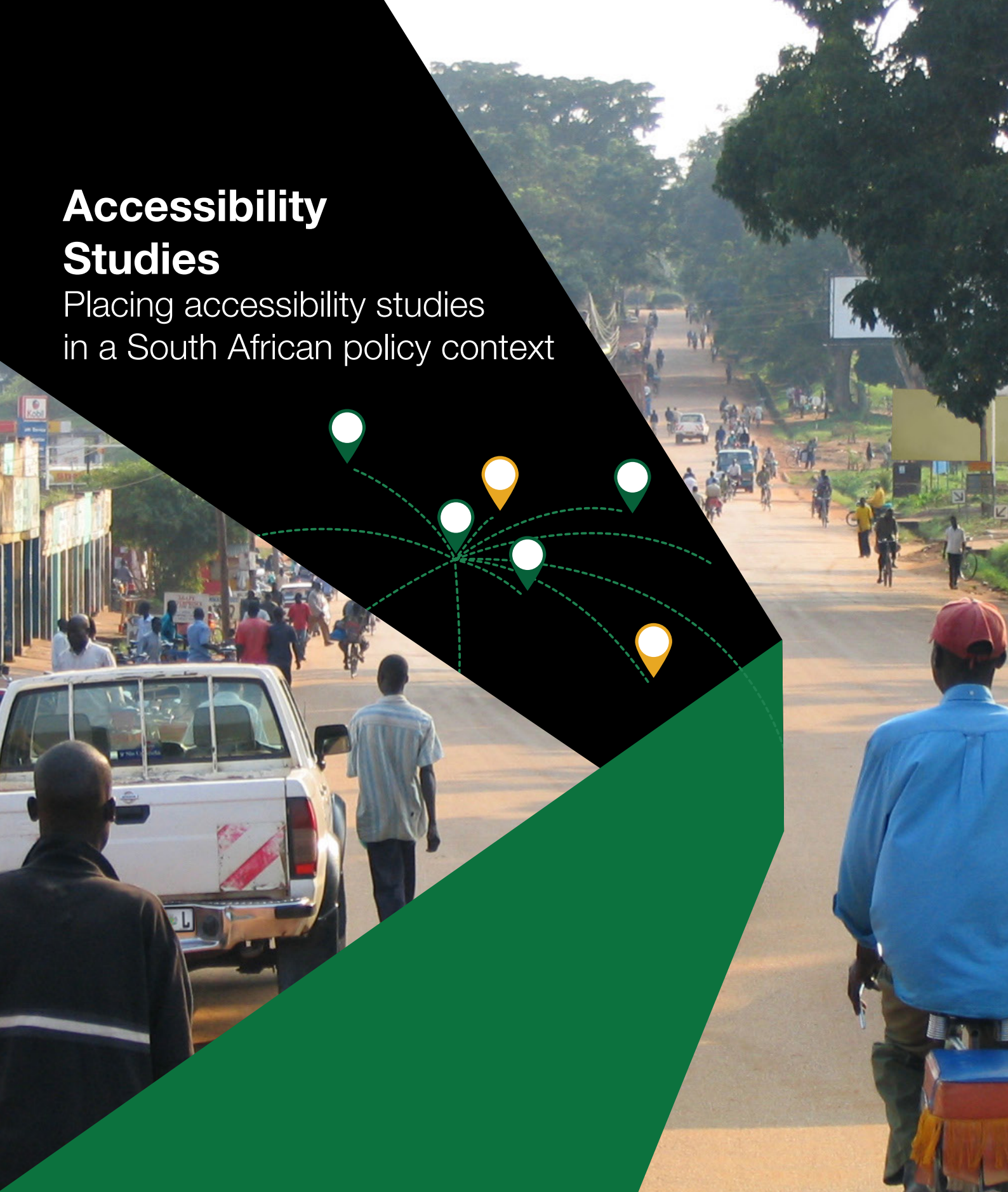


Accessibility Studies

Placing accessibility studies in a South African policy context



the dpsa

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Placing accessibility studies in a policy context

People often face difficulties and inconvenience in accessing government services and information. Many people who live in remote areas have to travel long distances to obtain services.

One of the aims of White Paper on the Transformation of Public Services or the Batho Pele framework is to provide a framework for making decisions about delivering public services to the many South Africans who are still denied access thereto. The Batho Pele framework aims to rectify the inequalities of distribution in existing services, as all national and provincial departments are required to set targets for progressively increasing access to their services. In drawing up their service delivery programme, national and provincial departments must develop strategies to eliminate the disadvantages of distance; for example, by setting up mobile units, and redeploying facilities and resources closer to those in greatest need. Service delivery programmes should therefore specifically address the need to progressively redress the disadvantages of all barriers to access.

Although such difficulties can be attributed to a range of factors, geographic accessibility to service points is still a key factor affecting access to services. This is more so in countries where a large part of the population resides in rural areas at considerable distances from service points. Physical access is a key determinant of the utilisation of service points. Accessibility studies are therefore a tool to enhance service delivery.

The definition of geographic access inculcates the notion of proximity of people to government service points where citizens come into contact with government offices and facilities to get information, communicate with government and/or transact services. Service points should be located in close proximity to where people live.





With accessibility studies, the level of access present in various parts of the country can be determined as well as what measures can be taken to improve access to services. The areas of greatest need is identified and interventions recommended to address these gaps, where feasibly by increasing the capacity of the service point, and/or the addition of new, well-located facilities. The use of mobile services especially in the remote and sparsely populated areas could greatly enhance access to services.

Although many studies considers accessibility in relation to population coverage and travel distance, some government departments consider a much wider range of factors in making a final decision on where their facilities should be located or expanded. In such cases, the findings of accessibility studies, together with other sources of information available to departments can be used to make a final decision on the most appropriate way to improve access and availability of their services. For instance, whether the establishment of additional facilities should be planned and funded, whether existing facilities should be expanded or reduced, where they should be located and what service boundaries are applicable as well as cultural preferences for services, income levels, and current usage/ demand on facilities.

Where the provision of additional facilities or expansion of existing facilities is not appropriate or affordable and where alternative actions is required to address the backlog, alternative solutions need to be investigated to improve access to each of the services; for instance, through the establishment of partnerships, use of technology, and the sharing or clustering of facilities.

Accessibility studies also promote greater alignment across spheres of government (national, provincial and local) and sectors in the provision of services. This can be achieved through greater integration between city spatial development frameworks and growth plans and the identification of facility needs and backlogs at national and provincial levels. Joint planning for different facilities in the same areas and within the same time period lends support to urban growth objectives through co-location and improves citizens' access to core services.

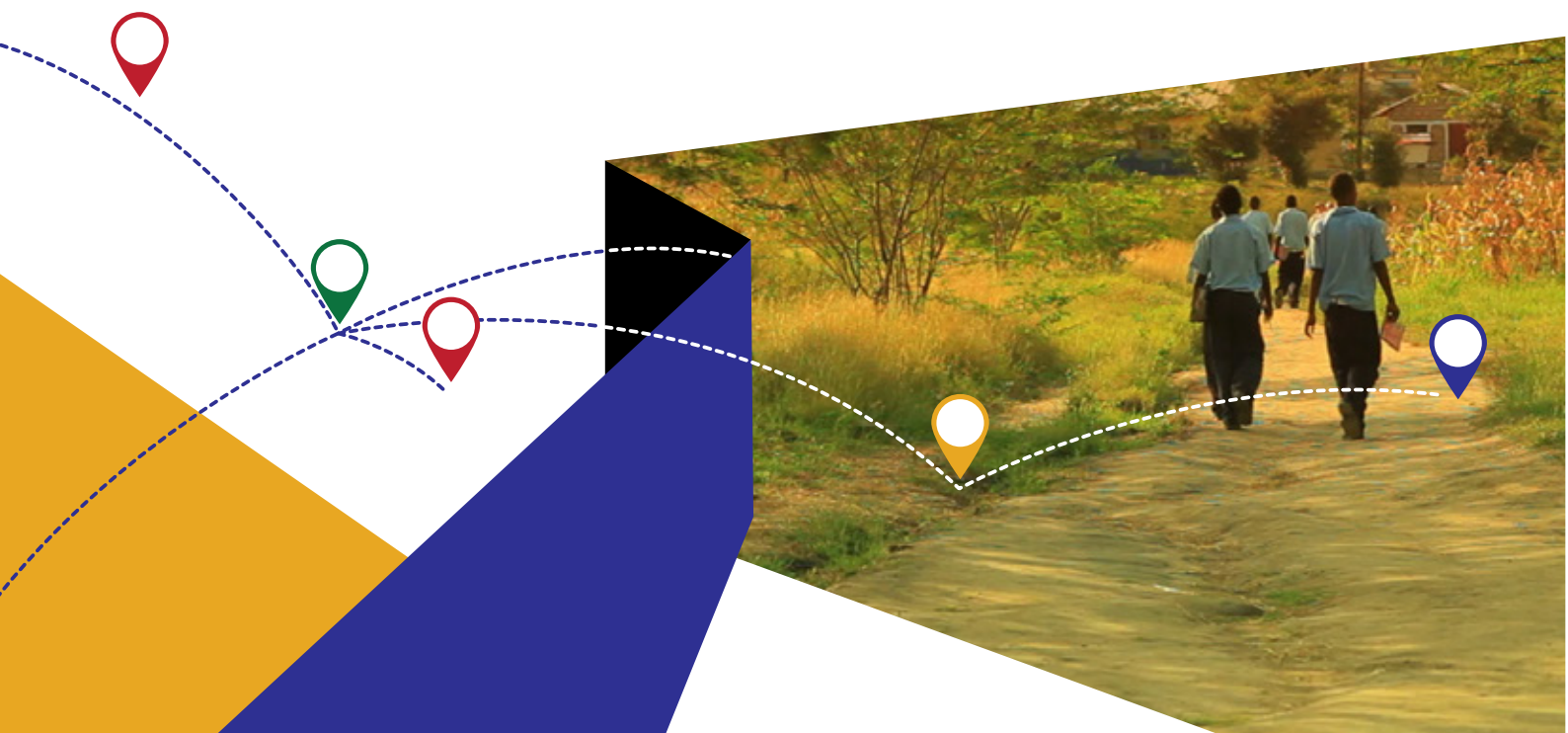
What is a geographical accessibility study?

Accessibility studies consider the ease with which people can reach the nearest government service point (e.g. school) using the existing road network and using different modes of transport (e.g. walking, bus, taxi, car).

Accessibility modelling specifically refers to the methods used to predict the optimal location of service points based on a defined set of norms or standards, such as distance travelled and the capacity of the service point to deal with the demand of the target population within reach of the service point. The modelling makes provision for using differentiated access norms and standards for densely/sparsely populated areas and for urban and rural areas.

Geographic accessibility analysis also takes into account factors such as population size and density; the availability of transport infrastructure such as railways, bus routes, taxi routes and bus rapid transport routes; as well as the population thresholds (number of people that can be served at a service point) and capacity parameters of service points (human resources available to serve citizens). Distance travelled is not the only factor that is considered.

Accessibility studies model the access of residents to facilities, thereby showing whether the service provision is well located and sufficient and where additional capacity is required to achieve equitable distribution of services. The model assists in determining how a more equitable distribution of facilities and facility sizes could better meet the demands of the population.



A geographic accessibility study basically compares the current supply and demand of facilities relative to the population distribution following a basic five-step approach developed by the CSIR (Figure 1)

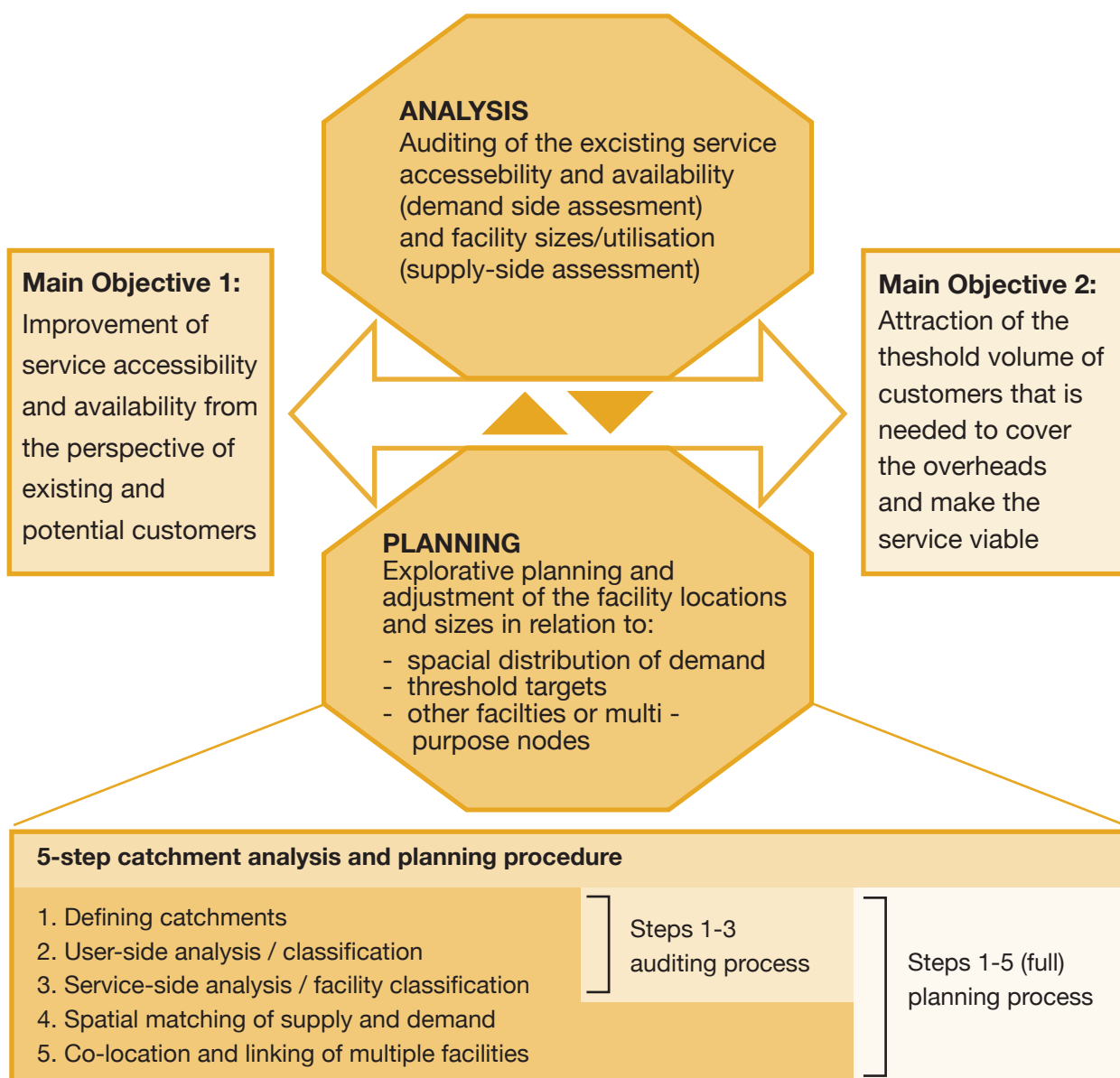


Figure 1: Basic approach and methodology

What are the basic building blocks of these accessibility studies?

To undertake accessibility modelling access is required to the population statics (demand data based on the latest Census data at the smallest spatial level), government services (supply data) and a road network that connects the supply and demand points to each other.

- E.g. demand refers to the number of people within the target population that need access to a specific service (number of secondary school learners).
- Supply refers to the physical availability and capacity of a service point (number of learners that can be accommodated per large secondary school)

Spatial information on the location of government service points is critical in undertaking accessibility modelling.

The availability, completeness and accuracy of data are critical and needs to be prioritised as spatial service point data is the basis for any geographic accessibility study. The identification of facilities by incorrect suburb names, differences in spelling of names, lack of accurate address details causes considerable problems in the preparation of data in the modelling process.





The development and maintenance of the electronic databases of government facilities, which provide the GPS location of facilities together with relevant services and capacity and user statistics, are key components that require far greater attention by dedicated data owners. The spatial data is essential to plan and provide services equitably and effectively in the future. The accuracy, currency and availability of critical data sets for this type of analysis cannot be overstressed. The confidence with which decisions can be made based on these results are directly impacted by the quality of data inputs. Planning is impossible without the necessary information.

Departments need to take responsibility for the systematic collection and maintenance of their service point data and the spatial information on services. The maintenance of geographic co-ordinate data for all government (national, provincial and local) facilities, together with relevant supply information on the services is a key area that requires dedicated attention in support of planning for a better life for all.

**“ Dedicated attention in support of
planning for a better life for all. ”**