

Analysing Community Participation in the Municipal Integrated Development Planning Processes in Limpopo Province, South Africa

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Abstract

Despite stipulations in relevant local government legislations for effective local involvement in development planning, most studies indicate that there is limited participation among local communities in the municipal integrated development planning processes in South Africa. Hence, this study aims to explore the views of officers and community representatives regarding the level of community participation in Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) in Polokwane, Lepelle-Nkumpi and Aganang local municipalities in Limpopo. Techniques such as interviews, group discussions and questionnaire were used to collect data. The findings from interviews and group discussions indicated that community members mainly participate in providing information about their needs and aspirations during consultation meetings of integrated development planning processes organized by the local municipal officers. The attitudinal analysis shows that the majority of the respondents acknowledged that the local municipalities role is limited in promoting community participation. Likewise, the analysis on the degree of response revealed the key factors that affect the local participation, inter alia: low sense of ownership of development initiatives; limited capacity of the municipality; absence of voluntary community associations; non-functionality of ward committee; and exclusion of some groups. Therefore, it is recommended that local municipalities should focus on: encouraging the establishment of voluntary community associations; ensuring the proper functionality of ward committee in mobilising and exchanging information; ensuring the inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalised groups in development processes; building the institutional capacity; and developing sense of ownership within communities regarding municipal on-going and completed projects.

Keywords: Local government, community participation, Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), South Africa, developmental local government, integrated development planning.

1. Introduction

Participation is an important component in planning and decision making (Lane, 2005). Though the concept of participation is contentious, local participation broadly refers to a formal involvement by communities in the local decision making structures with regard to the processes of development planning and implementation (South Africa, 2005). This suggests that development organisations including government bodies and other institutions should encourage a formal structures and mechanisms to enhance the processes of local participation in planning and decision making in relation to services and development.

In South Africa, the approach of integrated development planning has been adopted at national and local level in order to promote local participation in development affairs. The concept of integrated development planning refers to "participatory approach to integrated economic, sectorial, spatial, social, institutional, environmental and the fiscal strategies in order to support the optimal allocation of scarce resources between sectors and geographical areas and across the population in a manner that provides sustainable growth, equity and the empowerment of the poor and the marginalised" (DPLG, 2000:15).

Accordingly, developmental local governments in the country have policy mandates to prepare their own Integrated Development Plan (IDP) for promoting services and development in their area of jurisdiction (South Africa, 2000). Furthermore, it is stipulated that developmental local governments should participate community and community based organizations in planning and implementation of local development (South Africa, 1998). Despite stipulations in relevant local government legislations for effective local involvement in development planning, most studies indicate that there is limited participation among local communities in the municipal integrated development planning processes in South Africa.

In light of the aforementioned context, the purpose of this study is to explore the attitude and perception of municipal officers as well as community representatives regarding the level of community participation in Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) in Polokwane, Lepelle-Nkumpi and Aganang local municipalities in Limpopo Province, South Africa.

2. Literature Review

Theoretically, it has been argued that the extent of public (community) participation is largely determined by the approach of planning (Lane, 2005). Put it differently, the most crucial thing for effective community participation is the processes of development planning. In this regard, Dale (2004) suggests that the approach of development planning should be: firstly, processes-oriented in a sense that it should not follow technocratic or top-down approach; secondly, it should be people-focused entails the need to involve community in the identification of needs and priorities; thirdly, it should be institution-sensitive suggests that the planning processes should give more attention to the existing institutional capacity for planning; and finally, it should be strategic means the planning processes should identify key strategic issues for directing the available scarce resources to implement the plan.

The issue of effective community participation in development planning has gained momentum in various developing countries in their efforts towards people-centred development approach. Although, many countries have adopted policy reforms to support people-centred approach, the implementation at the local level still remains inadequate in terms of increasing the magnitude and quality of local involvement in development affairs. In this regard, the quest for effective community participation in development planning in developing countries, including South Africa, has been the focus among several researchers and scholars.

In South Africa, the process of community participation in local development affairs has been promoted through the new systems of developmental local government and integrated development planning. Developmental local governments in the country have policy mandates to prepare their own IDPs for promoting services and development in their area of jurisdiction (South Africa, 2000). Furthermore, it is stipulated that developmental local governments should participate community and community based organizations in planning and implementation of local development (South Africa, 1998). In line with this, different scholars have been studying the magnitude of community participation in the municipal integrated development planning processes. Hence, the following are some of the studies that have been conducted in South Africa in relation to participation in IDPs.

Mngxali (2008) has studied public participation at local government level in South Africa with reference to integrated development planning and ward committees. Mngxali argues that there is a limited public participation at the local government level in South Africa. He indicated that public participation is not always effective and the concerns and issues of people do not reach the municipal and or integrated plan. Furthermore, the capacity of municipalities remains inadequate in terms of delivering their developmental mandates, especially in previously disadvantaged black areas and townships (Mngxali, 2008).

A similar study was carried out by Maphunye and Mafunisa (2008). Their study sought to analyse the relationship between IDP and public participation process in the Republic of South Africa's new democracy. They indicated that the key challenges to effective public participation within the IDP include lack of a culture of public participation, lack of information, inadequate skills for public participation, population diversity, negative attitudes and perception towards public participation and the costs of public participation.

Several researchers have conducted case studies in different part of South Africa. For instance, Tshabalala and Lombard (2009) assessed the role of community participation in the IDP process in the Govan Mbeki municipality. The finding revealed that the community participation was limited due to the failure of the municipality to create an enabling environment for meaningful participation of grass root people. Mafunisa and Xaba (2008) examined public participation in the IDP process in Limpopo Province. The authors argued that the participation of the poor and the marginalized groups was inadequate in decision making process.

Likewise, Cash and Swatuk (2010) have conducted a case study in Stellenbosch municipality, Dwars River Valley, to assess the effectiveness of the participatory planning model, the IDP. The study result shows that one of the key reasons for the ineffectiveness of IDP in the area was the failure in the public participation process. Taking into account the various challenges in citizen participation in the democratic South Africa, Tau (2013) suggests that community needs to be participated in decision making process, implementation of developmental projects, monitoring and evaluation and holding officials accountable to ensure and promote local governance in local government.

3. Methodology

The study area, Limpopo Province, is one of the nine provinces officially recognised in South Africa. The Province is divided into five municipal districts and sub-divided into twenty five rural and urban local municipalities. Geographically, this Province is situated at the north eastern corner of the country. It shares the border with three countries such as Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. It is also the main gateway to other countries in further field in Sub-Sahara. According to Statistics South Africa (SSA, 2012), the Limpopo Province has a total land area of 125, 754 square kilometres which forms 10.3 percent of the total land area in South Africa. The population of the Province was estimated at 5 404 868 people which accounts for 10.4 percent of the total population of the country. Regarding the socio-economic situation, the percentage of population and of the total number of households in the Province is steadily growing.

The participants of the study included about 53 IDP, LED officers and community representatives of which 15 (28.3%) were participants from urban (Polokwane) and the rest 38 (71.7%) were from rural (Lepelle-Nkumpi & Aganang). These participants were selected purposively in close collaboration with the concerned municipal officers and coordinators. Questionnaire was administered to test the perception of participants using an ordinal five-point scale which was designed to obtain more differentiated answer, for instance, strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree. The questionnaire was largely filled by the respondents as there was no apparent challenge of illiteracy. However, for a limited number of respondents (about nine) the study involved face-to-face approach and a trained translator.

The data analysis involved the following steps. First, the filled in questionnaire was edited for quality and completeness by the researcher. Secondly, the raw data were coded and captured as well as processed using IBM SPSS version 21. The data analysis technique employed descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation). Finally, the finding was presented in cross comparative table format.

4. Finding

4.1 Biographical Details of Respondents

The study was undertaken by engaging a total of 53 respondents. Out of the total 53 respondents, 34 (64.2%) were male and 19 (35.8%) were female. Regarding age, the mean age of the respondents was 38 years with a standard deviation of 8.8 and it ranges from 19 up to 60 years. Out of 53 respondents, 10 (18.9%), 15 (28.3%) and 28 (52.8%) had grade 11 or less, grade 12, diploma and above, respectively. Out of 53 respondents, 44 (83.0%) and 9 (17.0%) were municipal officers/ workers and community representatives, respectively. The mean year of experience of the respondents was 5 years with a standard deviation of 12.3 and it ranges from 1 up to 9 years.

4.2 Perception and attitude of respondents about the level of community participation

The result shows that despite the promotion for public participation in local development affairs, the situation regarding community participation remains a serious issue of concern for local municipalities. Respondents remarked on the quality and extent of community participation as "*Communities participate by giving views and suggestions regarding their needs on IDP meetings...*" and "*...there is lack of adequate consultation...*"

Table 1 shows the degree of response, the mean and standard deviations of the responses related to the local municipality's role in community participation. The construct 'the role in community participation' consisted of six statements listed as follow:

- Statement B1- Community participation is low in terms of making inputs in planning and budgeting process.
- Statement B2- Non-functionality of wad committee is affecting in community involvement in determining development needs and priorities.
- Statement B3- Exclusion of some groups (e.g. women, disabled) is affecting community involvement.
- Statement B4- Absence of voluntary community associations is affecting community involvement in determining development needs and priorities.
- Statement B5- Limited capacity of the municipality is affecting community involvement in determining development needs and priorities.
- Statement B6- Less ownership of development programme or project by community is affecting the development role of the local municipality.

Table 1: Degree of response related to community participation (n=53)

Items	Percentages (%)					Mean	SD
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree		
Statement B1	17.5	12.5	17.5	37.5	15	3.20	1.344
Statement B2	15.0	12.5	5.0	50.0	17.5	3.43	1.338
Statement B3	10.0	30.0	2.5	30	27.5	3.35	1.424
Statement B4	12.5	7.5	10.0	37.5	32.5	3.70	1.344
Statement B5	10.0	12.5	10.0	25.0	42.5	3.78	1.387
Statement B6	7.5	2.5	15.0	47.5	27.5	3.85	1.099

Source: own survey data, 2014; SD= Standard Deviation

As indicated in Table 1, the mean of statement B6, which was related to 'less ownership of development projects by community' is high (mean=3.85) when compared to the other items. This statement is an indication that lack of sense of ownership affects local participation in development. The second item with high mean is the statement B5 (mean=3.70). This statement strongly suggests that lack of capacity at municipal level affects the efforts towards community participation. The third highest mean (3.70), i.e. statement B4 'absence of voluntary community associations is affecting community involvement in determining development needs and priorities also reveals the need to encourage the formation of voluntary community associations to promote local participation.

In general, the above response on degree of response in relation to community participation indicated that the municipal role in community participation is low and being affected mostly by factors such as the less sense of ownership of development initiatives, limited existing capacity and the absence of voluntary community associations within the local municipalities. The result can be further detailed by considering items from B1- B6 as follow.

- **Statement B1- Community participation is low in terms of making inputs in planning and budgeting process.** Table 1 indicates that totally 38% of the respondents agreed with the above statement; 15% strongly agreed; 17.5% were undecided; while 30% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Most of the respondents agree with the statement. The finding shows that despite the policy and legislative provision for local participation in planning and budgeting remains a challenge for municipalities. On the other hand, the significant proportion of respondents who did not confirm the statement may suggests that there is some improvement in local participation, for instance in terms of established structures, mechanisms and consultative meetings.
- **Statement B2- Non-functionality of wad committee is affecting community involvement in determining development needs and priorities.** Table 1 shows that altogether 50% of respondents agreed with the above statement; 18% strongly agreed; 5% were undecided; while 28% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. According to the finding, the majority of respondents confirm the statement. This could mean that weaknesses of the ward committee affect the level of community participation in the local planning processes.
- **Statement B3- Exclusion of some groups (e.g. women, disabled) is affecting community involvement.** Table 1 indicates that about 58% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the above statement; only 2.5% were undecided; 40% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The large proportion of respondents agreed with the statement may suggest that exclusion of disadvantaged and marginalised groups affects the level of community participation in the local planning processes. On the other hand, the significant proportion of respondents who did not support the statement may also suggests that there is an effort from municipality in encouraging special groups in local development processes.
- **Statement B4- Absence of voluntary community associations is affecting community involvement in determining development needs and priorities.** Table 1 shows that only 20% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed; 8% were undecided; 38% agreed; while 33% strongly agreed with the above statement. The highest proportion of respondents who supported the statement may suggest that absence of voluntary community associations affects the level of community participation in the local planning processes.
- **Statement B5- Limited capacity of the municipality is affecting community involvement in determining development needs and priorities.** Table 1 indicates that only 23% of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed; 10% were undecided; 25% agreed; while 43% strongly agreed with the above statement. The largest proportion of respondents strongly agreed and agreed with the statement may indicate that there is limitation in municipal capacity which would seriously affect the level of community participation in the local planning process.

- **Statement B6- Less ownership of development programme or project by community is affecting the development role of the local municipality.** The above response in Table 1 indicates that only 10% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed; 15% were undecided; 48% agreed; while 28% strongly agreed with the above statement. The high proportion of respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement may imply that less ownership of development programme or project by community could be critically affecting the level of community participation in the local planning processes.

Table 2: The overall attitude of respondents towards community participation by categories of local municipalities (n=53)

Category of local municipality	SD & DA		Undecided		SA & AG		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Urban (Polokwane)	10	10.87	1	1.89	4	7.54	15	28.30
Rural (Lepelle-Nkumpi & Aganng)	8	15.09	5	9.43	25	47.18	38	71.70
Total	18	33.96	6	11.32	29	54.72	53	100.00

Source: own survey, 2014; SD= Strongly Disagree; DA=Disagree; SA= Strongly Agree; AG= Agree.

The result of attitudinal assessment on the role of local municipalities in community participation is indicated above. The comparative analysis on overall attitudes of respondent's relating to community participation indicated that the majority 29 (55%) of respondents tend to support the view that the role of local municipalities in community participation is low due to various factors in the study areas; while 6 (11%) of them remained undecided. The rest, 18 (34%) of them tend to disagree with the view (Table 2).

The result varies along the categories of local municipalities. Among the 15 respondents from urban (Polokwane), 4(8%), 1(2%) and 10 (11%) of them have confirmed, undecided and did not support the idea, respectively. On the other hand, among the respondents who belong to rural (Lepelle-Nkumpi & Aganang), 25 (47%), 5 (9%) and 8 (15%) have confirmed, undecided and did not support the idea, respectively (Table 2).

To sum up, it has been found that the role of local municipalities in community participation is low due to various factors in the study areas (Aklilu, 2014). Studies done in other municipalities also shared similar views (Napier, 2008; Reddy and Sikhakane, 2008). Swanepoel and De Beer (2011) emphasised that community participation must be one of the key principles which guides the planning and implementation of projects and programmes based at the local level because people must have the power to make decisions and assume responsibilities of ownership and manage their projects from the very beginning.

5. Conclusion

It has been argued that community participation is an important component of integrated development planning in South Africa. Literature shows that despite stipulations in relevant local government legislations, there is limited participation among local communities in the municipal integrated development planning processes in the country.

In addition, the findings from empirical study (the interviews and group discussions) indicated that community members mainly participate in providing information about their needs and aspirations during consultation meetings of integrated development planning processes organized by the local municipal officers. The attitudinal analysis shows that the majority of the respondents acknowledged that the local municipalities role is limited in promoting community participation. Likewise, the analysis on the degree of response revealed the key factors that affect the local participation, inter alia: low sense of ownership of development initiatives; limited capacity of the municipality; absence of voluntary community associations; non-functionality of ward committee; and exclusion of some groups.

Therefore, it is recommended that local municipalities should focus on: encouraging the establishment of voluntary community associations; ensuring the proper functionality of ward committee in mobilising and exchanging information; ensuring the inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalised groups in development processes; building the institutional capacity; and developing sense of ownership within communities regarding municipal on-going and completed projects.

The paper contributes to a better understanding of the level of community participation in integrated development planning processes. Furthermore, the finding will assist local policy makers and practitioners to consider alternative interventions to improve local participation. One of the key limitations is that the sample size is not large which may restrict generalization of the result. Hence, it is suggested that similar studies should be replicated in other local municipalities in Limpopo Province.

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