AOSIS

An exploration of public accountability and service delivery at the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality in the Eastern Cape province, South Africa

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Background: The South African public sector still faces numerous challenges of public accountability and corruption 26 years post the establishment of a democratic government and a free society. These challenges are mainly found in the local sphere of government which is the heart of where service delivery takes place.

Aim: This article aimed to examine the public accountability strategies and mechanisms being used at the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality in the Eastern Cape province whilst giving a conceptual view of how corruption and maladministration adversely affected the municipality and province.

Setting: This study was conducted at the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality in the Eastern Cape province, South Africa.

Method: The study adopted an explanatory sequential design based on a mixed-methods approach where data was collected through questionnaires and secondary documents. Data was analysed through a comparative lens and thematic analysis. A total sample of 47 participants was chosen through a purposive sampling technique.

Results: The key findings of the study revealed that there is a lack of communication between local government and the residents. As well as poor implementation of accountability mechanisms and capacity issues, that is, lack of training and resources amongst others contributed to the ailing public accountability and service delivery issues.

Conclusions: Conclusions drawn reflect a municipality that is struggling with huge backlogs on service delivery. Furthermore, public accountability mechanisms exist but implementation is a challenge. Recommendations included enhanced community engagement and participation, capacity building and skills development, the promotion of individual independence of the community, enhancement of resources and infrastructure and the enhancement of the Public Participation Unit.

Keywords: public accountability; service delivery; local government; poverty; corruption; maladministration; new public management; public participation.

Introduction and background

South Africa and its democracy, although embodied by inequality and poverty, is still considered as one of the world's most civilised democracies. Leibbrandt et al. (2015) attributed this inequality and poverty to the pre-1994 regime of apartheid and separate development. South Africa's young democracy dates back to the 27th of April 1994 and is anchored by a constitutional system that seeks to redress the legacies of the apartheid era, colonial oppression and dispossession. Chapter 2 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) (hereafter the Constitution) contains and promotes the rights that every citizen of the republic should enjoy equally and without discrimination or prejudice (Republic of South Africa 1996). The mandate of promoting the development and rights of the citizens rests on the state through available resources and sector-wide community development initiatives.

Furthermore, the government through a decentralised system ensures community development by rendering services that are financed through taxes. This exercise should be enforced through

public accountability to eliminate any form of maladministration and corruption. The *White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (Batho Pele)* as well as Section 195 of the supreme law of the country, the Constitution, advocate for an accountable public administration and declare that accountability and transparency to be the grounding pillars of the public service and service delivery. The concept of public accountability means public officials and entities who are custodians of the state resources (financial, human, information and physical) are answerable and responsible for their decisions, conduct actions within the public domain. This is especially linked to their management of these resources.

Bovens (2005) argued that for public accountability to happen, there are two elements that need to be factored in. Firstly, the accountability must happen in public to promote transparency and secondly, the setting must be in the public sector. This means that the concept of accountability and transparency cannot be separated from each other, whilst also considering that the accountability relationship happens between the government and the citizens of the republic. The relationship applies to the national and provincial government departments, district and local municipalities, parastatals and government entities (Munzhedzi 2016).

Smyth (2007) argued that the supplying and requesting of reasons for conduct, results in accountability. Smyth further explains accountability by showing interlinked concepts such as the underlying power basis of the one seeking answers from the other, the account, that is given and the relationship shared by the parties involved, this relationship is normally between the government and the citizens or other stakeholders and at the end states that all of this is limited to answers being given (answerability). According to Krishnan (2008), words equivalent to accountability include 'liability, answerability, culpability, chargeability, responsibility'. Public accountability thus means that a public representative is obliged to explain, justify and provide evidence for his decisions and actions to the public and stakeholders.

The Auditor-General's (AG's) report of 2019–2020 on Local Government Audit outcomes reflects a general undesirable performance of municipalities in South Africa, with the Eastern Cape province incurring R2.5bn in irregular expenditure and a further R4.2bn was flagged for audits being finalised after the cut-off date of the AG's Report (Auditor General 2020). These funds were meant to deliver services to the communities in different localities.

Nleya (2011) attributes the rise of protests to the failure to deliver services in the poor urban areas from 2004. This means that the communities in South Africa have resorted to public demonstrations that often turn violent, because of a lack of service delivery by the government. Mofolo, Mkuyana, and Skade (2014) attribute some of these challenges that lead to failures in the local sphere of government to the lack of willpower of the politicians, the institutional design, shortcomings from the management and inadequate leadership as well as corruption.

This has been a challenge for many years in the Eastern Cape and has seen the province lagging with regard to development and service delivery.

In the 2004/2005 financial year, the South African government was alleged to be rescued from a 10-year projected future loss amount of R3.5bn by the Special Investigative Unit (SIU), (Republic of South Africa 2007a). The Auditor General's Integrated Annual Report for the 2018/2019 financial year, highlights the lack of accountability by many local governments and public entities which led them to fail to deliver on their mandate of health services, education and infrastructure, especially at municipalities. Reddy (2016) denotes services delivery to be a globally popular phrase that is used to describe the distribution of services such as housing, water and sanitation, land, infrastructure and electricity. These services are what communities need daily for their existence. In the South African context, service delivery has been a challenge, that is evident with the rise in service delivery protests by disgruntled communities.

Tshitshonga (2015) argues that protests in South Africa have taken many forms where communities are expressing their frustrations through many ways that include forcing the municipal officials to resign, toyi-toying, mass meetings, confrontations with the police, submission of memorandums and petitions, election boycotts, processions, stay-aways, construction of barriers and burning of tyres, road blockades, destruction of property and looting. Breakfast, Bradshaw and Nomarwayi (2019) describe how the African National Congress (ANC) led administration is confronted by protest actions that are associated with perceived lack of service delivery and systemic corruption at the local sphere of government. These protests are usually violent and lead to the destruction of infrastructure and properties.

As early as 2004, South African communities have resorted to destructive and violent public demonstrations that destroy public infrastructure like schools, libraries and at times the houses of non-performing local government councillors (Steyn-Kotze & Taylor 2010). Ndhlovu (2015) notes a difference between the modalities utilised to deliver basic services at the City of Johannesburg and Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM n.d.). She indicates that the City of Johannesburg outsources some of the service delivery functions to private companies whilst BCMM carries all the basic service delivery responsibilities. This poses much strain on the municipality. The BCMM strives to deliver these services and alleviate poverty through the development of local economic development (LED) strategies, inclusive of cooperative strategies (Gxabuza & Nzewi 2021).

Akinboade, Mokwena and Kinfack (2013) wrote that between 2004 and 2012, BCMM registered a significant number of service delivery protests because of water supply and housing issues and this is attributed to poor governance. Such problems commonly emanate from a lack of accountability, transparency and public participation in the affairs of government nationwide (Mutangabende 2016).

Mutangabende further writes that the BCMM not only faces challenges of waste management and health issues but a shortage in housing for the communities. These form part of the basic services that the municipality is obliged to provide. Where there is no public accountability, a clear opportunity for misconduct and maladministration presents itself and leads to the government not being able to fulfil its mandate of service delivery. It is, therefore, from this problem orientation that the article seeks to find out whether, through the views of the community members, the business community, public officials and politicians in the locality, public accountability and service delivery exist.

The article sought to carry out a conceptual and theoretical exploration of public accountability and service delivery in the locality whilst giving recommendations on the findings presented. Further emanating from the problem statement are objectives that the article seeks to address, which are as follows:

• To give a conceptual and theoretical explanation of public accountability and service delivery at the BCMM.
• To examine the current status quo on service delivery and public accountability.
• To give recommendations on the findings presented.

A conceptual overview of public accountability and service delivery

Figure 1 demonstrates an accountability model integrative of functions and relationships shared by various actors striving towards sustainable public accountability (World Bank 2003). This article adopted the model to conceptualise the relationship between public accountability and service delivery.

The above diagram illustrates an accountability relationship and function model which indicates the responsible actors in the accountability cycle. It shows in the public sector how citizens and community-based organisations delegate power and authority to government and politicians to manage public resources.

The citizens finance the operations of government and subsequently need to hold them answerable for their actions and decisions. The government should always execute its duties in the most transparent and accountable way. This means that the public needs to be informed concerning the

Source: World Bank, 2003, *Citizens and service delivery assessing the use of social accountability approaches in the human development sectors*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

FIGURE 1: Accountability relationships and functions.

government's functions and decisions. As articulated by Bovens (2005), public accountability includes the obligation of governments and public entities for being answerable for their actions and decisions to the general citizenry of a country. This entails that there should always be a healthy working relationship and clear lines of communication between the government and the citizens to ensure accountability, openness and transparency.

Mfene (2014) argues that when there is no accountability, inclusion and equity in society, prosperity is attained by only a few. This means public accountability as a principle promotes a general cohesion between stakeholders to work together. Smyth (2007) simplifies public accountability as giving and demanding reasons for the conduct and it has proven to be a much complex concept in practice than in theory. Thornhill (2011) argues that public accountability as a concept has moved broader than being viewed from a financial standpoint. It is a prerequisite in any administrative, political and managerial decision and action taken within the public sector. Accountability is even demanded within the private sector for the delivery of quality goods and services as well as the management of human resources.

Whilst South Africa transitioned from a very oppressive regime pre-1994, many of the systems that were in place were not for the development of the majority. Miller (2004) noted that the post-apartheid democratically elected government inherited a public service that was plagued with problems. This created a public service that lacked professionalism, legitimacy, representation and a democratic and development culture without having the capacity to deliver services to all citizens. The World Development Report (World Bank 2004) has a framework that identifies three different accountability relationships amongst citizens, politicians or policymakers and service providers.

These relationships can be identified in the form of three legs as explained below:

• The political process where citizens try to influence politicians is called 'citizen's voice'.
• The relationship between politicians or policymakers and service providers are the second leg of the long route: 'the compact'. Many of the government's current initiatives to improve accountability focus on this leg.
• The short route or the third leg considers how much the citizens, now acting as clients of public services, can directly pressure the service providers to ensure efficient delivery. We call this 'client power'.

This plays a critical role in trying to understand the relationship between the different stakeholders in the public accountability cycle. The citizens should be the beneficiaries of government services, thus making them the receivers in the accountability process. Accordingly when both the long and short routes to accountability work will be at their strongest. In practice, there is always a challenge in finding an integrated approach to merge the two. To strengthen
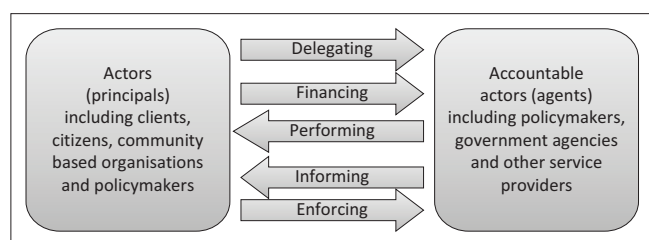
accountability in both the short and long routes, a methodology that emphasises a stronger democracy, internal state capacity and accountability and public participation need to be employed (Fiszbein 2005). Bovens (2005) proposes a classification of the different types of accountability and the table illustrates an adaptation of the South African local government context, with prevailing types of accountability.

Table 1 displays the different types of accountability that apply to various stakeholders and which are employed through different mechanisms. For this article, two of the various accountability types become more prominent and applicable. They are political and social accountability. Bovens (2005) describes political accountability as the type of accountability that forces councillors to become accountable for their constituencies, the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Local Government or in the South African context MEC for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) to the Provincial Legislation and municipalities to the legislature.

Mutangabende (2016) notes political accountability as elected politicians representing the voices of the citizenry between

elections and thus become answerable to the citizens. On the contrary, social accountability means that the government needs to be accountable to all interest groups and stakeholders within the locality (Bovens 2005; Mutangabende 2016).

Section 40(1) of the Constitution (1996) spells out an interrelated, interdependent and distinct government structure consisting of three spheres, namely national, provincial and local. Local government is considered the most important as it is responsible for providing direct services to the people and fulfilment of the development mandate to society. The Constitution of 1996 establishes the framework which stipulates this mandate via Section 152:

1. which provides for the objectives of local government, which are as follows:
   (a) To provide a democratic and accountable government for local communities;
   (b) To ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner;
   (c) To provide social and economic development;
   (d) To promote a safe and healthy environment; and
   (e) To encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.

In South Africa, public accountability is a legislative imperative that is aimed at ensuring that the interaction between state entities and the general public is enhanced whilst keeping the citizens informed about the affairs and activities of the government. The mandate of direct service delivery to the communities lies with the local sphere of government. Reddy (2016) details the importance of service delivery within the context of local government. He states that in this sphere, the government is concerned with the provision of municipal services, goods, benefits, activities and satisfactions that are deemed public to improve the quality of life within communities. These services would include housing, water and sanitation, land, roads, health services, public safety, waste management, infrastructure and electricity. Some of these services become what is termed a basic service. For municipal services to be considered as basic, it becomes necessary to establish if such a service is not provided would it possibly put the lives, health or safety of people in danger, or cause environmental harm (Reddy & Naidu 2012). The complexity of delivering services to the people calls for a robust strategy that involves all stakeholders within the local sphere of government.

Howard (2006) gives lessons from the Australian government where effective service delivery requires a full comprehension of government capacity that is, the human resources, community members, businesses, infrastructure, budgets, accountability mechanisms and governance. The factors which are mentioned above become determinants of the local government's capability to deliver services to the people. In South Africa's local sphere, a multipronged approach is also employed to involve multiple stakeholders in municipal affairs. Molepo, Maleka and Khalo (2015), identify the involvement of the public through public participation as a

TABLE 1: Different types of accountability.

Type of Accountability	South african local government examples
Based on Nature of the Forum	
Political	• Accountability by councillors to their constituencies
	• Accountability of the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Local Government to the Provincial Legislature
	• Accountability of municipalities to the Legislature
Legal	• Accountability to the courts
	• Legal scrutiny prescribed by civil, penal or administrative statute, or precedent such as testing a municipality's compliance with the provisions of the *Municipal Finance Management Act* or the *Municipal Properly Rates Act,* No. 6 Of 2004
Administrative	• Accountability to Auditors
	• Accountability to Department of Local Government and Traditional Affairs
Professional	• Municipal Managers accountable to the Institute of Local Government Managers (ILGM). Accountability to the South African Local Government Association
Social	• Accountability to interest groups and all other stakeholders including the local community
Based on Nature of the Actor	
Corporate	• The liability of the council as a legal entity which can sue and be sued
Hierarchical	• Accountability along the 'chain of command' such as the Municipal Manager being accountable to council
	• Supervisor and subordinate relationships
Collective	• A council being jointly and severally liable for a bad decision which resulted in losses to the municipality
Individual	• A member of staff is disciplined for misconduct
Based on the Nature of the Conduct	
Financial	• Accountability through a financial audit
	• Accountability to a donor or funder
Procedural	• Compliance with the Integrated Development Planning Process in terms of the *Systems Act.*
	• Compliance with the budgetary process in terms of the *Municipal Finance Management Act.*
	• Compliance with the administrative *Justice Act* provisions
Product	• Safety of infrastructure

Source: Krishnan, H.B., 2008, 'Public accountability: From concept to practice in the South African local government context', A paper prepared for the Democracy Development Programme, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 5th Annual Local Government Conference, 11–12 August 2008, Southern Sun-Elangeni, Durban.

legislative imperative that is gazetted within the Consitution, the *Municipal Structures Act* of 2000 (No. 32 of 2000) and *Municipal Systems Act* of 1998 (No. 117 of 1998) (Republic of South Africa 1998a). Furthermore, the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) becomes a key tool to ensure widespread consultation and involvement in the affairs of localities in South Africa as it is a strategic development plan for municipalities. With all the strategies, policies and legislations, the republic is still faced with service delivery challenges that lead to service delivery protests. Service delivery protests become the response from communities for inadequate and poor services by the local municipalities (Reddy 2016). It can also be viewed as a means of seeking answers and holding the government accountable for their non-performance. Alexander (2010) purports that communities believe in the notion that 'voting helps and protests work' when confronting service delivery deficiencies at local government.

Public participation and communication in public affairs

Government has the responsibility to involve the citizens in the decision-making process as well as to become accountable for its actions whilst dealing with the daily office business. Public participation in policymaking as well as in decision-making is supported by legislation and is reflected in the *Constitution* and the *White Paper on local government* of 1998 amongst other pieces of legislation (Republic of South Africa 1998c). According to the National Policy Framework for Public Participation, 'public participation is an open and accountable process through which individuals and groups from selected communities can exchange views and ideas and influence decision making' (Republic of South Africa 2007b). Bellamy (2012) argues that there is a vital role played by public participation in relation to the democracy of a country. To ensure that public participation is enhanced, the state needs to build strong platforms and mechanisms that will enable the citizens to get involved. This process involves consultation in its different forms but at the end of the day gives feedback to the government on what their citizens need as far as services are concerned.

Mziba (2020) presents some important arguments to the question on why public participation is important.

Mbiza describes public participation as a legal requirement, that can be promoted to ensure that development plans are relevant to the needs and conditions of communities. It should be encouraged to handover responsibility of services, promote local action and to permit local communities to take control of their lives and livelihoods. Molepo et al. (2015) identify public accountability as an opportunity for the government to consult the citizenry and create clear lines of accountability. Kotze (1997) argues that a people-centred approach advocates for the public or people's participation and refers to the following, involvement, communication, change of approach and attitude from the government as well as reciprocal influence. When clear lines of communications are strengthened and public involvement is enhanced, accountability and transparency become normal features in the society. The government through the *Local Government municipal structures Act,* No. 117 of 1998 sets out municipal objectives in Chapter 3 Section 19(2c) that echo the importance of the municipality through its council to review its processes of involving the community (Republic of South Africa 1998b).

Some of the platforms and opportunities created by the government for public involvement and communication are as follows:

• the Executive: Stakeholders and Imbizo
• legislatures and public representatives
• public Meetings, Public Hearings and report back meetings
• inspections or site visits
• local government and public participation
• the Mayor, ward councillors and ward committees
• community development workers, Stakeholder bodies and local stakeholder forums
• community or beneficiary organisations, community liaison officials and media.

All of the above are platforms that can be used to strengthen public participation and communication whilst ensuring that service delivery quality is of high quality.

Creighton (2005) sees public participation as a complex process that can be best understood and illustrated as a continuum (Figure 2).

The process involves much coordination, tolerance and consideration from all parties involved because at the end of the day a common objective needs to be reached. Creighton's illustration reflects a part of the process that involves the public in the daily business of government where the citizens need to be recognised during every step of the way. The first block suggests that the government informs the public of their plans, the second states that the government needs to take a consultative approach and listen to the views of the public, whilst in the third block robust engagement and debates take place to reach a common ground.

In the fourth stage, a policy or plan of action is developed and in the fifth stage, the public is informed before the commencement and implementation of the policy or project. This means budgets need to be made public, time frames need to be known and other logistics need to be made public
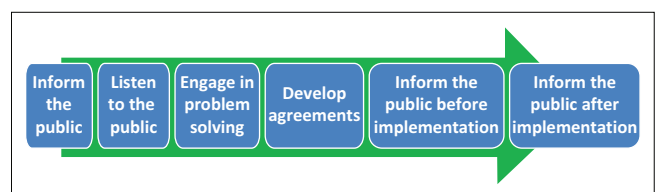
Source: Adapted from Creighton, J.L., 2005, *The public participation handbook*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

FIGURE 2: Continuum of public participation.

to the citizens. The final stage simply reflects the responsibility of the government to report back to the citizens after the projects on all financial and operational matters. Masango (2002) advocates for members of the public to be seen as 'individuals, members of groups, or group representatives' and all of the latter play a vital role in holding government accountable. An accountable government can be considered a good government putting good governance to practice.

Methodology

The article was guided by the research onion (Figure 3) as articulated by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019). In a previous edition, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) describe one of the ways of constructing a research methodology section through the theoretic conceptualisation of a research onion. The research onion details a very descriptive view of the many layers and stages of the research methodology process, which should be employed to formulate an effective and well-structured research methodology section (Raithatha 2017).

The Research Onion makes use of six main layers that inform the effective construction of the research methodology section. These include the research philosophy, approaches to theory development, methodological choice, strategy, time horizons and techniques and procedures. The article employed an interpretivism paradigm and philosophy. Whilst researchers in the natural sciences would apply a positivism philosophy, interpretivism is seen as a viable alternative for social science research, (Mertens 2010). Muijis (2004) identifies a link between how individuals interpret social realities and their ideological dispositions in interpretivism. Furthermore, the reality is influenced by the personal experiences of the actors concerning the political and social climate at the time the research is done. Silverman (2011) argues that interpretivism assesses reality using different methods from positivists and put emphasis on the data quality based on trustworthiness criteria of transferability, credibility, confirmability and dependability.

According to Paavola, Hakkarainen and Sintonen (2006), abductive reasoning is a form of inference that starts with observations of clue-like signs which provides the basic
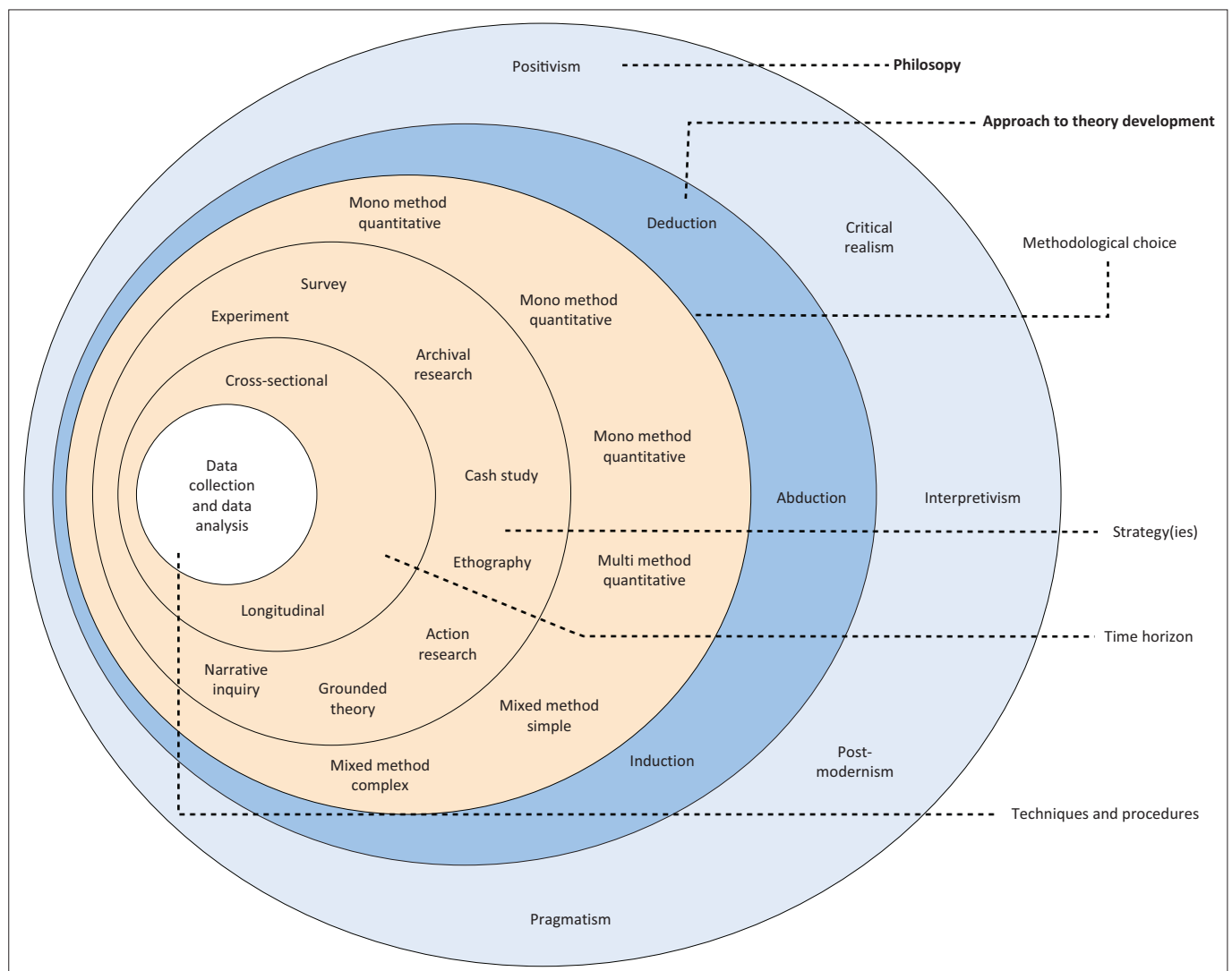

FIGURE 3: Research onion.

notion for further research. It aims to identify structures, connections, contexts and constraints, and involves the use of cognitive argumentation. The article utilised an abductive approach to theory development whilst utilising the New Public Management (NPM) theory to guide the study. The article adopted an explanatory case design based on a mixed-methods approach. Saunders et al. (2019) describe a research design as a general plan for answering the research questions and that laying down the specific details about data collection, analysis, ethical considerations and other elements involved in the study. A total sample of 47 participants was chosen through a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is commonly used in studies that are predominant of a qualitative nature for the selection and identification of information-rich cases that are related to the study phenomena (Palinkas et al. 2015). It involves the identification and selection of participants that are well-informed and experienced in the study focus, (Cresswell & Plano Clark 2011). The participants in this study are selected and identified because of their knowledge and experiences about public accountability and services delivery in the municipality.

According to Govindan (2014), the sampling technique for mixed-methods studies is dependent on the research design employed. Collins (2015) observe that in mixed-methods research, the sample design per phase can facilitate or can limit the degree that inferences can be made approximately equally from results generated in the quantitative and qualitative phases. Data was collected through questionnaires and secondary documents as per Table 2. Data was analysed through a comparative lens and thematic analysis.

The NPM represents an approach and model that borrows principles from the business sector and aims at improving service delivery in the public domain. There have been many schools of thought surrounding the theory and doctrine of NPM. However, its influence in the public administration practice and discipline since the 1980s cannot be overlooked. Pollitt (2003) and Hood (1991) argue that the aim of NPM is to fix the government's problems which include wastage of resources, having no confidence in the bureaucracy, poor programme design as well as poor performances. New Public Management proposes a choice to the user, incentivises the employee properly, and ensures visible transparency in institutional economics which is in contrast to the traditional understanding of bureaucracy (Hood 1991).

Although the notion of NPM triggers multiple views as to its relevance in the public sector, it is important to note the lessons that can be drawn from the theory to fit different governments, based on the context. Poole, Boyne and Mendes (2002) argue that it is impossible to implement NPM in the

public sector because of the differences in organisational goals, environments, structure and managerial values. Garson and Overman (1983) saw NPM as an interdisciplinary study of the generic aspects of administration that seek to manage human, financial, physical, informational and political resources by employing a combination of planning, organising and controlling functions of management. Hood's (1991) 'Doctrinal Components of New Public Management' is illustrated in Table 3.

New Public Management over the years has seen the public sector integrate and borrow principles from the economics discipline and other private sector policies to assist in managing and expending public funds. Because of the onus of public expenditure resting on government, NPM demands a more ethical, professional and accountable workforce in the public sector.

Ethical considerations

The study was guided by a strict code of ethics for social science research and Govern Mbeki Research and Development Centre policies on ethical considerations. The study was presented to and approved by the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee (UFHREC), ethical clearance number: IJE071SRUL01. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the participation is strictly voluntary and there is no harm (be it physiological, psychological or social) inflicted on the participants during any stage of the study. Lastly, because of the

TABLE 3: Hood's New Public Management Doctrines.

Doctrine	Meaning Typical	Justification
Hands-on professional Management	Active, visible control by those free to manage the organization	Accountability requires clear assignment of responsibility – not diffusion of power
Explicit standards and performance measures	Well defined quantifiable goals and targets	Accountability requires clear goals and close examination of objectives
Increased focus on output controls	Resource allocation linked to performance	Focus on results rather than procedures
Dis-aggregation of units	Division of monolithic units into specialized corporate units	Manageable units increase productivity, facilitate contract operations
Competition	Use of term contracts and public tendering procedures	Rivalry and competition lowers costs and raises standards
Private sector management style	Public service ethic is replaced with increased flexibility through private techniques	Private sector tools are proven, should be used in the public sector
Discipline in use of resources	Reduce direct costs, increase discipline in labour force, resist union demands	Do more with less by controlling public sector resource demand

FIGURE 4: Service delivery issues 1.

TABLE 2: Participants breakdown.

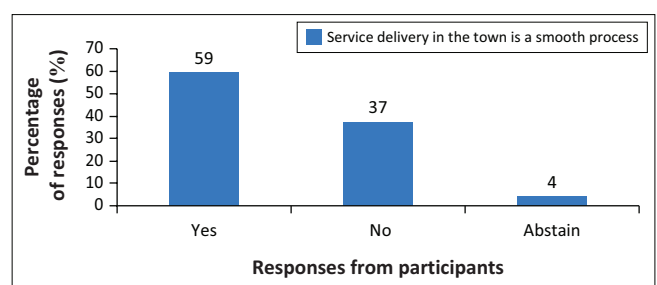| Participants	Questionnaires	Received or done	%
Municipal officials	15	15	100
Businesses and communities	25	19	76
Public officials or politicians	7	6	86

nature of the study, the researcher ensured that the results and findings are kept confidential to guard against victimisation and possible reprisal of participants.

Study findings

The first part of the findings gives a quantitative overview of the study focus point, which looked at the visibility of public accountability and service delivery at the BCMM in the Eastern Cape province. This section further draws up themes from the qualitative data as means of analysis. The data from Figure 4 is gathered from members of the community, the business community, politicians and public officials from the local sphere of government.

On the question, whether service delivery is running smoothly in the locality, 59% of the respondents which represent 24 participants believe that the municipality is fulfilling its mandate by delivering the necessary services to the communities. Twenty of the 24 participants who answered 'yes' are politicians and municipal officials. Fourteen participants said that there was a lack of service delivery whilst two abstained from answering.

Some of the respondents had these main points to state concerning the service delivery in the locality:

'Infrastructure in our community is poor, things only happen in town here.' (Business and community members [BC] 1, Female, 2015)

'We were told a library would be built in our area but it has been over 4 years now and no one updates us on what is happening.' BC3, Female, 2015)

'The government is trying its best to take care of issues like potholes but I think the material used is cheap as in a few weeks the holes are back.' (BC11, Female, 2015)

'Our local government has a good story to tell as we have created so many opportunities for our people and continue to do so.' (Politician [PP] 2, Male, 2015)

'Projects never get complete here.' (BC9, Male, 2015)

'We have been waiting to receive houses from the government for years I doubt if this is what we fought for.' (BC9, Male, 2015)

In terms of the *Housing Act* of 1997 and regarding the housing accreditation framework, the Municipality is mandated to ensure that housing development in the locality is achieved. Section 153 of the Constitution (1996) stipulates that the primary mandate of local government is to deliver basic services to meet the needs of the people whilst promoting social and economic development in the locality. When the government struggles to meet the demands of the people concerning infrastructure and economic development, it leads to protests by the public and unrest in the locality.

Public accountability and participation issues

The perception of the participants in the municipality regarding public accountability being evident in the post-apartheid era is rather interesting. A total of 29% strongly
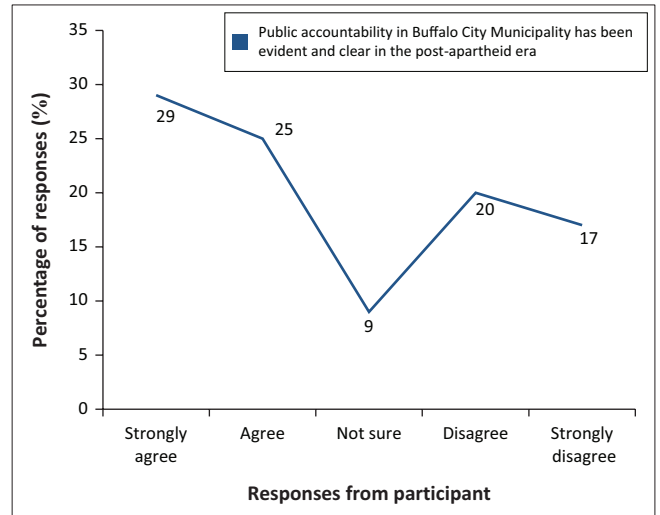

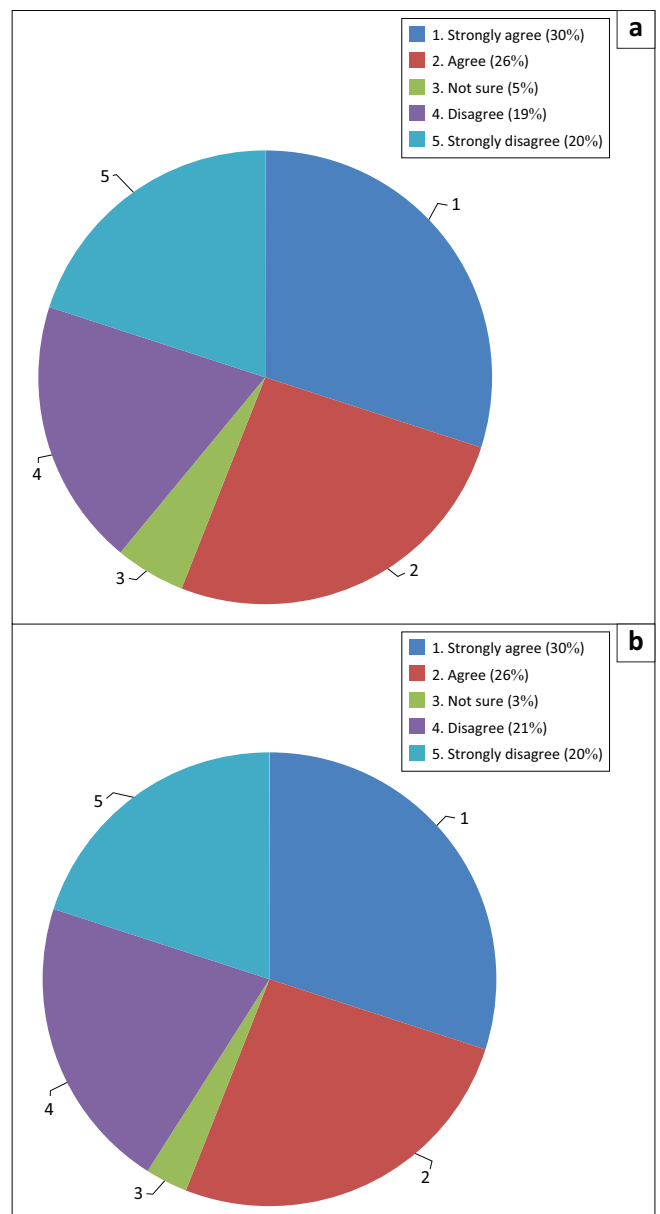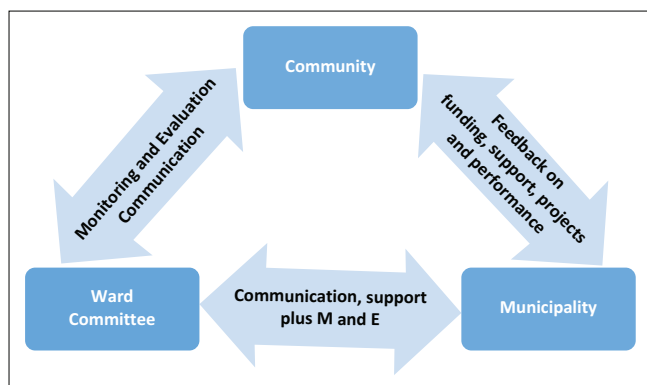**FIGURE 5:** Public accountability issues 1.

FIGURE 6: Public accountability issues 2: (a) in Buffalo City Municipality has involved all the stakeholders in the municipality and (b) in Buffalo City Municipality has created platforms to engange the public on municipal issues.

FIGURE 7: Public accountability framework.

agree, 25% agreeing to public accountability being visible, 9% not being sure whilst the rest were not in favour of the statement (see Figure 5). When posed with the question regarding stakeholder involvement and platforms of engaging the public on municipal issues, 50% agreed to these avenues being available, whilst 26% were uncertain and 24% did not agree. However, it is again the municipal workers, politicians and a few community members who affirm the municipality's efforts to promote public accountability and public involvement.

The two figures reflect the views of the participants concerning the ability or efforts of the municipality to involve the public in the daily business of government whilst creating a culture of consultancy between the service provider and service receiver. Figure 6 reflects the municipality's ability to involve the various stakeholders in the accountability process.

Discussion

The *White Paper on Local Government* (Republic of South Africa 1998c) identifies a developmental local government as a collaborative effort from the citizens, community groups and the government to find sustainable solutions to social, economic and material demands within the locality to improve the livelihood and quality of life in general. This then explains the differing views that the government and citizens have, as the citizens believe the government is not sticking to its developmental obligation. This at times is influenced by several issues that include budget, planning, capacity, resources, amongst others. The government has to find sustainable ways to ensure that services are delivered efficiently, effectively and economically. This must be seen to add value, enhance and empower the society at large. According to Friedman (1997), empowerment can be viewed in three segmentations of power:

- *Social power* – this is the access of communities to productive and reproductive resources that include skills, material goods finance and information.
- *Political power* – this refers to the ability of the citizens and the public to participate in policy decisions beyond the activity of voting for the policy-makers during elections.

- *Psychological power* – this refers to the ability and strength of an individual to believe that they can change or influence the situation around them.

Davids, Theron and Maphunye (2005) argue that empowerment is a legislative imperative and is a vital component of a people-centred development in the country. The *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development* (Republic of South Africa 1994) indicates that such development is not limited to the delivery of services but should encourage community participation and development. It advocates for the promotion and involvement of previously disadvantaged groups like women, people with disabilities and other groups. The article deduces that the views of the citizens indicate that development is happening in the BCMM but the community is divided in terms of being satisfied with the pace at which development is taking place.

The governing party has been in power for 27 years and is still trying to combat the inequalities it has inherited from the apartheid government and its 46 years of separate development policies and practices.

Maphazi (2012) argues that the participatory process requires that all the participants must be answerable for the individual actions, decisions and conduct as well as be willing and committed to transparency and openness to the process. This is in line with the principles of accountability, transparency and openness as stipulated in the constitution of the republic. This is very important because the most important legislative document in the country promotes a general obligation on public servants, politicians and administrators to be accountable whilst it creates and encourages an environment for engagements and interactions, between the government and the citizens.

According to Pope (2000), it is of importance for a national integrity system, that the citizens are informed and aware of their rights. Pope further states that when citizens do not take interest in enforcing accountability whilst being part of governance in the country, it will only give rise to corruption, fraud and maladministration thus resulting in poor cooperate governance. Politicians are seen to function under different structures of accountability and scrutiny. Their legal obligations are more formal and are attached to a wide range of issues, like tax, economic and financial affairs, health, education and state law enforcement agencies (Morrell & Hartley 2006). This has, to some point, carried the perception that our politicians get away with murder as they always try to hide behind these structures when needed to be accountable for their actions.

Section 17 (2) of the Local Government: *Municipal Structures Act* (No. 117 of 1997) requires a municipal administration to be organised in such a manner that it fosters and facilitates a culture of accountability amongst its staff. Section 16 (1) of the same act, stipulates that the municipality must establish a system of governance that promotes and encourages formal representative and participatory governance. Section 18 (a) –

(d) mandates the municipality to give its residents access to information, be transparent, and open regarding the governance, management and development in municipal affairs. Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality, in line with adhering with its vision of being 'A people-centred and developmental city', aims for good governance and public participation by creating and encouraging avenues for the involvement of the residents of the locality.

The BCMM 2013/2014 annual report indicates that its communications department in line with the Institutional Communications Strategy (ICS), as adopted by Council on the 30th of October 2013, intended to implement an action plan that was aimed at educating the communities about their services including information access and public participation. Seven years later through the BCMM 2019/2020 annual report, the audit committee identifies a 'lack of effective communication and coordination between directorates' and this leads to a lack of synergy between the municipal organs and the local citizens. The municipality through the operating Ward Committee Public Participation Framework aims to enhance the link and engagement between the government and its communities to fulfil its mandate of developing the lives of the people.

The BCMM 2014/2015 annual report also has some interesting statements from the ward committee meetings concerning the crime in the locality: 'The streetlights need to be revisited and some areas need to be installed because there is high rate of crime. High mast lights are requested in Southernwood to prevent crime in darker areas such as Milner Estate and Braelyn area. High rate of crime in the ward due to the unemployment'.

These comments were taken directly from the different ward committee meetings where the people expressed their concerns about the high rising crime statistics and how this impacts their daily lives.

Crime also occurs when expenditures cannot be justified in government and irregular spending happens.

There are various means by which the citizens can appeal to the different institutions and organs of horizontal accountability including law enforcement agencies and courts to combat corruption and hold people accountable (Blind 2011). The findings have illustrated the municipality's efforts to enhance engagement between the municipality and the communities, to become accountable and deliver on its mandate of service delivery. However, implementation is still a challenge.

Conclusion

The article dealt comprehensively with the issue of public accountability and service delivery taking into consideration different aspects that influence the ideal practices of government to become accountable to the public. The article concludes that great strides need to be made by BCMM in

assuring that development is attained through its different strategies as well as achieving its service delivery mandate and public accountability. When communities are dissatisfied and frustrated with the delivery of services, they demonstrate through protests. As a clear line of communication between the locality and its residents, the elected ward councillor needs to represent his or her community and put pressure on the municipal officials to speed up service delivery. It is anticipated that the article will aid in the formulation of new strategies for the public sector on how to best enforce public accountability for effective community development and sustainable service rendering. The BCMM should promote effective leadership and public accountability of government. The following findings and shortcomings were identified:

- The understanding of the processes of government by the citizens needs to be enhanced.
- Access to information to the public needs to be strengthened.
- The need for developmental opportunities for citizens is not at its full potential.
- Citizens do not attend community meetings and ward leaders do not convey the necessary information to the people on time.
- The municipality has put in place strict measures to ensure that the local authorities are always in compliance with the regulations and policies of the municipality.
- There is a strong relationship between communication and accountability.
- The municipality has a clear IDP that genuinely caters for the needs of the people but implementation is a challenge.
- The citizens were reluctant to share their views when questions were asked about the political nature of government.

Recommendations
Enhanced community engagement and participation

The creation of platforms for all the surrounding communities in the locality needs to be at the top of its priority in line with the governing legislation. It should use its loud hailers effectively to disseminate information and put posters, not only at the door of the municipality but also at groceries and other points where people from the community frequently go. This is an important part of democratising development and disseminating information. The municipality should constantly engage with the community through media such as radio, newspapers and so on, which have a large audience and that provides a good platform for public debates on development that works. This should be one of the steps that the municipality should take to democratise participation.

Capacity building and skills development

Inadequate skills and capacity to design and implement local economic development (LED) within the local municipalities in BCMM has led to municipalities being criticised for their

ineffective service delivery to the local communities. This is evident with the high levels of poverty being experienced within the areas of BCMM, indicating that people involved in promoting LED and effective service delivery lack certain requisite skills to achieve the municipal intended goals. Therefore, municipalities need to develop and expand the delivery of services by improving their ability to do so.

Enhancement of resources and infrastructure and promotion of individual independence of the community

The municipality must come up with creative ways of generating funds, ways that are cost-effective. One of the ways of doing this is by initiating programmes that are driven by the community, creating a sense of ownership so that the programmes are self-sustainable. If the community is driving a clean-up campaign to address the problem of delayed refuse collection, then the municipality will incur less cost and the government can assist their efforts by providing resources like cleaning equipment for community members or even providing financial assistance to young community members who are looking to start businesses that could provide such cleaning services in the municipality. The government should always capacitate the people with skills that will enable them to do things on their own, whether they are educational, entrepreneurial or social skills. The government needs to attract investors in the municipality to ensure that there is always a flow of capital to boost local businesses whilst also creating opportunities for the citizens to get jobs.

The enhancement of the public participation unit

As it is still at its infancy stages, the Unit needs to be utilised and developed as it can bridge the gap between the government and the citizens. Other areas to take into consideration are as follows:

- improving communication
- enhancing Monitoring and Evaluation mechanisms
- improving intergovernmental relations
- promoting education amongst the politicians, and
- seeking to strengthen relations with higher education institutions in the province.

All of the above recommendations are not absolute solutions to the problems surrounding the realisation of public accountability, public participation, development and service delivery in the locality. This suggests that further research should be conducted to find alternative solutions to the problem. As indicated before, public accountability and service delivery are visible in the municipality, but the shortcomings that hinder the pace and implementation of them is still a problem.

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Competing interests

Authors' contributions

T.R. and E.O.C.I. both contributed equally to this work.

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Data availability

The data results and interpretations presented in this article are those that have been collected from mixed-methods research study by the researcher as a student. These data findings are therefore research results from a Doctoral dissertation that was completed in 2016 at the University of Fort Hare.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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