



The Role of Public Participation in the Development of Integrated Development Plan in a selected district Municipality in South Africa

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| ARTICLE INFORMATION | A B S T R A C T |
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| Received: August 23, 2023 Revised: November 17, 2023 Available online: January 30, 2024 | <p>The study's primary goal was to assess the role of public participation in developing the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) in a selected Municipality in South Africa. Local government remains vital for inclusive development in post-apartheid South Africa. To address the long-lasting effects of apartheid, the African National Congress-led government greatly emphasised local government as it was the closest developmental sector to the people. Hence it had to become important in the country's quest for inclusive development in the post-apartheid era. To answer the objectives of this study, a qualitative research approach was employed, and a purposive sampling method was used as a sampling measure. The research approach was essential to ensure the study gained in-depth narratives and arguments, which proved crucial in helping the study produce reliable results. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to acquire the required data. The findings revealed that most of the public participates in developing IDPs, but some still need to be made aware of the importance of public participation. In addition, the inaccuracy of relevant information regarding public participation in the IDP process prevents members of the public from actively participating in the IDP process. Hence this study recommends that the municipality consider developing programmes to increase public participation in exercising citizens' democratic rights. This would help increase awareness of IDP and how citizens can participate.</p> |
| KEYWORDS | |
| Development, IDP, Public, Government, Growth. | |
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INTRODUCTION

According to Masango (2002), apartheid deprived all three spheres (national, provincial, and local) of strong public participation in policymaking and implementation. Most black South Africans could not participate in the formation and execution of policies and, thus, were intentionally secluded from having a voice in the country's economic, political, and social development process. In 1996, South Africa's Integrated Development Planning (IDP) concept was introduced as a strategic planning process for local government. The aim was to guide all planning and decision-making in municipalities nationwide. In Chapter 7 of the constitution of the Republic of South Africa, all municipalities ought to encourage members of the public to participate in local government decisions. Municipalities should be able to communicate with other government agencies and departments to ensure proper coordination and implementation of service delivery to beneficiaries (Siphuma, 2009).

According to Mahole (2012), public participation issues are time-consuming and costly to the community. Active public participation in the municipal IDP will transform municipalities into developmental structures, maximising the success of the municipal IDP. The public's active participation in local government concerns through integrated development plans is critical to the success of municipal reform. (Siphuma, 2009).

According to the Municipal Structures Act, 1998 (No. 117 of 1998), municipalities have been demarcated into the categories, illustrated in the table below:

Table 1. Municipalities demarcation categories

| Categories | Municipalities |
|--------------------|---|
| Type of category A | Municipalities or metropolitan, |
| Type of category B | Municipality or local municipalities |
| Type of category C | Municipality shares jurisdiction with several Category B municipalities |

The selected district Municipality in South Africa is a Category C municipality founded in 2000 under the Local Government Municipal Structures Act No. 117 of 1998. It is a municipality with a Mayoral Executive System, which allows for executive authority by an Executive Mayor, vested with the executive leadership of the municipality and aided by a mayoral committee. It is made up of four Category B executive municipalities: Thulamela, Makhado, Musina, and Collins Chabane. The district municipal headquarters are in the town of Thohoyandou.

The Importance of Public Participation in Integrated Development Plan

In a democratic country such as South Africa, the issue of public participation is critical as it is at the core of the citizen-government relationship. This is an unusually close and interdependent connection. The Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) ensures that the IDP must be adopted as a strategic planning tool that supersedes all previous plans in a municipality that identify obstacles and developmental goals. As a result, public participation is an essential method for achieving successful integrated development planning at the local government level.

According to Bekker (1996), the reason for direct public participation is that the public should be involved in the early

stages of formulating integrated development plans rather than after officials have made their decisions. Govender and Reddy (2011) assert that IDPs and public participation can be viewed as locally based planning instruments that can assist towns and communities in addressing poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Mubangizi (2007) believes that IDP allows communities and local stakeholders in a municipal area to establish their goals, requirements, and related priorities. This could be accomplished by structured participation and creating conditions for public participation throughout the planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and review cycle. Tshabalala and Lombard (2009) add that IDP is supposed to be each municipality's business plan, focused on what and how it would benefit the populations within its authority. Communities should be informed, consulted, and allowed to participate in the planning process affecting their needs and future. As a result, municipalities should coordinate the IDP and ensure proper participation from all stakeholders in the area. This procedure can potentially empower the community and increase their ability to impact the IDP process meaningfully. Participation of citizens in IDP processes is seen as one strategy to facilitate engagement between local government and citizens (Madzivhandila & Maloka, 2014).

The Benefit of Public Participation in IDP

According to Creighton (2005), the most common concern with community participation in municipalities is ensuring that those participating in such programmes are truly representative of the public, as failure to do so will impact how those represented perceive themselves. Those in the mainstream must feel represented and not left out of the process. Houston (2001) identifies the following challenges to participation in the process. The council's failure to respond to the ward committee's recommendations due to a shortage of resources, participants are unable to participate. Due to a lack of information, participants in the IDP cannot participate. Members who fail to complete their tasks will not face any disciplinary action. Communities are concerned about whether their participation will be helpful in the IDP and stakeholders' conflicts of interest since the municipality or council decides without consulting the people involved in the process from the beginning.

Van der Walt (2007) argues that a relationship between the municipality and the community is essential. The transition can be seen in the emergence of municipal partnerships as part of public-private partnerships in South Africa, and this transformation will have a scientific impact on local decision-making. If a municipality council makes decisions and implements policies without considering the many actors, role players, and stakeholders, it would face significant legitimacy issues (Managa, 2012).

Conceptualizing Public Participation

For any country to ensure inclusive socio-economic development, the governance processes ought to ensure that they reflect the needs of the people. In a post-apartheid era, South Africa has come a long way in promoting collective development. However, various challenges remain persistent, including the lack of public participation in the governance process. Public participation is a concept that describes the activities of involving people's concerns, needs, and values in public decisions and actions (Peng, 2020). For Quick & Bryson (2016), public

participation in governance involves stakeholders' direct or indirect involvement in decision-making about policies, plans or programs in which they have an interest. For the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Public participation can be any process that directly engages the public in decision-making and considers public input in making that decision.

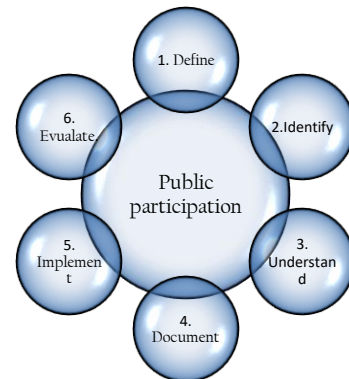


Figure 1. Elements of better practice in public participation in government decision-making.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office. (2015).

The concept of public participation is, therefore, vital for developing South African society. Selebalo (2011) notes that several challenges in South Africa still exist. For example, limited media access has also impacted some communities' ability to access information regarding parliamentary functions. Secondly, the public is deliberately excluded from the legislative process by Parliament. Furthermore, disadvantaged communities are often marginalized from decision-making processes due to various factors such as time constraints, limited access to the media, and lack of education. Therefore, while public participation is vital, it is still hindered by various challenges, which to some extent, have been problematic for the government to address. Malemane & Nel-Sanders (2021) note that capacitation of the local community and building strong ward committees is essential to promote participation, building substantial social capital, and promoting collaborative engagements.

METHOD

This study used the qualitative research approach, allowing the researcher to understand the obstacles that may prevent public participation in the a selected district Municipality's IDP process. This study targeted eight (8) potential participants for this study. One Municipal manager, one community liaison officer, three local councillors from different wards, and three members of the public who had vast knowledge of the Integrated Development Plan. In-depth interviews were used to collect data. MS teams (due to Covid-19 restrictions) were used to conduct interviews with district councillors in the selected district Municipality, the municipal managers, and the liaison officer to learn more about their role in fostering public participation in IDP development. Members of the public were interviewed at their places of residence. Purposive sampling was used in this study to choose a sample based on information about the population, its components and their understanding of the Integrated Development Plan. A thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data through a narrative form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of data obtained through qualitative research methodology from interviews assessing the role of public participation in developing Integrated Development Plans (IDP) in rural municipalities. Data collected through interviews was presented in a Narrative analysis. Eight participants were able to answer the interview and the study's research aims, and questions guided the debate and interpretation of the findings.

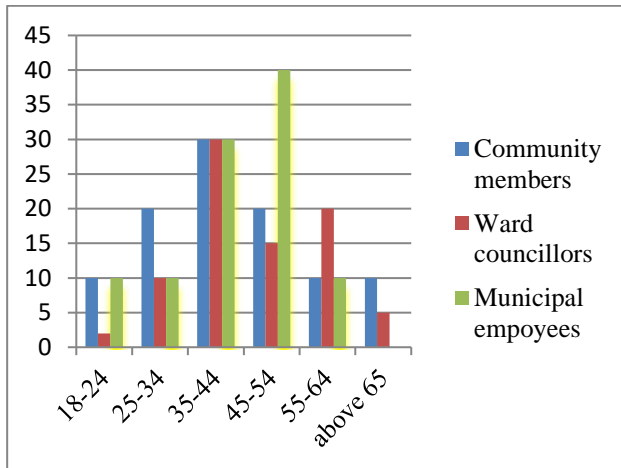


Figure 2. Composition of the sample by age of Participants. Source: Authors

Figure 1 shows that 30% of ward councillors were between the ages of 35 and 44, and 15 percent were between the ages of 45 and 54. Many ward councillors, 40% are between the ages of 55 and 64. Ward committees included 2% of people between 18 and 24 and 5% of people over 64. According to the findings above, youth and adults participate in community structures. However, there were few ward councillors in the age groups of 18 to 24 and 25 to 34 years old. This could be because a councillor's position is political, and the youth lack political expertise.

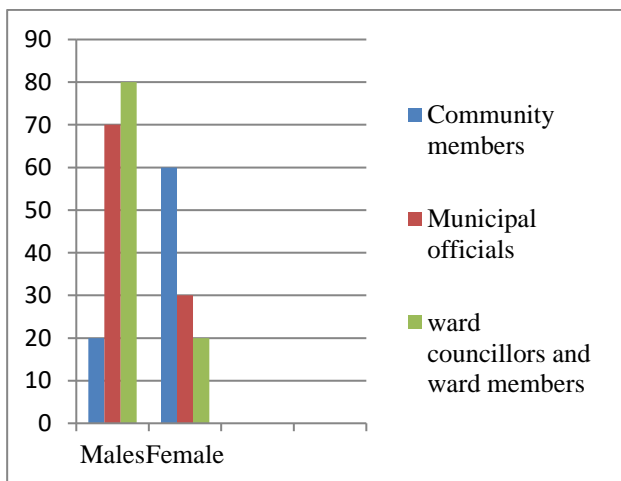


Figure 3. Composition of the sample by gender group Source: Authors

According to the diagram above, males comprised 80% of ward councillors, while females comprised 20%. Males comprised 60 percent of ward municipal officials, while females comprised 30 percent. Finally, males comprised 20% of society, while females comprised 60%. Based on the preceding data, it can

be stated that both genders were equally represented in the study sample. The disparity in gender distribution, particularly among ward councillors and ward members, could be linked to a lack of female candidates.

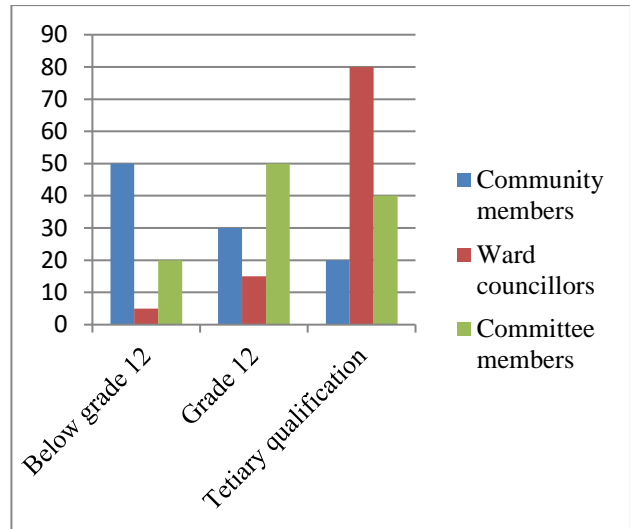


Figure 4. Level of education of the Participants Source: Authors

Most ward councillors (80%) had a tertiary degree, with only 30% having a Grade 12 level of education and 15% having a level below Grade 12. More than half of the ward committee members had completed Grade 12. 50% had completed less than matriculation, and only 40% had completed tertiary education. 20% of community residents had completed tertiary education, 30 percent had completed Grade 12, and 50 percent had not completed Grade 12.

According to the data, many ward councillors are better qualified than ward committee members and community members. This could have an impact on public participation in discussions about developmental challenges. Because most municipal papers are written in English, the degree of knowledge of community people directly engaging in community participation is crucial. As a result, 50 percent of community members who were in matriculation or below may have difficulty reading municipal papers, which may impact public participation.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Eight people were interviewed, and the results are presented in a narrative format. The interviews were able to generate data that was coded into themes. The study was able to generate three (3) themes which are discussed below.

1. Roles of public participation in the development of Integrated Development plan
2. Challenges concerning public participation in the development of the Integrated Development plan.
3. Effective techniques for increasing participation in the integrated development plan

Roles of public participation in the development of Integrated Development plan

From the literature review, it becomes necessary to note that public participation is essential in the governance and developmental process. However, public participation can, at times, be confronted by challenges. However, respondent 1

believes that public participation is vital for any IDP project to be successful as it gives the community chance to be part of the initiative.

“During an IDP meeting, communities can identify and communicate their requirements to the municipality. “IDP meetings are an excellent opportunity for the public to communicate their wants and demands in the most effective way possible, after which the municipality listens to us and decides when and how to provide these services”. (R1)

The above reflection is supported by Masiya et al. (2021), who alluded that public participation encourages citizen-focused service delivery and improves municipal credibility among the citizenries. It becomes vital for the government to promote public participation as it will improve service delivery and ensure services reflect the needs of people. Respondent 2 also communicated that:

“Public participation is important in IDP development because it ensures that the municipality provides the services that residents require”. (R2)

The above reflection is supported by Madumo (2014), who notes that communicated that that public participation proves to be an imperative tool that is utilized for effective governance that results in the efficient delivery of services to the people. Therefore, public participation serves as an essential feature of democracy. However, implementing IDP as a process and project comes with its challenges. Respondents 3 and 4 believe that, at times government does not meet the needs of the people. This was captured in the response below.

“In many pillars of South African society, the public is not happy about why service delivery is so slow. This is the result of misunderstandings and miscommunications. As a result, the public recognizes the IDP as a vehicle for service delivery. Political parties misuse IDP to achieve or hold power in municipal elections, and those communities cannot exercise their responsibilities. Participants also believe that public participation is not limited to recognizing community needs; if a solid working relationship exists, service delivery will improve”. (R3 & 4)

The lack of trust and poor service delivery and community engagement have fueled many service delivery protests across the country. Continued weak service delivery undermines trust in government and breeds anger in underserved communities. By most measures, citizens are growing ever more doubtful of the ability of the government to meet their needs. Respondents 5 and 6 believe that the IDP will be necessary in allowing the government to better understand the people's needs and ensure corruption is addressed through legal frameworks.

“The IDP will bring the government closer to the people, improving the climate for future service delivery efforts. “It fosters greater localized partnerships and involvement, key components of modernization ideas and decisions. Public participation in IDP development restricts the room for corruption and ensures that municipal officials do not deviate from their formal legal responsibilities; including community people in the picture is essential because no municipal officials will risk engaging in corrupt activities if the public is watching”. (R5 & 6)

The above narration is supported by Kamal & Arifin (2019), who states that community participation is needed to prevent and eradicate corruption. Public participation in efforts to prevent and eradicate criminal acts of corruption is manifested in the form of data search, acquisition, and provision of data on corruption. In addition, the community has the right to provide advice and opinions responsibly to prevent and eradicate corruption. Public participation in local government processes, especially in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), is imperative to promoting institutional democracy. The IDP as a development tool promotes participatory democracy (Mac Kay, 2004)

In the literature review, it was revealed that public participation is crucial to effective service delivery. This was further narrated by respondents 7 & 8 below:

“If communities are actively involved in developing the IDP, the participant believes that openness and accountability will be strengthened. Moreover, Because the municipality cannot afford to meet all the community's requirements, the community will express their most pressing concerns, and the municipality will address them in order of priority. During the IDP meeting, community members will boost the priority level”. (R7 & 8).

Participants 1 and 4 mentioned that community participation in IDP development is intended to help communities define their needs, expectations, and aspirations. Respondent 2 replied that public engagement is critical in ensuring the community receives the most outstanding possible service. Respondent 3 believes that the public knows their participation role since they know that IDP is the vehicle through which services are delivered. Respondent 4 believes that community needs cannot be met because only political considerations are considered. Respondent 5 believes IDP is to bring the government closer to the people. Respondents 6 and 7 indicated that IDP development restricts the room for corruption and ensures that municipal officials do not deviate from their duties and ensure accountability. Respondent 8 noted that the municipality should prioritise the needs of community members from ward to ward. This was consistent with Khawula (2016), who indicates that an IDP is a master plan for an area that lays out a broad framework for growth. Its goal is to bring together the efforts of local and other levels of government in a cohesive strategy to improve the quality of life for all residents in each area.

Challenges concerning public participation in the development of Integrated Development plan.

To ensure effective development, the public's participation becomes essential. However, public participation must be seen in collaboration. That is, public participation ought to be supported by relevant legislation, however, challenges persist, as narrated by respondent 1 below:

“The main challenge that they face is that the wards are found in the local municipalities, “they don't have wards at the district level, and the communities that are needed to participate in IDP are in the wards as a district municipality is very hard for us to just go to the wards without the local municipality”. (R1)

The lack of communication at the local government was another operational challenge. President Cyril Ramaphosa

argued that accountable, accessible, and reachable leadership is critical to a well-run local government in the country. Therefore, people need to be always at the centre of development. Respondents 2,3 & 4 contended that the selected district municipality is bound to assist a municipality in category B. The respondents noted that:

“The local municipality under the selected district municipality should always be ready to ensure any challenges related to service delivery. This will ensure that the selected district municipality can support the successful implementation of the IDP”. (R2,3, & 4)

The above is supported by the argument of [Bachelet \(2019\)](#), who notes that Local governments are in contact with people in the most direct way. They receive demands, claims, and complaints from residents while developing and enacting policies that directly affect lives. Therefore, addressing issues in the local community through adequate policy support and development becomes vital. However, despite the plea for public participation, challenges remain. Respondents 3 & 4 narrated this below.”

“The issue is that ward committees are elected, but they do not stay around once they are elected, they move to town, and we are unable to contact them when we require services or ways to fulfil our role in attending this meeting. Furthermore, political allegiance is a concern in every element of every municipality from cadre deployment to public participation in the IDP, this means the lack of accountability will carry on crippling service delivery”. (R3 & Y4)

The major obstacle in South Africa's public sector is the issue of cadre deployment. [Mlambo et al. \(2022\)](#) argue that effective delivery will continue to hinder the quest for inclusive development without addressing the elephant in the room, cadre deployment. However, respondent 5 offered a different view and noted that:

“Party affiliation is not a problem in the IDP; other parties have protested about being neglected, but I believe it is simply the opposition being the opposition, always crying about something”. (R5)

Respondent 6 believes that municipalities at times deviate from what needs the of the community needs as narrated below:

“When municipalities deliver services, they do not adhere to what is agreed on it during IDP meetings; instead, the municipality ignores what the community wants by delivering the needs that are documented in the IDP; as a result, meetings tend to be discussing similar needs and demands every financial year, which are not addressed”. (R6)

However, respondent 7 argues that while, to some extent, deviation does take place, respondent reasons that frequent strikes and protests are the biggest threat to service delivery. The respondent narrated that:

“The most significant challenges to IDP development are service delivery strikes and protests. This is because these tend to be violent, with community members destroying services such as infrastructure, roads, and schools, as well as looting, and this will only be addressed with thought coordination communication between locals and authorities. (R7)

Respondent 8 was also concerned about how public members engage in the IDP when they are concerned and believe that members of the public should be included throughout the process.

“Because they cannot speak for themselves, the participants think their lack of participation jeopardises community needs. Participants feel that the IDP is a platform where the community may identify their requirements and that the municipality will make its judgments if they do not want to participate”.

Respondents 1 and 2 indicated that the selected district Municipality is a category C municipality which makes it challenging to meet with their wards, but they rely on their local municipalities. Respondents 4 and 5 disagree and believe municipal leaders prioritize political affiliation over the people. Respondent 6 noted that the biggest challenge is that the municipality does not adhere to what is agreed upon during IDP meetings. In contrast, Respondent 7 feels that service delivery protests are the most problematic element because after they have ended, the municipality must start afresh building roads (and repairing destroyed infrastructure) that were not part of the IDP. Respondent 8 emphasized the importance of the public participating in the IDP development process throughout. Respondent 3 worries that ward committee members may move to the cities once elected. The finding aligns with literature by [Creighton \(2005\)](#), who asserted that the most common concern with community participation in municipalities is ensuring that those who participate in such programmes are truly representative of the public, as failure to do so will have an impact on how those who are represented perceive themselves.

Effective techniques for increasing participation in the integrated development plan

There is a need to ensure that service becomes critical towards the country's development. Having discussed the challenges and need for IDP, there is a need for the public to be involved in every step of development, planning and implementation and the need to ensure effected consolidation. There have been increasing talks as to how can be improved. Respondents 1 and 2 argue that:

“Public participation can be improved by the municipality placing a high value on public participation in IDP development. The respondents believe that as a member of the community, the public must be at the forefront of engagement in the IDP's participation. Municipalities should treat IDPs as democratic decision-making platforms, allowing community members to democratically participate”. (R1 & 2)

Therefore, it becomes vital to ensure that public participation is consolidated to successfully implement the IDP. Public participation in policy decision-making and local governance is regarded as a critical principle of constitutional democracy ([Lesia, 2011](#)).

Communication is vital. It is essential to ensure IDP can be characterized by frequent communication so that beneficiaries understand their role in the process. Respondents 3 and 4 narrated that:

The municipality must have a definite time to begin projects to address the community's requirements. This will allow community members and the

municipality to collaborate if projects are not delivered on time. Thus, communication should be at the forefront between the locals and those implementing the project. (R3 & 4)

The communities play a vital role in preparing, implementing and reviewing the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). Therefore, there is a vital need to ensure that developmental projects align with the needs of communities. However, there was also the view that municipalities should go beyond their mandates to ensure development. Mehlahe (2022) supports this and asserts that community participation in the IDP processes was viewed as one of the ways of enabling interaction between local government and citizens. However, citizens faced challenges in community participation, which impacted the level of community participation.

There is a need to ensure that communication between locals and the authorities becomes competent to build a consolidated relationship characterized by trust. However, there was also the assertion that access to education was essential in ensuring communities understand the role and importance of IDP. These were further exhibited by respondents 5 and 7 below.

“The municipality must respect the public's wishes by implementing much more of what was agreed upon in the IDP meetings. If any adjustments are needed, the municipality should communicate with the public again so that they gain trust in the municipality and have the desire to participate in municipal affairs, particularly in the IDP development. More education is needed in the IDP development for the community to understand where the process starts and when it will end and know the structures they must use to ensure effective service delivery. Education will also assist the community in knowing which structures they can use if what is documented in the IDP is not achieved”. (R5 & 7)

Education has become an important contributor to economic development, allowing people to play a meaningful role in development. Service delivery is also driven by different interests' groups, which are vital in promoting public participation, as reflected by respondent 6:

“Individuals commonly participate in grassroots interest groups or influence organisations to increase public participation in IDP development, and these groups should be targeted to enable people to participate in municipal affairs. Interest groups and pressure groups try to sway public policy in their preferred direction. Since civic associations have been essential players in developing a tradition of activity in civil society, this is a central public involvement for them”.

To consolidate public participation respondent 8 narrates:

“To promote public participation, the municipality should develop ward clusters, which are small groupings of community wards near one another. Participants feel that if IDP meetings are scheduled by ward clusters rather than the entire municipality, community members can attend since they will be travelling a shorter distance, and decentralization of the community necessitates efficient municipal attention”.

Respondents 1, 2, and 6 believe municipalities should treat IDPs as democratic decision-making platforms and use interest groups or influence organizations to increase public participation and meeting frequently. Whereas respondent 4 encourages the

municipality to publicize the information and garner their support. Respondent 5 believes that the municipality must respect the public's wishes by implementing much more of what was agreed upon in the IDP meetings. Respondent number 7 reflects that education is needed in the implementation of IDP and to ensure the community is aware of what is happening. Respondent 8 believes that ward clusters will help the municipality. The finding was consistent with what Ndou (2019) communicated, identifying public participation as an essential feature of local democracy and participatory local governance and community organizations' involvement in local government issues is a step in the right direction.

This study discovered that the most critical finding in the roles of public participation in developing an Integrated Development Plan is for the public to distinguish their needs and ensure that the municipality accounts for their actions. The community should exercise their democratic role by participating in developing the IDP, and the municipality must ensure that its administration is honest and accountable, among other things (Scheepers, 2015). The role of public participation is to assist the municipality in delivering public services and prioritising community fundamental requirements to ensure inclusive development. One of the roles played by public participation in the IDP is to bring the municipality to the people they serve. Communities in the selected district Municipality are being informed, consulted, and allowed to participate in the planning process affecting their needs and future. As a result, municipalities should coordinate the IDP and ensure proper participation from all stakeholders in the area. This procedure can potentially empower the community and increase their ability to impact the IDP process meaningfully. Participation of citizens in IDP processes is seen as one strategy to facilitate engagement between local government and citizens.

It was discovered that political leaders are abusing their power by using platforms created for the public to further their political agendas. The study discovered that service delivery protests are a significant challenge for IDP development, like ward committee members moving to suburbs once elected, making it difficult for the community to locate them. Another challenge is that the municipality cannot reach out to the community. It was also discovered that the municipality faces obstacles in addressing the same demands because the municipality lacks a good platform for sharing vital information with the public and also because the municipality lacks responsibility in terms of redressing broken commitments. The study discovered there is more to be done to increase participation. The municipality should set time frames on what they are going to do, how is it going to be done, who is involved what role should be played by the community. It was also discovered that target groups could be used to enable people to participate in municipal affairs such as civic organisations. In addition, the municipality should treat IDP development as a democratic decision-making platform.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the Role of Public Participation in Developing an Integrated Development Plan (IDP). Public participation has a significant role in bridging the gap between communities and municipalities, as it allows for more public participation in developing the integrated development plan (IDP). However, while there is a higher grasp of the concept and its value, this is not matched by programme execution,

particularly in towns. The conclusion is obtained from the outcomes of the research conducted in municipalities to evaluate the effectiveness of public participation programmes in service delivery, and it is based on this statement. The study discovered that most of the public participates in the development of IDPs, but that some are still unaware of the importance of public participation. In addition, the inaccuracy of relevant information regarding public participation in the IDP process prevents some public members from actively participating in the IDP process. The people of the selected district Municipality believe they are part of the IDP process.

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