



Strengthening policy- and decision-making processes through community participation: A municipal perspective

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Background: Post-apartheid South Africa has been experiencing massive service delivery protests where local communities express their disenchantment with municipal service provision. The critical component of the latter is supposedly the result of lack of sufficient and adequate community consultation when municipalities take decisions or formulate policies.

Aim: It is against this background that this article explored the extent of community participation in local government (local municipalities), with specific attention to policy- and decision-making, using Mbombela Local Municipality as a case study.

Setting: The study focused on the local government administration, with specific reference to policy- and decision-making process in local municipalities using the notion of community participation.

Methods: The study used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches using semi-structured questionnaires (quantitative) and in-depth personal face-to-face interviews (qualitative) as data collection methods. The sample groups of the study were community members of the Mbombela Local Municipality and municipal officials. The findings derived from these sample groups.

Results: The study found that there was little to no community participation.

Conclusion: *Inter alia*, the recommendation is that local municipalities should adhere strongly to community participation strategies.

Keywords: community; participation; service delivery; local municipalities; Mbombela; public; administration.

Introduction

Phago (2008) sees community participation as the active engagement of the community in the planning process and decision-making. Phago (2008) further states that community participation is a right and has become an imperative objective to be fulfilled by all spheres of government, most importantly local government. The implementation of community participation in policy- and decision-making has increased in several nations, but the level of adoption varies from country to country (Cavric 2011). In the more developed continents like Europe, Germany and the United Kingdom, arrangements are made for allowing the direct involvement and participation of citizens in policy- and decision-making (European Institute for Public Participation 2009). In addition, throughout the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, community participation has begun to become established as a popular alternative for making routine decisions and resolving conflicts in public life (Development Bank of Southern Africa 2006).

Heydenrych (2008) says South Africa, like many countries in the Northern Hemisphere, made its transition from authoritarian rule to democracy with a founding election, which further endorsed citizen participation in government administrations. Mathebula (2016) also states that South Africa's post-apartheid government introduced the integrated development plan (IDP) amongst other policy frameworks as the foundation to encourage and enhance community participation in different areas of local government, such as policy formulation and decision-making.

The active participation of communities in South Africa is supported by various legislative frameworks such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the *Local Government:*

Municipal System Act (32 of 2000), the *White Paper on Local Government* (1998) and the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act* (117 of 1998), which oblige municipalities to engage communities in the matters of the municipalities, specifically policy- and decision-making.

Chapter 4 of the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act* (32 of 2000) encourages the nature of participatory governance; this is expressed with the IDP. The IDP, therefore, must encourage and create the conducive conditions for participatory democracy in local communities. However, according to Booyesen (2009), effective local community participation in local government affairs is still a major challenge in some of the South African municipalities. This article explored and addressed the aim through the objective of finding out the extent of community participation in policy- and decision-making in the Mbombela Local Municipality.

According to Bishop and Davis (2006), a major challenge seen with community participation efforts is the exclusion of community members from participating in decision- and policy-making processes, with little opportunity given to them to make their voices heard and contribute to the developments affecting them. Community participation is not only the mere presence of the municipal community but rather proactive engagement in the affairs of a municipality to ensure that development and service delivery are driven within the best interest of the communities (Phago 2008).

The lack and low level of community participation have led to different frustrations amongst the members of communities, as their needs are not met and services not sufficiently provided. To a greater extent, Marais et al. (2008) provided evidence that communities are not fully engaged and involved in the decision-making process of municipalities, particularly decisions and policies directly affecting their lives. According to Williams (2016), South African local municipalities experienced various violent service delivery protests between the period 2015 and 2016, and Mbombela Local Municipality is not an exception. To provide evidence of these, Mabusa et al. (2016) presented a newspaper article. Sparking protests in Mpumalanga in the run-up to the municipal election:

Mbombela residents recently blockaded a major road with burning tyres, branches and rocks to protest against the nomination of their councillor as the ANC's [*African National Congress*] ward candidate for the local government elections. They claim that they were not fully consulted about this major decision and they also claim that Eric Mutobvu, councillor for Ward 11 in Mpumalanga's capital city, has 'done nothing' for them, particularly to address water shortages.

This norm of excluding local communities from local government affairs still occurs in most parts of South African local municipalities, given the legal pledges provided by the legal frameworks as enshrined and discussed above. It is therefore notable that rural communities in Mbombela are

not an exception from these. The researchers have, however, noted a lack of community participation in local government affairs as a contributing factor to other hindrances affecting South Africa's development agenda. It is also again against this background that this article investigated the extent of community participation in Mbombela Local Municipality.

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded and builds on the participatory democracy theory. According to Hendriks (2007), participatory democracy theory emphasises the broad participation of the community in the direction and operation of political systems. Several decades ago, citizens universally began to gain a particular influence in policy- and decision-making. Across the globe, many countries have gained experience with collaborative and participatory governance, citizens' advisory committees as well as participatory budgeting (Cain 2006). Cain (2006) further says that from a democratic perspective, community participation is perceived as a valuable element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making. Participatory and deliberative proponents argue that community participation has positive impacts on the quality of democracy. Participatory democrats regard community participation as vital to a democracy.

Dalton (2006) states that the roots of participatory democracy theory go back to Rousseau, whose view is that the participation of each citizen in political decision- and policy-making is vital to the functioning of state institutions. According to Dryzek (2007), participatory democracy theory strives to create opportunities for all members of society to make meaningful contributions to the decision- and policy-making process. It is, therefore, against this background that this study adopts the participatory democracy theory, which places people at the centre of policy- and decision-making processes.

Modise (2017) states that participatory democracy should take into cognisance the diversity of South African society and the reality of the existence of a multiplicity of socio-economic and cultural interest groups, thereby awarding them a participatory opportunity in matters that affect their daily lives. Modise (2017) further posits that participatory democracy is a great challenge for democratic South Africa. This is the case because of citizens' lack of sufficient knowledge about political operation locally and internationally. The service delivery marches and protests are a clear symptom and sign that participatory democracy is a great challenge in democratic South Africa. Craythorne (2006) professed that local government is of extreme importance in many instances. It is also the sphere of government closest to all the people of South Africa and is constitutionally responsible for providing a number of services without which people would be forced to live in depression, hopelessness and poverty. Hence, the provincial and national governments need to offer support, supervision,

assistance and mentorship where applicable. People, through their ward committees, need to inform the local government and politicians about their needs. Local, district, provincial and national government must be informed of the people's needs. These can as well be done through the IDP process, specifically in the local sphere.

Significance of community participation: South African perspective

Bryson et al. (2013) states that community participation is vital in local government and has different aspects explaining its importance for, *inter alia*, enhancing and strengthening local democracy and good governance and communicating with the local citizens. These pillars assist in addressing community challenges, exploring potential solutions and producing policies, plans and projects of higher quality to meet social needs. The two aspects mentioned above are briefly discussed below.

Enhancing and strengthening local democracy and good governance

According to Phago (2008), the link between community participation, democracy and governance has become more relevant in the South African context, where community participation is seen not only to play a pivotal role but also to enhance local democracy and good governance by ensuring that the needs of the people are prioritised. Putu (2006) indicates that there is an overall agreement that community participation is a key mechanism for the success of the local development process and that there have to be participatory systems through which the views of the community can be heard and contribute to policy formulation. Hence, Bryson et al. (2013) agree strongly that the ward committee system is a relevant representative system through which suggestions and ideas of the community are heard and implemented in the policy formulation framework. Community participation plays a key role in reflecting and creating citizenship by showing community members that their input and ideas matter in the process of decision- and policy-making (Bryson et al. 2013). Community participation ensures good governance of municipalities in being accountable, transparent and responsive and having an ethical culture.

Communication with local citizens

Quick and Bryson (2016) state that community participation provides the opportunity for communication between decision-makers and community members; citizens may contribute to decision-making by suggesting different ideas for solving a concern and the motivation to address problems. According to McGee (2002), community participation is understood as a process whereby different actors within the community are involved in policy- and decision-making before decisions about development initiatives are taken. Fung (2006) reflects that community participation in matters of local government may assist the municipality and the

community members to become more knowledgeable and develop a broader view of issues. Community participation in a municipality helps both the community members and the municipality to identify any threatening gaps, ensure possible measures and support a more equitable distribution of limited public resources. Furthermore, participation provides resources for future problem-solving and implementation to address public issues (Quick & Bryson 2016).

Community participation strategies

Williams (2016) believes that community participation in matters of local government is the heart of participatory democracy in South Africa. Municipalities can ensure community participation in decision- and policy-making through a variety of strategies, which are discussed below.

Community-based planning

According to Cloete, J. (2012), community-based planning is a community participation strategy in participatory planning and decision- and policy-making designed to promote community action and linkage to the municipality's IDP. Cloete, J. (2012) maintains that community-based planning empowers communities to plan for themselves and enables the municipality to understand and plan comprehensively for community needs. Community-based planning also promotes a bottom-up approach to planning as opposed to the accustomed top-down approach. Williams (2016) assumes that community residents should have the right to set the direction for their community's future. Hence, community-based planning creates a sense of community ownership in terms of service delivery and development. More importantly, Cloete, F. (2012) believes that community-based planning guarantees that the poorest of the community and the marginalised sectors of society will take part in local governance. Local empowerment can also be used as a strategy to hold local government accountable.

Decision-making strategy

According to Smith (2008), community participation in decision- and policy-making often involves a one-way flow of information from the municipality to the local community members. Through its decision-making strategy, a municipality consults the community before making any decisions. Examples of decision-making strategies include public meetings and public hearings. Smith (2008) indicated that a decision-making strategy might also include questionnaires to get anonymous views from community members. This form of community participation allows community members to freely make suggestions – for example, suggestion boxes at the municipality for citizens to give different suggestions on particular issues.

Consultation strategy

Consultation as a method of community participation allows the community to access and influence the decision-making process. According to Mbambo and Tshishonga (2008),

community participation in decision- and policy-making provides opportunities for the community to express their views in development projects. As a result, Mambo and Tshishonga (2008) further expressed that the planning and implementation of these projects ought to be accepted only after considerable discussion and consultation with communities. Consultation strategy allows democratic community participation, especially between elections. Examples of consultation strategy in community participation include questionnaire surveys and in-depth and focus group interviews. Mbambo and Tshishonga (2008) further outline that consultation as one of the strategies for community participation in decision- and policy-making is vital in ensuring that the municipality consults with community representatives and groups on decisions and other developmental programmes.

Initiating action strategy

According to Davis (2006), initiating action strategy in community participation may be done through participation. It includes focus groups, advisory panels, forums and sector groups. These action strategies are complemented by community *izimbizo* [outreach] programmes and *masithethisane* [let us talk] programmes, which aim to establish the community's needs and their feelings on governance and how it should be comprehensively improved. Through *izimbizo*, government and communities interact directly. Davids (2006) indicates that these participatory programmes serve communities with the chance to hear directly from the municipality regarding the expectations for implementing programmes to ensure a sustainable life for everyone. *Izimbizo* programmes assist in building partnership between municipalities and communities for development and growth. Davis (2006) concurs that public participation strategies have the primary benefits of the democratic policy-making process – specifically, participation leads to better policy outcomes, and participation assists the public in formulating and developing the capacity for uplifting their lives, promoting community involvement and good corporate governance.

Information-sharing strategy

Cloete (2012) defines information-sharing strategies as participation as a means to an end because participation in an information-sharing strategy is generally short term. More emphasis is set on obtaining the objective and not the act of participation per se. According to Cloete (2012), information-sharing strategies are not composed through community participation because communities should be the judge of the finished product or review decisions that have been taken by the municipality on their behalf in the best interest of the community members. Buccus and Hicks (2006) view information sharing strategy as geared mainly towards seeking the community's input into existing policy responses. An example of this kind of strategy is information documentation. The major concern is not about the attainment of long-term social advantage and sustainable development but what

community participation contributes to the end product or final decision. Hence, Reddy (2011) believes that communities must be informed of decisions approved by their respective municipal councils. This is also called 'report-back meetings' because other decisions could affect the community directly.

Public hearing

A public hearing can be conceptualised as a formal meeting between citizens and government authorities to deliberate on a particular subject matter, such as a bill, a municipal by-law or any other type of decision to be made by the government. According to Nzimakwe and Reddy (2008), these community meetings are carried out during the decision-making process. The *Local Government: Municipal System Act* (32 of 2000) requires councils and boards to conduct public hearings and consult with the community before adopting or amending official community plans or any form of by-law. Public hearings are held to engage a wide audience in information sharing and discussion. They bring diverse groups of stakeholders together for a specific purpose.

Methodology

In this explorative study, the researchers used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative approach included the use of in-depth personal or face-to-face interviews and observations, whereas the quantitative approach used questionnaires. The study was conducted in Matsulu Township under the jurisdiction of the Mbombela Local Municipality.

The estimated staff complement of the Mbombela Local Municipality is 6221, and the population of the community of Matsulu is 47 306 with an estimated 12 100 households (Mbombela Local Municipality IDP 2016–2017). The population groups included the community members of Matsulu Township and the Mbombela municipal officials. The research used non-probability sampling and its subtype, the purposive or judgemental sampling method, because the respondents were considered relevant for providing additional information. The researchers sampled about 10 municipal officials and about 30 community members, and a 100% response rate was achieved (40 respondents participated). Because it was impossible to study all members of the defined population, generalisation based on the achieved sampling quota was a necessary scientific procedure. The researcher used a portion of the population to observe a smaller group and then generalised the findings to the populations.

For pilot testing, the researchers took five questionnaires to the municipal officials for testing and sanctioning. However, they did not necessarily participate in the actual study. Three interviews were conducted with municipal officials to determine the appropriateness of the questions, and ultimately these people did not participate in the actual study. Furthermore, the researchers also took five questionnaires to community members for verification of the questions and to observe the ethical considerations in the field. Selepe (2018)

states that a pilot survey enables the researcher to restructure the interview schedule, collect relevant and accurate data, and remove improper and unacceptable terms. The pilot survey herein increased the validity of the research instrument and was also used to determine the duration of an interview session with each respondent. Different data analysis techniques were used for different data collection methods. The data collected through interviews were analysed and interpreted using the narrative analysis approach. The data collected through questionnaires were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software with the assistance of Microsoft Excel where necessary.

Ethical consideration

In conducting the research study ethics were of ultimate consideration and confidentiality of the information provided by participants was highly assumed. The names of the interviewees are protected and were not revealed to avoid any form of harm to the participants. Permission for conducting the study was obtained from the ethics research Committee of the university. The researcher did uphold professional conduct by means of avoiding inquiring harmful and emotional questions.

Results, findings and interpretation of data

This section firstly provides the data obtained from the community members using a structured questionnaire. Secondly, the findings from the municipal officials obtained through face-to-face interviews are discussed.

Data collected through questionnaires (community members)

This section provides the biographical data of the community participants and is further interpreted below. This is illustrated by figures, using pie charts.

Gender

Figure 1 depicts the gender distribution of respondents. It indicates that 23 respondents out of the 30 targeted or estimated sample size participated through questionnaires – 57% male and 43% female. The uneven distribution of gender emanated from some questionnaires distributed not being returned to the researchers for different reasons.

Race

Figure 2 illustrates the racial differences among participants. Twenty-three (100%) of participants from the community were black people from the recognised sections of Matsulu. This implies that a larger portion of Matsulu Township is inhabited by black people.

Age

Figure 3 indicates age variations of the respondents who participated in the study; 23% of the respondents were

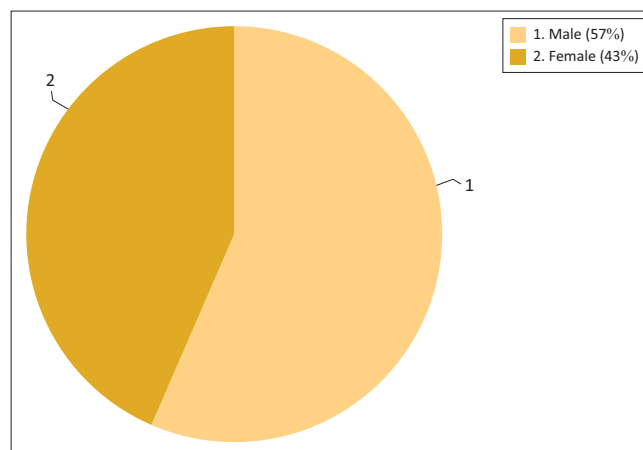


FIGURE 1: Gender profile for community members.

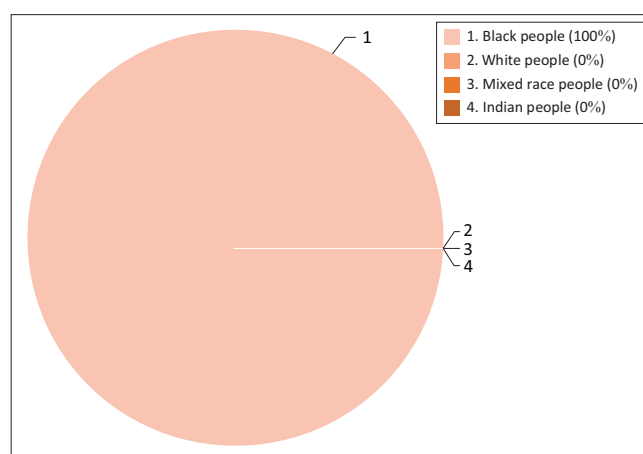


FIGURE 2: Race.

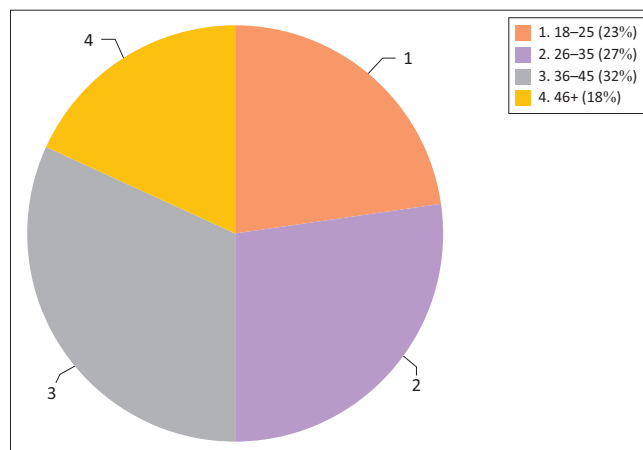


FIGURE 3: Age of community respondents.

between the ages of 18 and 25, whilst 27% were between 26 and 35 years, 32% were between 36 and 45 years, and 18% were 46 years or older. This indicates that in the community, there was more participation by community members between the ages of 36 and 45.

Educational level

Figure 4 displays the educational levels of the respondents who participated in the study; 26% of the respondents had

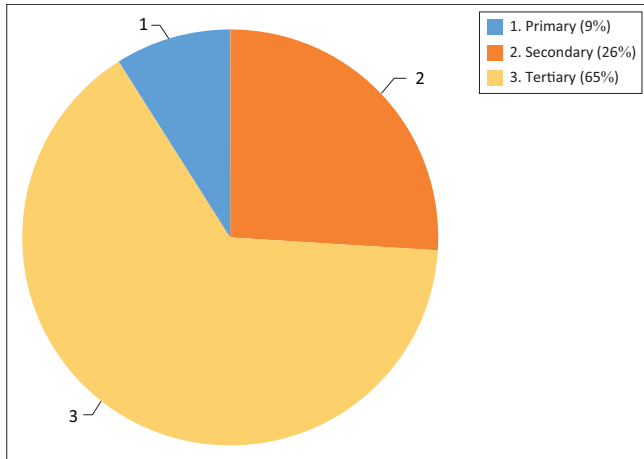


FIGURE 4: Education level: Community members.

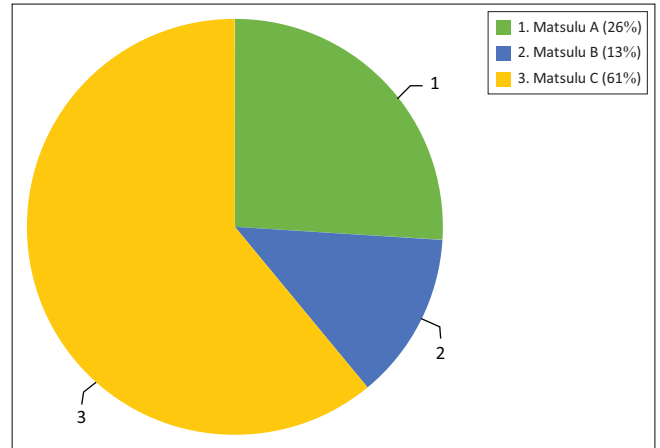


FIGURE 6: Locality: Community members.

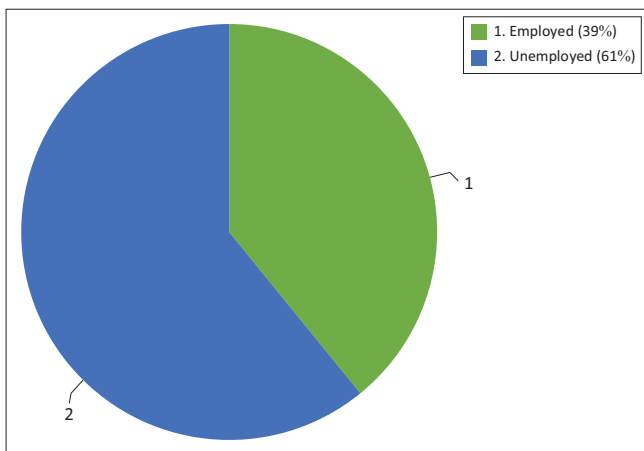


FIGURE 5: Employment status: Community members.

reached the secondary level, 65% managed to reach the tertiary level, whilst 9% went to primary school. There were no participants who reported non-attendance altogether.

Employment status

Figure 5 shows that 61% of the respondents in Matsulu Township were unemployed, whilst 39% had jobs. From the above findings, it is evident that the rate of unemployment was on an upward trajectory because the majority of the respondents were unemployed.

Locality

Matsulu Township consists of three sections: Matsulu A, Matsulu B and Matsulu C. This means that the number of respondents is different because each section in Matsulu has a different estimated population. Consequently, it was vital for each respondent to indicate their locality to uncover different views based on community participation in the municipality's decision- and policy-making. Figure 6 indicates that 26% of the respondents were from Matsulu A, 13% from Matsulu B and 61% from Matsulu C. As a result, this demonstrates that there was greater participation from Matsulu C.

Analysis of results obtained from community members

This section analyses the results obtained from the community members of Matsulu Township concerning the objective of this article as stated in Section 'Introduction' – that is, to find out the extent of community participation in policy- and decision-making in the Mbombela Local Municipality.

The extent of community participation in policy- and decision-making

This section discusses the extent of community participation in policy- and decision-making in the Mbombela Local Municipality, Matsulu Township. This objective was obtained after several questions were posed by the researchers.

Level of community participation in policy- and decision-making in the municipality: Figure 7 portrays the level of community involvement in policy- and decision-making in the Mbombela Local Municipality. The objective was to establish whether all the residents of Matsulu were engaged, at all times, in municipal matters, particularly when it came to policy- and decision-making. The findings show that 87% of the respondents (community members) were not fully involved in the processes of decision- and policy-making of the municipality, whilst 13% have some level of community participation in policy- and decision-making within the said municipality. The majority of the respondents (87%) clearly stated that the community meetings called by the municipality were limited and that their opinions were hardly requested in any matters. Consequently, the municipality consulted the community after taking decisions and making policies alone.

The 13% of the respondents agreed that the community was sufficiently involved through the ward committee system, councillors and the IDP process. However, there were challenges hindering progress from such participatory systems. These findings show that the municipality did not habitually call participatory meetings; when it does, there were communication problems that hindered the success of community participation in municipal matters.

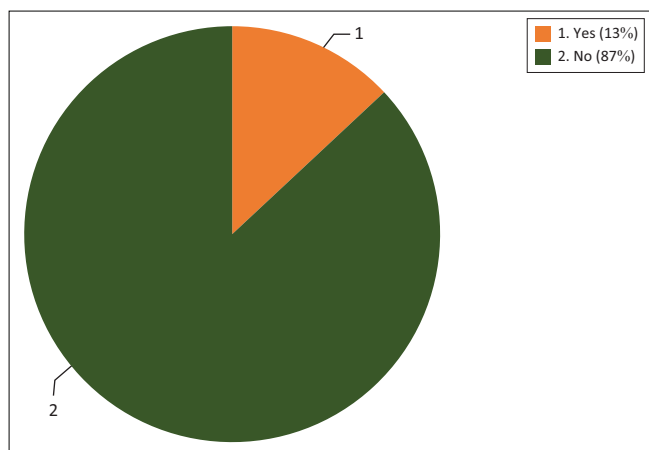


FIGURE 7: Level of community involvement in policy- and decision-making in the Mbombela Local Municipality.

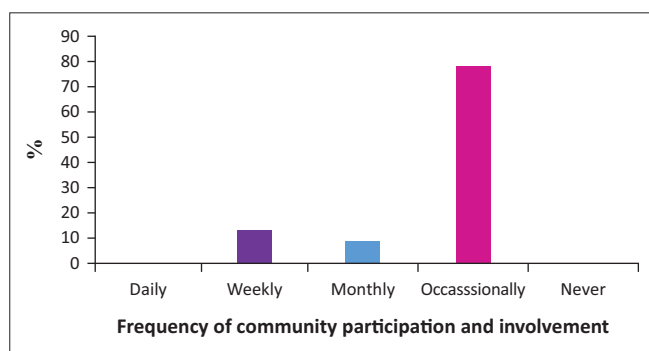


FIGURE 8: Frequency of community participation and involvement.

Frequency of community participation in meetings: Figure 8 displays the frequency of community participation in municipal policy- and decision-making. The rate of recurrence shows that the municipality is irregularly involving and engaging the community in the matters of the municipality. As such, 78% of the respondents indicated that community participation took place occasionally (once in a while), 13% weekly and 9% monthly. As a result, community participation was infrequent.

Rate of community participation in municipal initiatives and development programmes: Figure 9 shows the rate of community participation in municipal initiatives and development programmes, where 26% of the participants classified community participation as fair and 65% as poor because of the lack of communication between the municipality and residents of Matsulu. In contrast, 9% saw improvements, saying the level of service delivery had been enhanced over the years.

The above findings show that poor community participation was rising. The majority (65%) of the respondents indicated that the involvement and participation of the community were poor – the municipality did not encourage the residents to participate. Thus, the residents were demotivated to attend

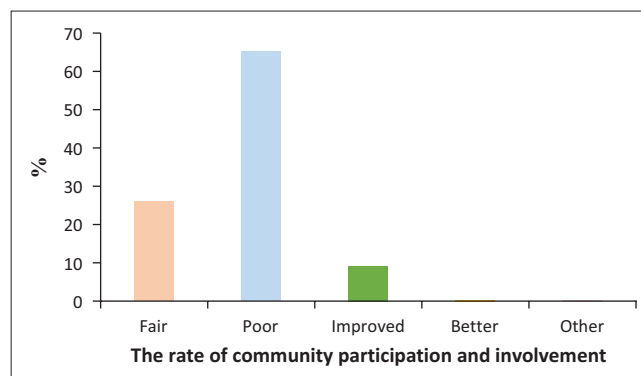


FIGURE 9: The rate of community participation and involvement.

or participate in meetings because the municipality had not fulfilled its promises and mandate.

Communication strategies in place to ensure community participation: The respondents provided different communication strategies used by the municipality to ensure the participation of the Matsulu residents in the policy- and decision-making process. The strategies were, amongst others, public meetings, ward committees, public hearings, social media and word of mouth. These meetings were usually publicised through loudspeakers mounted on vehicles driving around announcing the venue and time. Respondents deemed the loudspeaker system ineffective because not everyone got to hear the announcements. As a result, the information got distorted when relayed to others and caused confusion.

Respondents further recommended that the municipality consider more than one strategy when calling a public meeting in order to spread the word. The municipality should encourage community participation in such meetings as it is their democratic right to be engaged and consulted in the matters of the municipality, particularly the IDP.

Level of engagement satisfaction in municipal decision- and policy-making: Figure 10 indicates the views of the respondents based on the level of satisfaction from being engaged in municipal decision- and policy-making. This was to check whether the residents of Matsulu were satisfied with how the municipality engaged, consulted and involved them, particularly in decisions and policies directly affecting their lives.

According to the findings, 91% were not happy, whilst 9% were satisfied with their level of engagement in municipal decision- and policy-making. The majority of residents in Matsulu were not satisfied with the instituted communication strategies because they were not effective enough in ensuring the participation and engagement of the community in the matters of the municipality. Hence, the municipality at times took decisions on certain community projects without consulting the community.

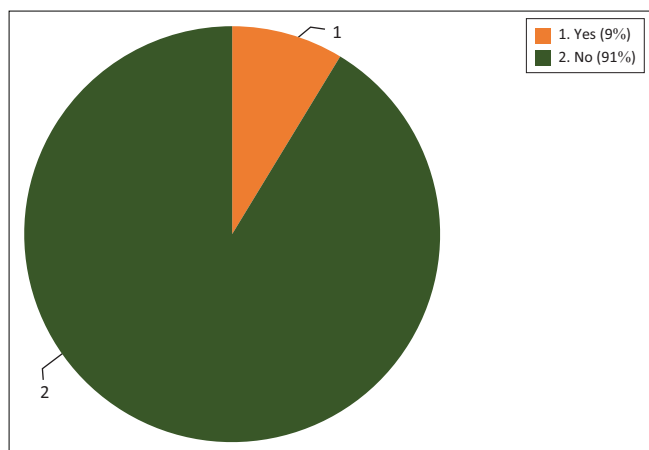


FIGURE 10: Level of satisfaction.

Data collected through qualitative interviews (municipal officials)

This section presents the findings and analysis obtained through interviews from Mbombela Local Municipality officials, using voice recording – which was effective and helpful for the researchers. The researchers relied on the main objective of the article as discussed above. As discussed in Section ‘Methodology’, the researchers interviewed only 10 municipal officials to obtain the respondents’ views, opinions and perceptions of the extent of community participation in decision- and policy-making.

The extent of community participation in policy- and decision-making

The municipal officials indicated that the Mbombela Local Municipality interacted and engaged the community of Matsulu, in all the three sections, regularly through good functioning ward committee systems, local structures and subcommittees. They specified that there was sufficient communication between the municipality and the residents of Matsulu. Normally, the municipality involves the community in the IDP consultative meetings and community meetings conducted by ward councillors. One of the municipal officials said:

‘In the course of the IDP process, the municipality consults with the community three times before and after the finalisation of the IDP’. (Respondent no. 1)

Another municipal official said:

‘Community participation in policy- and decision-making is equally important that during the IDP initiatives the communities must be consulted’. (Respondent no. 2)

The responder further attested that:

‘It is actually the democratic right of the residents to be consulted and engaged in such in order to ensure good progress in the delivering of services by the municipality’. (Respondent no. 2)

It is, however, arguable whether the level of response from municipal officials can be equated to the legislative and/or

legal rights that encompass and support the existence of community participation in this municipality. Often there was no response about the actual practice put in place to support the implementation of the answers they have provided.

Discussion of findings

This article’s objective was to establish the extent of the Matsulu community’s participation in policy- and decision-making in the Mbombela Local Municipality. The researchers can confirm that drawing from the research findings, with specific reference to Figures 7 and 8, most respondents believed that the level of community participation in decision-making was low. They were not satisfied with the way in which they were consulted and engaged in the matters of the municipality. Firstly, the participants said that communication between the municipality and them as the main beneficiaries of the municipality was lacking. The lack of communication was attributed to the different expectations of the community members and the municipality’s agenda. This caused confusion amongst the Matsulu residents, especially when information was not disseminated in advance.

Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) outlines the objectives of local government; one of them says that the municipality should encourage and engage with local communities to participate in the matters of local government. However, the findings of the study (Figure 9) show that the rate of community participation is low. This is because the municipality consults with the community after taking decisions on particular matters or community projects. This causes frustration, which may further lead to community protests.

However, the municipal officials seem to be very aware of the legal documents and legislative mandates, both at the national and local levels, that instruct local municipalities to adopt and effect community participation within the communities (refer to Section ‘Introduction’). In the same breath, Mbombela Local Municipality could not mention even one single successful community participation that took place. The study showed that the Matsulu community members are increasingly disenchanted with the poor community participation within their municipality. This result is supported by the figures and interpretations presented and explained in this article. Therefore, this study states that community participation should be a consultative effort, strategy, tool, instrument and mechanism to be strictly adhered to by Mbombela Local Municipality in networking and connecting, as well as reconfiguring, with its people or residents.

Recommendations

According to the findings of this study, there is a great need for the Mbombela Local Municipality to intervene and address the challenge of little to no community participation

by community members in municipal policies and decisions that affect the community. This article, therefore, outlines a considerable number of recommendations in line with this study's main objective.

The recommendations include:

- The Mbombela Local Municipality must ensure community participation of the local communities by strongly adhering to the community participation strategies discussed in Section 'Theoretical framework' of this article.
- The municipality may, as a result, adhere to the naked operation of the IDP processes; municipal officials should not set objectives for the community but should visit the communities frequently for the locals to identify their own needs.
- The municipality should encourage the participation and engagement of the community in the matters of the municipality by creating participatory programmes and mechanisms to encourage and boost the participation of community members.
- Education on local government administration is very important. The municipality should run educational programmes to help communities understand the daily operations of a municipality. In most communities, there are a myriad of differences individually; some are illiterate and others are literate, which implies that the majority of people may or may not know about critical components of local government administration such as community participation. The implication is that communities should be educated on the administration of government.
- One of the best principles of New Public Management is being 'customer oriented', implying that the municipality should see its inhabitants as customers. Community members should be attended to with the fastest speed possible. The narrative of this pillar is seen in the lackey role that the municipality plays.

Conclusion

Most South African municipalities are faced with different challenges, including a lack of community participation in decision- and policy-making. The failure of municipalities to adopt and effect community participation activities has resulted in many service delivery protests that led to the destruction of municipal services like infrastructure. This article found that the lack of community participation in the affairs of the municipality at Matsulu had a negative effect on the development of the community. Investigating the extent of community participation in policy- and decision-making process in the Mbombela Local Municipality, this study also revealed that the municipality fell short in community participation in policy- and decision-making. The extent of this problem has the potential to thwart community development. The researchers maintain that both the Mbombela Local Municipality and the community of Matsulu must work together in ensuring participation in the

affairs of the municipality. Better communication is a two-way street; therefore, the municipality and the community need to meet each other halfway for fruitful local development.

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Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Author's contributions

All authors contributed equally to this work.

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Data availability statement

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer

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