

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT:  
A CASE STUDY OF WARD COMMITTEES  
IN UMHLATHUZE MUNICIPALITY

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***Declaration***

I, Kwandakwethu Kwanele Zulu, declare that:

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## **ABSTRACT**

Apartheid prevented the participation of the majority of the population in South Africa in governance. In 1994, with the apartheid regime's demise, South Africa entered into a democratic era. Ward committees were one of the structures that were introduced to enhance public participation at the local level of government. This study aimed to explore and understand the effectiveness of public participation through ward committees in local government in uMhlathuze Municipality. This study explored the challenges that ward committees experienced in effectively fulfilling their public participation duties, especially in policy-making and in the implementation of service delivery demands for their communities. This study aimed to unveil the views and insights of ward committees, community leaders and ward members on uMhlathuze municipality on the limitations that exist in the public participation procedures within their community. Using qualitative methods, the researcher gathered data through in-depth interviews with 22 participants drawn from ward committees, community members and municipal officials. This study used content and thematic analysis to analyse the data. The study in uMhlathuze Municipality indicated that ward committees are an essential structure which can improve public participation in local government. However, the study revealed that there are multiple disablements which contribute to the dysfunction of ward committees and a communication breakdown between the municipality and the community.

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## List of Acronyms

ANC	– African National Congress
BCMM	– Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality
CBPs	– Community Based Plans
COGTA	– Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
DPLG	– Department of Provincial and Local Government
ECOC	– European Capital of Culture
EPG	– Empowered Participatory Governance
IDP	– Integrated Development Planning
KZN	– KwaZulu-Natal
LED	– Local Economic Development
MFMA	– Municipal Finance Management Act
NDP	– National Development Plan
NGO	– Non-Governmental Organisations
RSA	– Republic of South Africa
SALS	– South African Legislative Sector
SDGs	– Sustainable Development Goals
UN	– United Nations
UNESCO	– United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WPLG	– White Paper on Local Government (1998)

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1. Introduction**

This chapter introduces the key aspects that guided this research. It provides the basic tenets of this study and outlines the key ideas and guidelines that informed the research. The study explored the role of public participation in the governance of local municipalities in South Africa with particular reference to a case study of ward committees in the uMhlathuze municipality in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province. The study explored public participation and its impact on the advancement of democracy and development. Therefore, this chapter presents an orientation of the research background and an understanding of public participation in democratic South Africa. This chapter sets out the rationale of the study, the research objectives and research questions. The significance of the research and the delimitations of the research are also noted. The overall structure of the dissertation and the summary of this chapter are also presented.

### **1.1. Research Background**

Public participation is the process of engaging people in deciding, planning, and playing an active role in the development and operation of services (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000). It is meant to promote good governance, transparency and accountability (Cloete, 2012). In the South African context, public participation was historically absent due to apartheid which prevented the participation of the majority population in legitimate governance. The right of meaningful participation in governance was for the privileged, minority of whites. In 1994, with the apartheid regime's demise, South Africa entered a democratic era. Decentralization was the primary tool of the new democratic government to enhance inclusive public participation. According to the Department of Provincial and Local Government (2007), local government was meant to improve the quality of essential services provision. The Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (hereafter referred to as the Structures Act) and the Municipal Systems Act of 2000 (hereafter referred to as the Systems Act) were promulgated to guide local government. Ward committees were one of the structures that were introduced to enhance public participation at the local sphere. Ward committees must comprise various members

representing women, youth, the disabled, religious, education, and traditional leaders, and they must not exceed ten members. A ward committee consists of 10 representatives that the community members elect and the ward councillor chairs the committee (Municipal Systems Act, 2000). The ward committees act as the mediators between the community and the local government officials by incorporating the voices of the people in regard to appropriate development and projects that need to take place in the community (Republic of South Africa Municipal Systems Act, 1998). Nzimakwe and Reddy (2008) supported this view in their study based on the municipal council of Tshwane, concluding that ward committees had a positive influence on the municipal council and the ward committee structure enhanced public participation. Although this study focuses on uMhlathuze Municipality, it is important to draw parallel lines with other municipals, such as Tshwane, uMsunduzi and Buffalo to understand the relationship between municipal councils and ward committee structures.

Madumo (2011) has noted that the efficiency of the ward committees in South Africa is reliant upon the effectiveness of their established portfolios and that the failures in a particular portfolio will extent to undesirable sway on the improvement of the ward committees. Naidu (2008) contends that ward committees can be measured as the solitary feasible instrument to guarantee efficiency through which residents are invested to participate in the development programme. However, Smith and De Visser (2009) contend that part of the problem is that these structures are seen as dysfunctional and fail to promote public participation at the local level. The authors add that there are various reasons that make ward committees dysfunctional including the lack of skills in terms of communicating and working with the community, and some of the elected members are not educated about the expectations of ward committees.

Ward committees are identified to be lacking in skills resulting in negative outcomes as most members do not understand their roles (Sekgala, 2016; Taaibosch & van Niekerk, 2017). Previous studies indicate that some ward committees are political forums that facilitate the mandate of political parties (Reddy & Sikhakhane, 2008). Piper and Nadvi (2010:212) observed ward committees in eThekweni and uMsunduzi municipalities and indicated there is "a lack of genuine will on the part of elites and the relative power of key social actors mean that, in practice, they are either meaningless processes or simply co-opted by political parties." Ward committees do not uphold their obligation because they are concerned about political affiliation. Ward committees consist of different members of different political parties within the community. This has made it difficult for the committees to uphold their mandate. The

reason is that the ward includes different people from various political parties which results in political conflict (Piper and Deacon, 2009). Due to political considerations, ward committees end up choosing people according to political affiliation. Thus, the ward committees end up working in favour of political parties and most people within the community disengage themselves because they feel excluded (Naidoo & Rampal, 2018).

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

The inclusive role of the municipal co-ordination in South Africa is increasingly undermined due to the exclusion of ward committees in the policy-making process. Ward committees are vital to public participation in South Africa's local governance. The Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998) established ward committees as the vehicle to institute and promote participatory democracy that emphasizes the deepening of democratic development through public participation. However, the inadequacy of basic services provision has increased drastically, and people are not considered in decision making on project and policy formulation as it relates to their environment (Narsiah, 2017). Hence, one would be concerned regarding the functionality of local government structures as ward committees are expected to bridge the gap between the municipality and community needs, specifically in regard to the provision of basic services.

The role of ward committees in improving public participation has been 'disempowered' by various impediments and limitations which include the lack of access to information, insufficient administrative and other resources, and poor relationships between ward councillors and ward committees (Himlin, 2005; Piper & Deacon, 2009 & Sekgala, 2016). Studies indicate that ward councillors often serve the interests of their political parties in advancing policies rather than the advice and benefits of the community as expressed by the ward committees (Sekgala, 2016). Moreover, Maphazi (2012) alluded to public participation tactics which were insufficient and shown a negative affiliation among government officials, ward councillors and ward committee members. Furthermore, he argued that political affiliations, lack of capacity among stakeholders and the lack of commitment on the part of the municipality to prioritize public consultation negatively impeded the efficiency of public participation through ward committees. In this regard, one notes that there is no guarantee that issues discussed by the ward committees and their ward councillors that are in the best interest of the community will be discussed and implemented at the municipal level. As a result, the

views often expressed through ward committees are prematurely aborted and disengaged, frustrating the processes of citizen participation in democracy and development. Thus, communities might often end up protesting when local governments do not take into consideration their basic service needs.

In the light of the information presented in the paragraphs above, my study finds it essential to explore the impediments that ward committees faced in conducting and fulfilling their responsibilities. The city is located northwest coast of KwaZulu-Natal province. It was established in December 2005 following the demarcation process. It has the deepest harbour in the continent. The city of uMhlatuze comprise of 34 wards with an approximate population of 384 449 (Stats SA, 2011) In the case of uMhlatuze municipality, the established structures to enhance development are seen to be clouded by the impediments referred to above since communities are still experiencing the lack of water, sanitation, electricity, proper health care, and social and recreational facilities. Cele's (2015) study on service delivery in uMhlatuze municipality revealed that the exclusion of community participation is the result of the breakdown in the relationship among citizens, policymakers and government officials. Citizens were expected to rubberstamp what the leadership had decided on. Cele also revealed that the issue of poor service delivery on the part of the municipality was raised from the Year 2006. This study seeks to identify the problems and to explore workable public participation measures that can be put in place to enhance the role of ward committees in ensuring citizens' voices in local development practice and policy-making processes.

### **1.3. Study Rationale**

There are various studies that discuss the relationship between public participation and ward committees in South Africa. Existing studies indicate the lack of effective interaction between ward committees and policy-making processes. However, there is a very limited number of studies that provide qualitative views on the experiences and views of citizens and community leaders (via ward committees, traditional leaders, civil society and political leaders) regarding public participation in their municipality. Therefore, my research is a contextual study that seeks to explain ward committee members' experiences and the role of public participation in 'the uMhlatuze Municipality given that no studies of this nature have been carried out in this Municipality. It is envisaged that this study will provide primary evidence that can help

policymakers in devising a more interactive system in engaging the views of the public in development planning and policy-making processes.

#### **1.4. Research Objectives**

The study aims to explore the effectiveness of public participation through ward committees in local government in uMhlathuze. The objectives of the study are to:

- examine the level of compliance of ward committees with the legislation and regulations on public participation, transparency and access to basic services in uMhlathuze municipality;
- explore the effectiveness of municipal communication strategies in ensuring that ward committees and municipal councillors interact effectively with residents of the uMhlathuze municipality;
- examine the effectiveness of the public systems to report or complain about ward committees and ward councillors in uMhlathuze municipality;
- identify and assess the procedures that ward committees use to report back to the community and address community concerns regarding basic services provision in uMhlathuze municipality; and
- draw conclusions and recommendations that may positively contribute to the improvement of ward committees in executing their duties.

#### **1.5. Research Questions**

The following key questions will inform this research on public participation in ward committees in local government in the uMhlathuze municipality;

1. What is the level of compliance by ward committees with legislation and regulations about public participation, transparency and access to basic services?
2. How effective are municipal communication strategies in ensuring that ward committees and municipal councillors interact effectively with the residents?
3. What systems are in place for the public to report or complain about ward committees and municipal councillors, and how effectively do these systems operate?

4. How do ward committees report back to the community to address community concerns regarding basic services provision?
5. What models can be adopted to promote the effectiveness of ward committees in deepening public participation?

### **1.6. Significance of the Study**

This study contributes and promotes the knowledge and practice of active public participation in a local municipality in South Africa. It helps in shaping the democratic quality at the local scale and suggests ways of improving the role of citizens in participating in the development and policy-making processes in their communities. Ward committees are critical vehicles for public participation in promoting growth and development, and democracy at the local government sphere in South Africa. This study explores the challenges that affect the role of ward committees in fulfilling their public participation duties, especially in policy-making and implementation of the community's service delivery demands. This study aims to unveil the views and insights of ward committees, community leaders and members on the limitations that exist in the public participation procedures within their community. Previous studies suggest that policy-making processes at the local government are highly exclusionary of views from ward committees due to competing political interests by ward councillors. Therefore, this study examines the role of ward committees towards active public participation in policy-making and development practices within selected communities in the uMhlathuze Municipality as a case study.

### **1.7. Delimitation of the Study**

This study focuses on the uMhlathuze Municipality which is geographically located in north of KwaZulu- Natal Province, South Africa. This study holds a contextual, case study method. The study gathered relevant primary data from the uMhlathuze municipality through interviews. The study also explored the literature on public participation and ward committees from various local, regional and global sources.

## **1.8. Structure of the Dissertation**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter introduced the background to the study as well as the research problem. This chapter points out the importance of researching the proposed title and problematizes the issue under investigation. The chapter outlines the significance of the study, including the importance of engagement of societal representation in matters of development and service provision at the local scale. .

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This chapter reviews the literature on public participation and ward committees. The literature review provides the background of the research problem and engages the key objectives of the study. It furthers explores the theoretical framework that guides the research and its application to the study.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

The section outlines how the study was conducted, and the research method and strategies adopted. The use of a qualitative approach and the associated data collection techniques adopted in this study are discussed in the methodology chapter.

### **Chapter 4: Results Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

This chapter presents the findings from the field research. The data collected from interviews and other sources are analyzed using thematic analyses. The analyses include inducing and establishing themes and coding the data.

### **Chapter 5: Research Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter included summarizing the main points, ideas, and findings of this study by way of concluding and offering a recommendation.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **2. Introduction**

Public participation plays a key role when it comes to governance. It is concerned with involving, informing and consulting the public in the planning, management and other decision-making activities that can be considered as part of the political process. This in turn encourages and provides chances for the public to communicate their views, and for governments to learn about the opinions of the public and to find opportunities to build a bridge between the two entities. A sense of recognition and importance can be instilled on the part of the public and this can also be beneficial directly or indirectly to government. Therefore, my research is a contextual study that seeks to explain ward committee members' experiences and the role of public participation in 'the uMhlathuze Municipality given that no studies of this nature have been carried out in this Municipality. It is envisaged that this study will provide primary evidence that can help policymakers in devising a more interactive system in engaging the views of the public in development planning and policy-making processes.

The initial part of this chapter presents a literature review on public participation in local government and the nature of ward committees. Second, this chapter presents and discusses the key policy and legislative frameworks on public participation in South Africa. It also explores how the idea of public participation is shaped as a democratic process within the local government framework and how key strategic procedures are structured for implementation in local government. Last, it provides a detailed discussion on how Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) as a theoretical framework analyses public participation in local government through ward committees.

#### **2.1. Global Views on Public Participation**

Public participation is of great importance globally. Public participation plays a key role in democracy (Bellamy, 2012). According to Papadopoulos (2003), this conception of participation is grounded in the ideas of 'democracy', 'governance' and cooperative political organisation. The main aim of public participation is to increase the transparency of management, improve accountability and improve democratic legitimacy (Birch, 2002; Sintomer, Herzberg & Röcke 2008; Sintomer & Maillard, 2007). The idea of democracy as

enshrined in public participation is a universal value based on the free will of people (African Charter on Human and People's Rights, 1981; European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950; International Bill of Human Rights, 1948; 1966; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966). In this respect, people are empowered to determine their political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of their lives (General Assembly Resolution, 2010). The foundation of any democratic system lies in the protection of basic human rights for all (Art, 1999; Donnelly, 1999), including minorities, who should have their proportionate share in the exercise of power, along with the right to have their interests carefully considered if it is threatened in proposed legislation and the practice of their own culture (Lister, 2012). A study steered by the European Institute for Public Participation, EIPP 2009 in the United Kingdom discovered that the public officials and politicians did not want to engage the citizens in the policy development processes because they believed that the matters of policy formulation were too intricate for non-specialists to comment on. A study conducted in the Philippines by Marzuki (2015) that analysed public participation in a Metro Housing project revealed that the public's lack of knowledge and education posed huge difficulties for participation. Marzuki (2015:30) states that even though the government encouraged the public to get involved and the public were also willing to participate, the situation turned into a timewasting process of adapting due to lack of understanding from the public.

International experience has shown that citizen or community participation is an essential part of effective and accountable governance at the local level. In Europe, for example, Spain has expanded community participation (Sintomer et al., 2008) and has managed to solve the problem of inclusion (Dryzek, 2000). Around the world, there is a substantial literature on the legal and policy arrangements for citizens' participation in different countries. Eldias (2016), for example, reveals how international experience has shown that one way of achieving successful and lasting models to ensure that citizen participation takes place is through establishing structured and institutionalized frameworks for participatory local governance.

In the theoretical landscape, participation is defined and used in a variety of ways. These include (but are not limited to) ones that insist on the democratic character of the concept – the empowering involvement of citizens in equal decision making – and ones that focus on collective experiences, belonging and identities. In this way, public participation minimizes disputes by creating a process for resolving issues before they become polarized (Williams,

Denny, & Bristow, 2019). Complementary views can be drawn from Maloney and Rossteutscher (2007) and Morales (2009). These authors reiterate that public participation is an act of protest which suggests that human beings often participate owing to conformity to the group. Against this backdrop, public participation can therefore be referred to as public participation, community involvement or stakeholder involvement. Fishkin (2015) critic contends that citizens are not given any meaningful popular control in the decision-making processes and that transparency is not realised, because citizens are unaware of how their contributions will be incorporated into decisions. Whereas Dryzek (2000:17) argues that extra constitutional imperatives of the state such as protection of capital accumulation limit the potential decision making.

In achieving public participation through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a global context Barbera, Jones, Korac, Saliterer & Steccolini (2019) believe that there is a need for local government to go beyond just decentralizing services and policymaking; rather a deep engagement of intervention of decentralized activities is needed. Hence, countries such as Tanzania have shown advanced and transformed ways in achieving the true definition of participatory governance where local government is the central unit driving a devolved system (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019). However, in countries such as Kenya, the powers of local government are externally controlled by international agencies and various donors (Beisheim, Ellersiek, Goltermann & Kiamba, 2017). Macia (2016:11) mentions that during the drafting of the Constitution in Eritrea in 1997, the level of education across the nation was very low which made civic education an imperative to include the people to participate in the drafting process. Instructors were, organised to conduct town meetings and public seminars in the villages to educate the people. The acclaimed decentralization in these countries can be described as *phony* and counter-productive (Mhandu, 2016). This means that countries such as Kenya only have administrative power, and the devolution of power and management is still centralized to international agencies, donors and global financial institutions. Whereas The government of Lesotho espoused public participation as a principle of democracy by involving the public in the formulation of the Lesotho National Decentralisation Policy. *“We have formulated this policy through a highly participatory and consultative process. The policy statements and strategic actions contained in this policy therefore reflect the aspirations of Basotho, Government of Lesotho’s priorities for decentralization and inputs from our development partners”*, (Government of Lesotho 2014: viii). Irrespective of the abovementioned counterargument, through the progression of policymaking in a democratic

governance system, the participation of the affected or slightly apprehensive citizens still remains unavoidable. In South Africa, community participation is recognized as being compulsory, as acknowledged in Section 16 of South Africa's Municipal Systems Act No. 72 of 2000, where it states that a municipality are supposed to develop a culture of municipal governance. In Europe, there is a demand for institutions to engage citizens as active participants. In the wake of the political and economic crisis of the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, many social and political institutions seem to have lost legitimacy. This is especially visible in the rise of populist, anti-institutional and anti-establishment movements across Europe and in efforts to reduce these by involving citizens, creating social cohesion and increasing people's influence on their own lives. The problems of the declining social cohesion and public engagement are to be tackled through Municipalities. They try to reach out to and 'include' new and maybe marginalized audience groups, to turn users and audiences into active 'participants,' and to involve citizens with a variety of expectations and that their contributions make a visible difference.

The Working Group on Programme Harmonization (1978) indicated that what gave a clear understanding of popular participation was the collective efforts by individuals united to pool their efforts and resources with the aim to attain established objectives they set for themselves. This argument also finds complementarity in Kumar (2002) and Morales (2009). These latter authors are of the view that participation deals with encouraging participants to take initiatives and actions stimulated by their thinking and deliberation, and taking ownership of those issues over which they could exert effective control. Being involved in decision making generally augments a sense of ownership and citizens are likely to protect what they believe is theirs. Fishkin (2015:436) argue that citizens are motivated or competent to participate effectively, but rather that participation will have little or no effect on political decisions, citizen's viewpoints will be ignored or the process and result of participation will be manipulated by political authorities to suit their own interest.

The Danish city of Aarhus in 2012 applied to become the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) in 2017, emphasizing the inclusivity of citizen consultation processes leading to the bid. The participatory process was one way of demonstrating Aarhus' interest in answering what the applicants saw as a general need "to look at new models for citizenship, to make it easier for citizens to assume roles of responsibility within society. Formal political systems no longer

claimed to engage citizens sufficiently; thus, this democratic deficit needed to be addressed” (Aarhus, 2012: 7).

In the 1990s, Brazil presented a method termed Participatory Budgeting (PB). People were involved in the budget procedure at the local sphere of government and were given a chance to state their views to their metropolitan representatives every year. This exercise confirmed that the participation of people could result in a comprehensive procedure and the active arranging of metropolitan resources. "Through the PB, grassroots communities began increasingly to exercise their 'voice' in budget allocation, in the process shifting public goods to some of the city's most impoverished communities" (Melgar, 2014:129). The participatory budgeting method is an example of how direct participation by people in government issues can result in further operational service distribution and better social inclusion.

## **2.2. Public Participation in South Africa**

The South African government, since democracy has been trying to find ways to enhance public participation. The transformation route for effective public participation has been indecisive and has shed the spotlight on local government as a way to develop new ideas to improve the inclusion of people in decision making. To understand the effectiveness of public participation in South Africa provides a nuanced conceptualization of public participation. Public participation can be appreciated as a process that allows individuals to exchange their views to influence decision making (South African Legislative Sector, 2013). Authors such as Rowe and Frewer (2005) define public participation as a procedure that recognizes the inclusion of citizens in decision making. However, public participation in South Africa is influenced by different policies.

Nanz and Dalferth (2010) conceptualize as the all-encompassing process where various parties of the community are involved in developmental programmes, projects and policymaking processes established for social change. Creighton (2005) argues that public participation improves the quality of resolutions and obscurity can be unfurnished in position with the needs as deliberated by citizens. According to Nyalunga (2006), pre-1994, the South African administration had loopholes in constituting inclusive public participation as there were no policies to enhance public inclusion in local government. During colonialism and apartheid, public participation was not recognized and policies were based on racial discrimination

(Davids, Theron and Maphunye, 2005). It has been said that policies adopted by these two systems allowed individual 'superior' citizens to participate, whereas the poor were marginalized in public decision making.

Public participation is the process where the public can participate in deliberating straight to policymaking. Piper and Deacon (2009) argue that 'community participation' or public participation' are alternative terms for 'public governance.' They argue that community or public participation is not about representative democracy but about how municipalities are governed. It speaks to the relationship that exists between the government and those that are being governed, helping promote a more interactive and constructive relationship and development between the government and the governed. This means the views and interests of the governed are well-considered and valued in decision making by the government than in the past.

Scholars note that public participation in South Africa is a mandatory process in the many statutory municipal processes, including budgeting, development planning and service delivery agreements (Naidoo & Ramphal, 2018; Piper & Deacon, 2009; Sekgala, 2016). As a result, participation in local government has well-articulated frameworks that are fostered through the preparation, implementation and review of a municipal Integrated Development Plan in terms of Section 16 of the Municipal Systems Act, 2000. Despite the possibility that there are several occasions where the execution of public participation delays in most South African municipalities, the ideals of legislation and policy have never before been democratic and lawful, with encouragement to citizens to participate actively in local governance (Freedom House, 2017; Habib, 2014; Patel, 2012).

The core principle of democracy further highlights the importance of public participation in social development projects and decision-making processes (Yengwa, 2004). Colebatch (2002) agrees with this assertion, describing what is called "horizontal mechanism" as the vital tool that ensures social inclusion in policy-making processes and successful public participation which includes sanctioning an interaction between citizens, organizations, government officials and private stakeholders. Hence, this is supported by the South African government slogan, "from the people to government". To guarantee the effectiveness of social structures to bring about social development, local government must comply with this constitutional requirement of active public participation, not as rubberstamping but through participatory governance. Public participation includes delegating and sharing power through empowering

citizens to control and supersede community-initiated developments and develop capacity building towards promoting state-building (World Bank, 1996).

According to Putu (2006), public participation embraces the strength, quality and relevance that enable social programmes to achieve sustainability, while Tau (2013) believes that public participation increases transparency in the decision-making processes. Putu (2006) added that the power and activity of the citizens in the community hold the government officials accountable for their decisions. The adoption of public participation creates and promotes social cohesion, thereby establishing solutions to solve social problems that are an integral part of people's lives. Public participation ensures that from the different levels, the view of the officials, citizens, organizations and private affiliates can provide the coherent means through which most community needs would be appropriately addressed (Taylor, 2008).

The rise of the democratic government after the fall of the apartheid regime meant that the new government was obliged to establish platforms for public participation as a way to address past injustices of social exclusion (Nyalunga, 2006). According to Davids et al. (2005) the coherent plan of promoting public participation and social inclusion entailed creating partnerships in different systems which includes local economic development (LED), integrated development planning (IDP) and also public-private partnerships as they are seen as legitimate. Piper and Von Lieres (2008) argue that due to poor implementation, a lack of political will and poor design of public participation, institutions have undermined local government operations to date. Holdar and Zakharchenko (2002) state that citizens do not understand their rights and responsibilities. As a result, they are not able to express their ideas and concerns, and hence the promotion of citizen participation is obstructed. It is evident there exists various impediments which suppress the process of public participation in South Africa and the whole world in general, but hope still lingers since in countries such as Brazil (e.g., in the region of Porto Alegre) and India (as in the state of Kerala) public participation has been successful with participatory budgeting being fruitful (Piper and Lieres, 2008).

Ceaser and David (2007) mention that the benefits of public participation are reaped through better project planning, implementation and enhanced service delivery. This is the only tool that facilitates democratic values such as social inclusion, hence promoting state-building by considering the input of ideas at the primary ground-level. Public participation in local government is recognized as the main cure that promotes the effectiveness of good governance, and also through public participation social protest would be reduced (Masinga, 2005). These

lines of thought also find complementarity in the works of Fung and Wright (2003a). The latter authors unpack the communicative character of public participation which they refer to as Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG). For them, EPG is a way to make the decision-making process more participatory in local government. Finally, Booysen (2009) suggests that communicative participation is used to engage and inform citizens on government policymaking processes, programmes, and related citizen's rights and benefits. To protest is a direct reaction of citizens to unsatisfactory government administration, poor service delivery and non-accountability of public representatives. In South Africa, there has been a noticeable rise in these protests since 2004 (Booyesen, 2009).

### **2.3. Understanding Citizen Participation**

Reflecting on the ladder of citizen participation proposed by Arnstein (1969), one understands the roles and procedures that are important for effective public participation. Tracing the ladder of citizen participation helped to unpack the essential ideas that should guide democratic participation and challenge the existing limitations affecting ward committees in uMhlatuze Municipality and South African municipalities generally. Arnstein (1969) developed a ladder of citizen participation to understand how public participation operates. The abovementioned author proposes that "citizen participation is citizen power" and without power, participation would be useless and meaningless. Citizen participation is the redistribution of control and power to groups who were previously marginalized; it enables and empowers them to be socially included in political and economic processes (Arnstein, 1969).

Arnstein's model (1969) further distinguishes citizen power, tokenism, and no power or non-participation. At the bottom of the ladder is "Therapy and Manipulation" whereby citizens' expressions are suppressed; they have no inputs in the developments of the community and are forcefully given the mandate to follow without any question and a platform of consultation. In this mode, citizens are subjected to a top-down approach. The second mode is degrees of tokenism. Arnstein (1969) describes this mode as the level where citizens are consulted and engaged in the process, but still citizens have no power to enforce and influence decision making. In short, citizens are unable to hold officials' accountable and merely rubber-stamp decisions from above. The last level is the mode where citizens have power delegated to them (though no one can have total power). Citizens in this stage have full control and power to



participate in social development programmes, projects and policymaking. All stakeholders at this level contribute to issues that need to be addressed and to reach consensus (Arnstein, 1969).

Arnstein (1969) presented a deliberately provocative take on the relationship between community and government by using a ladder as a metaphor for increasing access to decision-making power. The ladder of participation is useful in describing the level of public participation and shows clearly the difference between actual optimal participation and something that might appear or masquerade as public participation.

The leading activity part in the citizen participation ladder is identified as non-participation or no power entails of the manipulation and therapy practices. The citizens are not granted the power to communicate their perspectives and knowledge on challenges that affect them. This stage is regarded as the sole platform of communication that anticipates educating the citizens. According to Arnstein (2003) maintains that manipulation is a major feature in non-participation or no power stage and thus it is noticeable during meetings where officials or power holders instruct the citizens without engagement. Moreover, at this level power holders are responsible for setting up agendas to completely control meeting and gatherings with citizens. Hence, this is regarded as the top down approach, where power holders are in charge in decision making without involving citizen's views and input. This may cause citizens to typically lose interest in participating in matters that affect them.

Manipulation is a form of participation where the public and the observer are "manipulated" into thinking that public participation is in progress. For example, at meetings of the citizen advisory committees, officials influence the citizens instead of the other way around. Also, community action agencies sometimes set up certain "advisory groups" in a neighbourhood to demonstrate their goodwill to the poor by actually letting them speak but they do not take their contributions into account. This often occurs when an organization has to prove that "real people" are involved in a project even though the project is not discussed with the people. Rather, the organization's vision is forced upon the people. This is also evident in South Africa's (SA) ward committees where the people's influence is largely absent.

As a result of the eight steps of the ladder of citizen participation in regards to the ward governance system, it is apparent that ward committees lack power and therefore some community members lose hope and lacking trust in them in matters related to municipal decision making. Sadly, the majority of ward committee likely to be categorized under non-

participation, simple as a result they are not well informed about their roles and duties. In addition, they function as the adjunct of political parties, are manipulated easily by power holders and they tend to uphold adherent interest (Naidu, 2008). However, for ward committees to achieve their mandate, they must be able create spaces where citizens can able to raise their challenges and drive the decision making. That would be secured as a meaningful involvement to the society and guarantee the municipal improvement of public participation in regards to decision making.

In Arnstein's (2003) Ladder of Citizen Participation tokenism entails informing, consultation, and placation. This is a step where the authorities inform the citizens and acknowledge their contribution. Citizen's participation happens; nonetheless it is the prominent power-holders who set the programme. The contest at this level is that citizens need more capacity to guarantee that their perspectives are considered by power-holders (Arnstein, 2003). The placation procedure better portrays the aim of the enactment on the foundation of ward committees, with Section 74 of the Municipal Structure Act (1998) recognizing that the ward committees may recommend the municipal council on issues that influence their wards. Be that as it may be, ward committees do not have administrative or official capacity to decide

Citizen power is a definitive classification of participation interest where both the citizen and authorities involve each other trying to discover mechanism for a specific issue. It contains three levels, specifically, partnership, delegated power and citizen control (Arnstein, 2003). Through a process of negotiation, power is evenly distributed and mostly defined as the compromise that the power-holders make in an attempt to reach consensus on issues of common interest. According to Creighton (2005), harmony building is essential in public participation as it constructs a concrete communication between the stakeholders and further channel to enhanced decision making. It is the needs of the people that mostly drive citizen power. As a result, citizen control is seen as a significant component of direct democracy.

Participation is featured in a representative democracy where citizens elect their representatives and subsequently hold them accountable for the decisions made on their behalf (Creighton, 2005). This means that the views of the general population should be aired through the elected representatives. Thus, decisions must be in the public interest. Democracy may therefore be defined as the call for citizen power and rule by the citizens. This means that people would have adequate power to governor and make decisions on matters that are of concern to them,

and that citizens are essential bodies in the process of government activities. Consequently, all resolutions taken must be organised by them, or at least involves them.

The theory being explored and its link to public participation and the way ward committees function can be related to Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation that entails three significant aspects with sub-themes. Arnstein (1969) argues that democracy and development cannot be adequately advanced if people are not fully engaged in deciding what they want in their community. People are influenced by different aspects such as resources and the outcomes they might reach; however, if people are not adequately engaged there could be unnecessary and unprecedented problems. The ladder of citizen participation provides insights in critically reviewing the roles of ward committees in SA's local government and the challenges faced in the process.

### **2.3.1. The Role of Ward Committees in SA's Local Government Development**

Public participation is a crucial component that endorses transparent and accountable governance (Nyalunga, 2006). Guha and Chakrabati (2019:61) believe that "rural local government cooperation indicates that the existence of a working relationship, either at interpersonal or at the intergovernmental level, is essential for successful collaboration." The department of provincial and local government established that the central instrument for effective public participation at the local government sphere is the ward committee. According to Piper and Deacon (2009), ward committees are an essential structure of the community that bridges the gap between the masses on the ground and government entities, especially in basic services provision. Kabane (2014) contends that ward committees were established in municipalities as community development structures to assume a fundamental part in connecting and educating the municipality about the necessities, goals, possibilities and issues of the community.

According to White Paper on Local Government (1998) ward committees executes their role and duties guided by ward boundaries as they are area based. They have no essential obligations and forces, thus they built up as the committee that assumes as consultant to the municipal council and other neighbourhood council. It is paramount to highlight that ward committees do not have legal status in the councils. The intent and purpose of ward committees were for the government to harness the capabilities, capacities and innovative ideas from citizens in local

governance and to ensure that service delivery was targeted towards addressing people's needs and aspirations.

Wards were first presented in South Africa during the colonial era in the Cape of Good Hope when the burghers pressed for a more significant share in the government of the Colony. Ward masters governed these wards, and in 1786, a commission of the high court was recognized in the Cape of Good Hope and was successively particular for metropolitan and regulating purposes in 1793 (Craythorne, 1997). The main aim was that all these 23 wards in the Cape should be administered by two ward controllers each, their function ranging from keeping a register of the persons in their wards to reporting on particular municipal or criminal matters to the committee of the high court. However, the role of the ward masters evolved into a specific relation where contact between the people and the municipal commissioners was advanced (Craythorne, 1997). From here above past background it is apparent the ward committees should serve a purpose of representation that is, promoting local participatory democracy. Currently, ward committees are established to ensure contact between the communities and local government institutions, and provide support to the elected councillors to represent specific sectors in a municipal council, as per Part 4 of the Municipal Structures Act, 1998.

One of the ward committees mandate is to ensure that through public participation, the municipality performance is evaluated and monitored. Hence, ward committees hold the responsibility to always track the municipality routine in achieving short and long term deliberate goal, and further influence the implementation of ward-based projects. During community meetings, ward committee present the progression of initiated project within their wards. Moreover, these proposed projects are streamlined with the broader vision of the municipality which is adopted from the Integrated Development Plan. Citizens who have been partaking in the progress of deliberating ideas get motivation to partake in implementation of actions towards achievement of that notion. . In this way, they become the custodians and co-owners of the idea (Condie, 2015; Herman, 2016; UNESCO, 2011).

Research carried out in Buffalo Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) specified that ward councillors engaged ward committees frequently on crucial development projects within the municipality (Ngamlana and Coopoo, 2019). Furthermore, the issues and complains that ward committees rise about these development projects, ward councillors are the one reporting to the municipal council (Ngamlana and Coopoo, 2019). Municipal officials also confirmed that

there was no other system designed to facilitate the wide ranging participation of ward committees and others in the execution and monitoring of the longstanding vision of the municipality (Ngamlana and Coopoo, 2019).

According to Van der Waldt et al, (2018), ward committees can improve correspondence between municipal council and community networks and assume a role in recognising community needs and align the municipality projects to deliver those provisions. In research carried out across South Africa, respondents were requested to highlight the significant successes resulting from effective ward committee functioning. Focus group respondents identified the success of ward committees. These successes included the installation of street lights in some wards, thus minimizing crime at a certain degree. Roads were cemented and walkways were built. Moreover, whereas access to ward committee members was barely possible before, access had now become simpler. . More so, community members were supported in the provision of identity documents, mainly for the aged; toilets were constructed in certain wards, thus improving health; and ward committee members helped community fellows in finishing the indigent grant forms utilised to process accessibility to subsidised electricity from the municipal offices (Van der Waldt et al., 2018).

Deacon (2009) notes that ward committees are the first advice-giving forum to the councillor. On the other hand, Cloete (2012) argues that having a councillor as the chair of the ward committee can sometimes be problematic for the smooth running of the ward committee since the councillor possesses more power to manipulate and dominate the members of the committee in decision making on projects to be undertaken in the community. Almost everything seems to be politicized, and Ragga and Taylor (2005) contend that for ward committees to work proficiently and to the most significant advantage of their separate groups, they should be effectively disengaged from, or less affiliated to the government.

Friedman (2005) states that despite ward committees are vital in local government, they are not well established and dysfunctional. Smith (2008) supports Friedman's argument that ward committees, especially the rural areas, are still not recognized as useful structures that seek to instil unity and champion adequate levels of basic services provision. Deacon (2009) argues that sometimes ward committees fail to uphold their mandate because of the diverse political affiliations of members. This sometimes causes problems within communities since the members of committees serve the interests of their political parties and reject the mandate of the masses. In the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (BCMM) the role of ward

committees in the achievement of the developing vision of local government was not favourable (Ngamlana and Coopoo, 2019). Municipal authorities who were personally complicated in the improvement of the municipal vision (i.e., BCMM Vision 2030) and in facilitating public participation noted that ward committees were not the part of the process as major community forum, but ward councillors sitting on behalf of them (Ngamlana and Coopoo, 2019). It is therefore not surprising that Sekgala (2016) contends that legitimate establishment should be endorsed that obliges ward councillors to submit reports and sanctions proposed by ward committees at municipal committee level. In general, ward committees in local government, especially in South Africa, have experienced various impediments and limitations that prevent the effective functioning of ward committees. These difficulties have hampered the promotion of public participation, the deepening of democracy, and the creation of functional ward committees to improve basic services delivery in local government.

### **2.3.2. Challenges affecting the Role of Ward Committees in SA Municipalities**

There are several writings around the efficiency of ward committees as channels for all-encompassing partaking in local governance, with many contends that ward committees are not as operative as expected (Amsler, 2014; Collingwood & McComas, 2001; Freedom House SA, 2017; Nabatchi & Reedy, 2012). Scholars argue that the decisions that are often taken by ward councillors in the municipal council are different from what they would have agreed to in meetings with ward committees. However, Moelefe and de Klerk (2019:14) argue that "ward councillors do not disseminate information and, even if they did, they did not engage in strategic communication, which enabled bottom-up communication and dialogue and allowed for dissent and self-organization." Hence, decisions concerning a community will be that of the ward councillor, not necessarily that of the ward committee.

The low levels of education amongst ward committee members also limit the capacity acceleration and impede the meaningful participation on technical matters and progressions. Given that the selection of ward committee members is not based on educational qualifications (but mainly political affiliation), people or organizations are influenced that ward committees do not add adequate worth on deliberate issues that are essential to develop a long-term vision. The belief is that ward committees are more likely to politicize gatherings and prioritize any of their benefits or those of their wards who are from superior positions within the municipality, and this has contravenes the deliberate rational and planning process.

A lack of resources is another challenge that ward committees faced, thus hindering their efficient functioning. Also, decent meeting venues were not readily available to the ward committees causing them to host meetings in someone's backyard or garage which were not conducive for fruitful discussions. Ward committees are legal structures established to assist municipalities in decision-making matters and should therefore be provided with a place or venue from which to operate. In general, most ward committees lacked credibility to influence decisions (Thornhill and Madumo, 2011) and to ensure that the municipalities would prioritize the new developments they had identified. Thus, ward committees had to explain to the community why development targets were changed or not met, a scenario that communities did not easily accept.

The shortage of skills is amongst other significant impediments that ward committees and municipalities throughout South Africa faced. . The possession of the relevant skills is essential for ward committees to execute their parts and duties successfully and competently. The challenge of skills shortage, it is not only affecting ward committees, but also ward councillors as the chairperson of the committee they lack adequate skill to perform their duties as it expected. In certain cases, the committees chairpersons are failing to openly describe the progress resolutions of municipal councils because they lack comprehending skill (Putu, 2006). Also, Smith and De Visser (2009) asserted that poor municipal communication strategies and the lack of accessible information at ward level limited the capability of ward committees to operate proficiently as orchestrating networks connecting municipal councils and communities. Ward committees are designed to play an advisory role to the council and they lack power to effect any change. For example, in some instances ward committee members call for a senior municipal authority to pitch and intervene with the public on a specific issue. In turn, the municipality sends an uninformed official who is not fully equipped with the decision-making procedures and techniques of the municipality. Thus, it would be a discussion with petitions being aired but no solutions offered.

In SA, poor communication between ward committees and the municipality crippled the role of ward committees in South African municipalities (Sekgala, 2016). Although ward committees come together monthly and report their issues and grievances to the councillor but the council delays in solving or engaging to the issues and grievances ward committees has reported. The incapacity of the municipality to be reactive to issues and grievances results to a

deficiency of trust on the side of community members in the ward committees and they decide to protests as a way to be recognised (Ngamala and Coopoo, 2019).

The effectiveness of ward committees is often ruined by the close relationship between committee members and political branches. In Piper and Deacon's (2008) study of uMsunduzi Municipality they found that ward committees were politicized in one of three ways: interparty competition in which political parties contest control of the committees; intra-party competition in which ward committees have become embroiled in factionalism within political parties and where one or other faction within the party uses ward committees to secure greater political power; and lastly, there is policy competition where the political party tried to define the role of ward committees.

According to Naidu (2008), a dominant part of ward committee individuals admitted that they had not been in a ward meeting where the municipality's vision was talked about or alluded to. Some ward committees even asserted that their particular networks had their own goals for their wards however these were not really in accordance with that of the municipality. Ward committees contended that they often lacked a vibrant effort and lacked precision on their duties and accountabilities. They also highlighted that they are manipulated to function as representative of political parties. Subject to manipulation and are required to promote partisan interests (Naidu, 2008).

#### **2.4. Local Government in South Africa**

Local government is viewed as the circle of government inside which resident experience the formative idea of government that is 'nearest to the citizens'. Developmental local government refers to a local government committed to work with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives. In this manner, the objective populace of local government must incorporate marginalized individuals and categorical groups inside communities, for example disable people, women and most impoverished in the public eye. It is crucial to highlight the effect local government has made on sexual orientation balance and value ecological maintainability, impoverishment extermination and to advance the standards of majority rule government. (Freedom House, 2017)



The White Paper on Local government (1998) is viewed as the milestone policy, the aim behind which was to make innovative vision for local government, in this manner redressing politically imbalances and racial segregation inequalities. Local government is entrusted with a determined formative goal of assisting in making a superior life for all. The post- apartheid accomplishments have been made towards enhancing municipality services provision and administration; nevertheless, there is still a room for improvement in ensuring that local government achieve its vision of enhanced life for all (CoGTA, 2016). In the vision and design for local government as set out in the Municipal Systems Act, (No. 72 of 2000) (Sections 1 and 2b), the notion of inclusivity is provided for and comprises the governmental support, the political support and communities.

Thornhill (2008b) observe local government to be the primary contact between an individual and governmental establishments. Thus, local government is regarded as government that is closest to the people. According to Cameron and Stone (1995), local government is defined as a sphere of government that works hand in hand with representative structures of the people to improve service provision on the part of municipalities. This is what the South African regime constitutionally dedicated its administration to, in rectifying the injustices of apartheid and to serve the people of South Africa (Houston, 2001). It is, therefore, a legal obligation of local government encourages the involvement of communities, organizations and private stakeholders in matters that affect them (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act no.108 of 1996). Local government was thus established with the principal aim of empowering people to participate in development programmes, projects and policymaking processes (Diamond, 2005).

The White Paper on local government (1998) articulates that the central approach of communication among local government and residents in the previous (before 1998) was command and laws. It suggests that local government legislation be supplemented with 'leadership, encouragement, practical support, and resources for community action' (White paper on local government, 1998:25). In addition, municipalities create a support mechanism to citizens and community project and to coordinate community dynamisms into tasks and project which advantage the whole community (White paper on local government, 1998:25). Since 199 to 2020 municipalities have been confronted with difficulties of delivering reasonable community service provision across the country, and in that capacity, this prompted to protest over facility provision. What may have set off these unrests could instigate from

different reasons from disorganised municipality leading structures to the lack of public participation of citizens in decision making. It is critical that White Paper on Local government (1998:25) identifies that “communities are not homogenous: municipalities need to be aware of divisions within local communities, and seek to promote the participation of marginalised and excluded groups in community processes”.

De Villiers (2008) argued that local government was designed as the vital connection tool where political parties affiliate hand in hand with the people. Local government has to guarantee there is a good relationship among all local stakeholders in developing their community (Reddy, 1999). Mhlari (2014) points out that local government plays a crucial role in administering local, metropolitan, regional and state government strategies to guarantee the responsible provision and distribution of entitlements.

Wards are established in local government areas. Where public participation is enhanced through ward committees, the municipality ought to be in a well position to provide basic services community needs. Hence, Section 72 (1) of the Municipal Structures Act, 1998, makes provision for ward committees to be established within metropolitan and local municipalities.

The Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 provides platforms for people and the public to partake in local government through designed structures, for example, Community Based Plans (CBPs), IDP discussions and ward committees in order to facilitate local improvements. The legislation aimed to enhance public participation but its implementation has challenged some local governments. However, Njenga (2009) revealed that this public participation platform is still dysfunctional due to various reasons such as political affiliation, scarcity of information and lack of adequate resources within municipalities.

Marais (2007) acknowledged that in local government, powers were decentralized to facilitate an inclusive public participation system for all. Thus, public participation in local governance presently enables citizens to improve an assortment of structures that affect their lives. These include casting a ballot in the ward or local government, the opportunity of choosing a political party, taking an interest in the community’s open gatherings, sorting out petitions and participating in task committees. Maserumule (2008) confirmed that the local government objective is to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner, to promote social and

economic development, and a safe and healthy environment; and to encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government.

Hanekom (1988) reported that public participation is the vehicle of local government which is obliged to drive participatory governance and ensure that public participation and the constitutional and democratic rights of the people are provided for. Through vigorous public participation, citizens must be able to identify the needs and priorities of their communities which municipalities must attend to, in collaboration with all community stakeholders (Bekink, 2006). Public participation in local government is the level that determines what is to be done and how it must be done, and it ensures that all development processes are adequately driven (Naidu, 2008). Cornwall (2002) went on to suggest that local government must not only promote what is called "invited spaces," that is, all those spaces wherein government organizes all the procedures and programmes the society must cooperate in. Instead, they must also highlight the significance of the "invented spaces" of participation which citizens, non-government organizations and civil society organizations establish and control.

Community or public participation is not immune to problems and challenges. A plethora of factors affect public participation in South African governments. This includes resource constraints, community elites and opportunists' abuse of participatory structures, the marginalization of communities from decision-making and questions over the legitimacy of structures through which the public participates. In addition, other factors include the lack of induction of the citizenry into democratic discourse and practice; the lack of creation of mutual, reciprocal, and political tolerance; and a normative consensus.

A survey by the Transportation Research Board in 2011 showed that the most significant internal challenges to public participation in SA local governance are inadequate financial and staff resources. The lack of support from upper management is also of considerable impairment as it cripples the participation prowess of the public. Thus, it is evident from the above that lack of training of staff and the lack of coordination among agencies are problems that weaken service delivery and public participation at the local government sphere.

## **2.5. Public Participation Legislative and Policy Framework**

This study sought to investigate the ward committees' level of compliance with the legislation and regulations on public participation, transparency and free access to basic services in the

Umhlathuze Municipality. It also sought to explore procedures that ward committees used to report back to the community and address their concerns regarding basic services provision. With these objectives in mind, this section presents and discusses the legislative and policy frameworks that guide public participation in South Africa's local government. Public participation is a democratic component in post-apartheid South Africa and is guided by well-defined structures in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) (hereafter referred to as the Constitution) and in relevant legislation termed 'participatory governance.'

Ward committees are considered the central driving vehicle of participatory democracy that facilitates effective municipal service delivery. With this understanding, this section reflects on how the existing legislative and policy frameworks guide the duties of ward committees in partaking local governance and democracy in South Africa. Some of the legislative frameworks discussed include the "Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998), the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) and the Municipal Finance Management Act (56 of 2003)". More so, the policy frameworks include the White Paper on Local Government (1998), and the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). These components provide detailed guidelines that shape the role of ward committees in public participation. Discussing these frameworks help in reflecting on the role of ward committees in local governments in South Africa.

This section focuses on the public participation legislative and policy framework. It further deliberates on regulations that are in place to guide and direct public participation through ward committees, especially in local government. This section also discusses the related legislation that drives public participation at a national, regional and local level. It also outlines selected elements from the following legislative policy framework elements that conceptualize public participation: The Development Agenda in the Post-Democratic Era; Local Government Authority within the context of the White Paper on Local Government of 1998; the Integrated Development Plan (IDP); the Constitution and the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998; Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000; and the Local Government Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003.

### **2.5.1. The Development Agenda in the Post-Democratic Era**

In 1994, South Africa adopted a developmental state, inter alia, to drive local economic development (LED) and ensure that urban and rural economic growth is facilitated through

citizen participation and the use of asset-based resources (Khambule, 2018). The development agenda sought to advance equality and address racialized and segregated policies instituted during the apartheid era. Therefore, the main objective was to provide effective support for the black population and to facilitate the development of their communities. The introduction of LED became a guiding principle to help local black communities and South Africans at large to generate increased employment, promote economic growth and alleviate poverty (CoGTA, 2019). The 1996 Constitution was also established to ensure more inclusive growth and development. Public participation is enshrined in Chapter 7 Section 16 of the 1996 Constitution and obliges municipalities to develop a culture of governance that complements formal representative government with a participatory system of governance.

Section 152 of the Constitution reflects on the role of LED and the task mandated to local government to advance economic growth and promote sustainable development initiatives across local communities. This means the local municipality is obligated to set up relevant LED strategies that encourage local people to be actively involved in economic growth and development (CoGTA, 2019). According to Khambule (2018), LED provides an integrative framework that invites the involvement of all local community stakeholders such as businesses, non-profit institutions, labour and religious organizations to work towards eliminating socio-economic challenges and the active advancement of economic growth. Therefore, the local municipality has key structural systems such as ward committees to ensure integrative development mechanisms and the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) to facilitate transparent budgeting, planning and the implementation of service delivery. The next section will present the legislative framework that reflects how local economic growth in SA's municipalities was structured to facilitate development through participatory governance.

### **2.5.2. Local Government Authority**

Local government in South Africa is mandated to create structures that facilitate the community participation in economic growth and service delivery, as per Chapter 7 of the Constitution. Section 151 of Chapter 7 mandates and stipulates the principles and guidelines for local government. It says the following:

The local sphere of government consists of municipalities, which must be established for the whole of the Republic; the executive and legislative authorities of a municipality are

vested in its Municipal Council; a municipality has the right to govern, taking its initiative, the local government affairs of its community, subject to national and provincial legislation, as provided for in the Constitution; the national or a provincial government may not compromise or impede a municipality's ability or right to exercise its powers or perform its functions; the local government is mandated with the legislative authority to plan their local development without interference from the national and provincial governments (Republic of South Africa (RSA) Constitution of 1996, Chapter 7, S151).

#### **2.5.2.1. *White Paper on Local Government of 1998***

The White Paper on Local Government of 1998 is one of the most important documents on public participation at the local state sphere in South Africa. It interprets and gives the various provisions of how local government has to function and relate within the community. The White Paper provided an interpretation of the constitutional guidelines and the infrastructure on public participation as a democratic process whereby citizens have the right to be actively involved in influencing policy development, budget and service delivery decisions in their local municipality. Though ward committees are identified as key democratic vehicles that are established by the municipal council and facilitated through the authority of the councillor, their contribution is emphasized to be apolitical, although in most communities this aspect remains questionable. Local government is obliged to establish an enhanced plan and a holistic approach to improving local governance and basic services provision. By doing so, it should create an open platform that will be encompassing of all relevant stakeholders within the community (White Paper in Local Government, 1998). The White Paper further outlines that it is the responsibility of the local government to actively create significant opportunities for employment, business and sustainable development (Section B 1.1 of the White Paper). Moreover, the White Paper provides for the role of the local government in establishing the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), which is the most important document in designing the vision, reporting, budgeting and implementation of development and service delivery within a municipal government term.

#### **2.5.2.2. *Integrated Development Plan (IDP)***

The IDP is a document that is designed and drafted by a municipality in consultation with the community on the planning, budgeting, reporting and implementation of the development plan. It presents the key strategies that the municipality is going to engage in to address all the

identified development challenges to promote economic growth and local economic development.

### **2.5.3 The Constitution and Public Participation**

Section 152 of the Constitution provides the basic guidelines for public participation in South Africa's local communities. It reflects on the responsibility of local government in engaging and organizing citizens to participate in facilitating development in the community. According to Section 152 (1), local government has the duty to:

- a) Provide democratic and accountable government for local communities;
- b) Ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner;
- c) Promote social and economic development;
- d) Promote a safe and healthy environment; and
- e) Encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government.

The South African Constitution in Section 152 (1) further states that citizens must be encouraged to participate and be involved in the matters relating to community development, and people's needs shall be served in the manner it satisfies them (RSA, 1996). Therefore, the Constitution considers public participation to be a democratic process that has to ensure the sustainability of service delivery and development in the local community. Involving community members and stakeholders is considered a critical role that every local municipality has to ensure. In short, all municipalities must provide the necessary consultation and set up relevant structures to facilitate effective public participation. To this end, the Local Government Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 was legislated.

#### ***2.5.3.1 Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (Structures Act)***

The Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 provides the basic guidelines for public participation in local government. It interprets the aims of public participation in local government, as stipulated in Section 72 of the Constitution. It provides opportunities for people and the public to partake in local government through designed structures, for example, Community Based Plans (CBPs), IDP discussions and ward committees in local government improvement arrangements (Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998). Section 72 of the Constitution indicates the essential structure of public participation that is well articulated in the Structures Act,

namely, the ward committees. These committees are considered the driving vehicle for democracy and public participation in municipalities. According to the Municipal Structures Act 1998 Section 72-(3), the main aim of devolution down to ward committees was to enhance social involvement and participatory governance in local government to improve basic service provision. Though the legislation presents the ward committee as an integral component in the local development process, Njenga (2009) noted that this public participation platform is still dysfunctional due to various reasons that include political affiliations, scarcity of information and lack of adequate resources within municipalities.

### ***2.5.3.2 Ward Committees***

Ward committees are a bridge for communication for development in communities (Piper and Deacon, 2009) and must be seen as a means for encouraging expanded responsibility, responsiveness and democratization in neighbourhoods and local government (Taylor, 2008). Kabane (2014) contends that ward committees in the municipality help serve as community development structures connecting and informing the municipality about the necessities, goals, possibilities and issues that affect local communities.

Deacon (2009) noted that ward committees are only advisory bodies to councillors. However, Cloete (2012) argued that the rule of ward committees that the councillor becomes a chairperson of the committee can sometimes negatively impact on the smooth running of the ward committee given their power to manipulate and dominate the committee in regards to decisions on projects for the community. Moreover, ward councillors often influence the persons chosen on ward committees on the basis of their political affiliations (Kabane, 2014).

### ***2.5.3.3 Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000***

The Local Government Municipal Systems Act (herein referred to as the Systems Act) provides the parameters on how municipalities should engage with local communities. It also outlines how the municipal political and administrative structures should function. Therefore, the municipal council has specific duties that are set out in Section 4, Section 5, and Section 16 of the Systems Act.

Section 4 notes that the local government has the duty to:

- a) Encourage the involvement of the local community.



- b) Consult the community about the level of quality, range and impact of municipal services provided by the municipality either directly or through another service provider.

Section 5 places emphasis on the rights of community members to participate in the development processes within the municipality. It stipulates that the community has the right to:

- a) “Contribute to the decision-making processes of the municipality and submit written or oral recommendations, representations and complaints to the council”.
- b) “Be informed of the decisions of the council”.
- c) “Be afforded regular disclosure of the affairs of the municipality, including its finances”.

Section 16 notes that the municipal manager plays an important role in guiding public participation in the municipality. It explains that the municipal manager must encourage the community members to participate in public processes, to employ relevant staff that can educate the community about participation, and ensure the training of all staff and councillors on the basic systems of development. The details of Section 16 indicate that the municipal manager should make sure that the:

The municipality encourages and creates conditions for the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality, including in – the preparation, implementation, and review of its IDP;

The establishment, implementation and review of its performance management system;

Determination, consideration, and adoption of by-laws;

The monitoring and review of its performance, including the outcome and impact of such performance;

The preparation of its budget; and Strategic decisions relating to the provision of municipal services. (Republic of South Africa, Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, Section 16).

#### ***2.5.3.4 Local Government Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003***

The Local Government Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 (MFMA) provides the basic guidelines on how municipalities should undertake budgeting and manage finances. It explains how the municipality should be accountable and how it should provide clear financial reports to the community. The MFMA (2003) was established to protect and manage financial records of the municipalities. It is guided by the principles of transparency and standard, established treasury norms which are vital components in ensuring that all projects and basic services costs are catered for.

This section presented and debated the key policy and legislative frameworks on public participation in South Africa. It explored how public participation is shaped as a democratic process within the local government framework. It discussed how it is structured and the key strategic procedures on how it is to be implemented within communities.

### **2.6 Theoretical Framework: Empowered Participatory Governance**

Public participation is essential to good governance. This study adopts the Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) approach as a theoretical framework to analyse and situate public participation through ward committees. Participatory governance is a governance theory that emphasizes democratic engagement through deliberative practices. The EPG approach aspires to deepen how ordinary citizens can effectively participate and influence policy formulation that directly or indirectly affects their daily lives.

The cornerstone of EPG is based on the deepening of democracy. It contends that the mechanism of political representation seems ineffective in accomplishing the central ideas of democratic politics. There is an apparent decline in the effectiveness of democratic institutions to escalate their attacks on the affirmative state simply because the political spectrum has taken advantage of democracy. The practical orientation of deliberative democracy develops governance structures geared to real concerns. The bottom-up participation establishes new channels for those most directly affected by targeted problems, typically ordinary citizens, and officials in the field need to apply knowledge, intelligence and interest to the formulation of solutions. Deliberative solutions or decision making is when participants listen to each other's positions and generate group choices after due consideration (Fung & Wright, 2003). The EPG approach is characterized by a commitment to capacitate ordinary citizens in promoting values

such as participation, deliberation and empowerment, and in so doing it recognizes legislative technicalities and tends to inspire and promote deliberative decision making in matters relating to people.

The Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) principles uphold that decision making relies upon the empowered involvement of ordinary citizens and officials in the field. Empowered Participatory Governance is deliberated and participatory because it encourages the engagement and capabilities of ordinary citizens to take part in decision making through well-structured planning and they are empowered in effort to convert discussion into action (Fung & Wright, 2003). The EPG is indeed the future in advancing public participation to improve basic services delivery. Fung and Wright (2003:16) asserted that "local problems may be more effectively solved by local citizens living and experiencing local conditions than by experts narrowly trained in providing technical issues." However, Gaventa (2006) believes that technocratic governments neglect public participation in decision making. He argues that public participation platforms and decision processes regarding community projects and developments are controlled and restricted for local citizens to be effectively involved. Hence, civil society organizations, non-government organizations and social movements need to counter-attack and hold accountable technocratic governments and ensure that basic delivery is enhanced in local government.

The EPG method has a prospective future to rescue local government through empowered citizens. For example, in Porto Alegre and Kerala, this approach thrived. It completely transformed the living conditions of citizens, and ordinary people were part of the successful deliberation and planning of strategies and solutions (Heller, 2001). For Fung and Wright (2003:22), "This is not to say technical experts are irrelevant to EPG, either they should play an important role in terms of coordinating, distributing resources and solving problems that local units cannot solve themselves. However, Hemson (2007) believes that ward committees in local government in South Africa are not functioning as they should, and this weakens the confidence of citizens in local governance. It is therefore not surprising that EPG contends that there is the need for a transformation in lower structures of government such as ward committees and that this decentralization needs to be stabilized. Further, there is the need to provide adequate funds, resources and technical support to ensure that local communities are included in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of development projects.

In public participation, there is a need for empowered capacity which the government should provide. . This means the state has to create the necessary measures which allow the citizens to be significantly involved in economic growth and efficiency. However, this does not seem to be the case in South Africa. Rather than deepening democratic politics to address citizens' concerns, the state has directed its energy to transforming the nature of politics and attracting more people to vote a ruling government into power (Fung & Wright, 2003). Narsiah (2012) supports this perspective and has argued that the relationship between citizens and government has been overtaken by the concepts of service provider (government) and clients or customers (citizens). This suggests that local government in South Africa has been transformed to function like the private sector, and in so doing it has rejected the implementation of public projects that seek to empower ordinary citizens. This is observed in municipalities where basic services are commoditized, and the mandatory Bill of Rights and Chapter 7 of the Constitution are violated. Hence, political energy in the democratic state has been reduced to run a productive private sector and politics altogether (Fung & Wright, 2003).

The current study argues that the political affiliation of ward committees and councillors is one of the influential issues that impede the structure's functions and effectiveness. Empowered Participatory Governance, as Fung and Wright (2003) argued, calls for a radical transformation of the mechanism of political representation to accomplish the central ideas of democratic policies to include the voice of the citizens. They suggested that transformation can be driven by active facilitation and the involvement of ordinary citizens, devising and implementing public policies that ground a productive economy and a healthy society and more deliberate and inclusive public participation to ensure that all citizens benefit and receive adequate basic living services provision.

The fundamental challenge for the present research in adopting EPG is to develop transformative democratic strategies that can advance our traditional values, social justice, and individual liberties combined with popular control over collective decisions and solidarity in the community. . Lastly, EPG seeks to address the failures of government structures by promoting public participation and deliberation as tools to enhance the effectiveness of ward committees. This is because it perceives that the direct participation of the citizens on the ground increases the level of accountability and reduces the influence of political party factions.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed and examined the literature available on public participation. Participation was viewed through the lenses of ward committees with the uMhlathuze Municipality selected as the case study area. It was noted that globally, participation takes different forms and impacts communities differently. In this chapter, a review of local government and ward committees in South Africa was undertaken. The role of ward committees' contribution to local government in SA the challenges they face in administering their duties were explored. . All these aspects were addressed to understand the extent of the impact of public participation on local government. This chapter also presented and discussed the key policy and legislative frameworks on public participation in South Africa. It explored how the idea of public participation is shaped as a democratic process within the local government framework. It discussed how public participation is structured and the key strategic procedures on how it has to be implemented within communities. Lastly, this chapter presented a detailed discussion on the importance of EPG as a theoretical framework to analyse public participation at the local government sphere using ward committees in a case study. The next chapter will outline the methodology used in conducting this study.

## **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

### **3 Introduction**

Mouton (1996) describes methodology as the means or methods of doing something. This chapter focuses mainly on the design and methods used in conducting the research on public participation in local government with a focus on ward committees in uMhlathuze Municipality. The study is qualitative and made use of qualitative research instruments which included in-depth interviews of critical role-players and respondents. The chapter presents detailed information on how the field research was carried out by first offering a description of the adopted research design, research paradigm, population, sampling and sample; data collection methods; and data analysis approach.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

All social research requires a design or structure before data gathering and analysis. According to Yin (2014), a research design is an activity plan for getting starting with one point then onto the next. For instance, in this study, the underlying question was to explore and understand public participation in local government using uMhlathuze Municipality as a case study. The researcher made use of qualitative methods. Given (2008) argued that qualitative research was designed to reveal a target audience's range of behaviour and the perceptions that drive it concerning specific topics and issues, and that it uses in-depth studies of small groups of people. This allowed the researcher to undertake an in-depth study of public participation in local government in uMhlathuze Municipality. The research intended to identify and understand the categories of information that emerged from the ward committees on public participation, and to establish if there was satisfaction with the process. The qualitative design used in this study is descriptive rather than predictive.

The case study approach of the study sought to adopt, explore, understand and explain the effectiveness of ward committees on the matter of public participation in local governance matters. This research design aims to understand the subjective experiences of ward committees in local government. The chosen research design enabled the researcher to formulate open-ended questions that allowed participants to share their experiences on the nature of the functioning of ward committees.

The researcher also used the sociological approach in exploring public participation in local government. The sociological perspective focuses on human behaviour and its connections to society as a whole, and it also invites us to look for the connections between the behaviour of individual people and the structures of the community in which they live (Payne, 2014). Payne (2014) further argued that the sociological approach is beneficial in research in that it helps us to see general social patterns in the behaviour of particular individuals and offers insights about their social world that extend far beyond explanations and relies on individual quirks and personalities.

The researcher also used a case study in his research because it aims to understand human beings in a social context by interpreting their actions as a single group, community or a single event: a case. Yin (2014) Define case study as an observation request which explores contemporary occurrence, inside it real life setting, particularly when the limits among occurrence and setting are not visibly described. The case study approach is particularly valuable in circumstance where logical states of the occasion being examined are serious and where the researcher has no power over the situations as they develop.

. Ritchie and Lewis (2003:52) see the original defining features of a case study as being a "multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context."

### **3.2 Research Paradigm**

According to Blanche and Durrheim (1999), the research process has three significant key: epistemology, ontology and methodology. As per these writers, a research worldview is a comprehensive arrangement of interrelated practice and imagining that describe the idea of investigation along these three measurements. Kuhn (1972:36) defines a paradigm as, "an integrated group of utilitarian ideas, variables, and problems involved with similar methodological approaches and tools". The term paradigm alludes to a research philosophy with an allowance of faith based expectations, qualities, and presumptions that publics of researches share for all intents and purpose in regards to the nature and comportment of research. A paradigm, accordingly, join an example, structure, and arrangement of logical and scholastic thoughts, qualities and suspicions (Grix, 2004), Thus paradigms encompass quantitative research study which determines the relationship between one thing (an independent variable) and another (a dependent or outcome variable) within a population. On

the other hand, mixed methods represent research that involves collecting, analysing and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same underlying phenomenon.

A qualitative study was used to obtain in-depth information from the participants. This approach allowed participants to give their personal views and accounts of their experiences regarding public participation in local government and the extent to which they encountered challenges that impeded its effectiveness (Blanche et al., 1999). Qualitative research involves the collection non-numeric data such as words and pictures from the respondents. Leedy (1997) highlighted that qualitative data collection methods which include interviews, ethnography and observations, among others, play an essential role in research by providing information useful to understand the processes behind observed results and in assessing people's perceptions of their well-being. In this study, the use of in-depth interviews was critical in gathering relevant information. The qualitative nature of the research methods enabled the researcher to explore the effectiveness of public participation via ward committees and allowed the active participation of respondents in addressing the research interest.

This study made use of qualitative techniques that enabled the researcher to investigate selected issues in depth, openly and in detail, and to identify and understand the categories of information that emerged from the data that was collected. The adopted research design therefore enabled the researcher to explore the effectiveness of public participation through ward committees and allowed for the active engagement of participants in addressing the matter of public participation in local government and the challenges that impede effective local government.

### **3.3 Target Population**

According to Best (1993), a population is a group of individuals that have one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to a researcher. It is a group that the researcher is interested in, for gathering information and drawing conclusions. The population in this research comprised the uMhlathuze Municipality's ward committee members, community members, ward councillors and municipality employees. These respondents were regarded as the custodians of the Municipality.



### **3.4 Sampling Strategies and Sample Size**

According to Best (1993), sampling is a method or process of selecting certain elements to represent the whole group, and a sample is a limited number of selected cases drawn from a larger group. A sample is a portion of the broader category of elements called the population. Snowballing sampling was used to allow the individual subjects to have an equal chance of being selected. According to Tuckman (1994), a snow balling sample limits the probability that one will choose a biased sample. In this study, the researcher interviewed a total of 22 participants who comprised ten ward committee members, ten community members and two municipal officials. Given that the municipality covers both rural and urban areas, the participants who comprised men and women were recruited from both these areas of uMhlathuze Municipality. Each interview session took between 30-45 minutes. Informed consent was signed with each respondent before the interview.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The data for this research was gathered through semi-structured interviews to solicit responses from the identified sample drawn from the uMhlathuze Municipality in both rural and urban areas. It was important to use semi-structured interviews which allowed the researcher to reach in-depth information from participants. The interviews were conducted in June and July 2019. The researcher was responsible for collecting the data himself via in-depth interviews designed to study public participation in local government with particular reference to uMhlathuze Municipality.

### **3.6 Qualitative Research Interviews**

An interview is a conversation between two or more people where questions are asked by the interviewer to elicit facts or statements from the interviewee. Interviews are regarded as a standard part of qualitative research. These interviews additionally permit the researcher to form follow up questions to increase further comprehension of the participants. According to Cohen and Miona (1996), an interview is a qualitative research technique that allows for person-to-person discussions with the main thrust of obtaining more relevant information for the study. Such discussions provide the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of one's beliefs, feelings and behaviours on important issues. Since interviews are usually one-on-one

discussions and semi-structured; they induce and allow the interviewee to talk intensively, giving detailed information than what is generally available through other data collection methods such as filling out a survey form and focus group discussions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In this case, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews based on a set of lead questions that he had designed. The researcher used face to face in-depth interviews as the preferred method of data collection with the chosen respondents. The interviews lasted 30-45 minutes, and investigated the effectiveness of public participation on governance in the uMhlathuze Municipality.

In conducting the interviews, the researcher was aware and privy to a set of variables that often militate against the smooth functioning of the interview process. These variables included disruptions during the interview process, the possibility that bias may creep in (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), the eagerness of the respondents to impress the interviewer with their answers, vague antagonism between the respondents and the interviewer, and the tendency of the interviewees to seek out the support of preconceived notions that may affect the outcome of the study. The researcher's awareness of these matters helped him to avoid the problems attached to the interview process.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Data analysis "aims to transform information (data) into an answer to the original research question" (Blanche et al., 2006: 52). Boeje (2010) argued that performing data analysis on qualitative data requires the dismantling, segmenting and reassembling of data to form meaningful findings that allows the researcher to draw inferences. The research objectives and aim were used to guide the process of developing and organizing the collected data into related ideas and themes for presentation and discussion. Wahyuni (2012) argues that this translation process from raw data to findings requires the interpretation of empirical data. The study therefore employed content analysis to interpret the meanings from textual data. Silverman (2011) posits that qualitative content analysis concentrates on portraying reality by discovering meanings from textual data. It identifies patterns and themes within the data (thematic analysis) which the study presented in tabular form. Consistent with the paradigm used, qualitative content analysis was applied in this study from the perspective of case organizations (Sarandakos, 2005). Thematic content analysis using manual coding according to the themes. Coding of the data helped to scrutinise the data and the researcher was able to retrieve and

collect together the data associated with the thematic ideas. Hence, thematic or insider approach was used to explore public participation in the local government in the uMhlathuze Municipality as the case study locality.

### **3.8. Thematic Analysis**

This study used content and thematic analysis to analyze the data. The interviews were recorded using a smart phone and transcribed by the researcher. Transcription took 3 weeks. In cases where interviews were done in IsiZulu, all translations were done by the researcher. There was familiarization and immersion on the part of the researcher in this study. The researcher then induced themes on the data collected from interviews. In coding themes the researcher coded data into a coding frame by allocating conceptual labels to fragments of data and then identifying themes within and across the subjects' accounts. In terms of elaboration, the researcher provided more details about the themes that were collected (Blanche et al., 2006.)

### **3.9. Data Quality Control**

Data needs to be of high quality so that decisions can be made based on reliable and valid data. The term quality control refers to the efforts and procedures that survey researchers put in place to ensure the quality and accuracy of data being collected using the methodologies chosen for a particular study (Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods, 2008) Quality-control efforts vary from study to study and can be applied to questionnaires and the computerized programmes that control them, sample management systems to ensure proper case processing, the monitoring of appropriate interviewer behaviour, and other quality-control aspects of the survey process, all of which could affect the quality of data and thus the results (Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods, 2008).

By revealing rather than avoiding the investigator's orientation and personal involvement in the research and by evaluating interpretations according to their impact on readers, investigators, and participants, qualitative research shifts the goal of quality control from the objective truth of statements to people's understanding. The researcher ensured that his handwriting was legible, that variables were recorded correctly and that he reviewed the recorded data to ensure the validity and reliability of data. Data quality control procedures were important for detecting

missing mandatory information, detecting errors made during the transfer of reformatting and attaching a quality flag to each numerical value in order not to modify the observed data points.

**Dependability and trustworthy** Carole *et al.* (2008) argues that dependability and trustworthy are key indicators of the quality of the data that the researcher gathered during fieldwork. The process of depending on specific respondents and trusting the information that they provide forms a large part of focusing on reducing unnecessary errors in the research process. In order to ensure that dependability and trustworthy was achieved the researcher used inquiry audit, in which an outside person (the supervisor in this regards) was used to examine the research process and the data analysis. The main aim was to ensure the consistency of findings is consistent.

### **Trustworthy**

Trustworthy involves the degree to which the explanation of fieldwork results is warranted. This is subjective in the sense that it depends on the intents and motives of the researcher and the research process. Trustworthy of the study defines whether the principal investigator truthfully and accurately measures the intended aspects, christening what O'Brien *et al.* (2009) view as the absolute way to hit “the bull’s eye” of the study objectives. The researcher was able to determine the validity of the instruments by asking logical questions that are anchored on the objectives of the study.

### **Dependability**

The researcher used a digital recorder so as to capture detailed information. In general, the trustworthy and dependability in this study justified the integrity of this study and ensures the credibility of the findings. In this research, data were originally gathered for a different purpose which is answering a research question. After the research was completed, data was stored in a password protected file and after considerable years it will be securely disposed of by destroying it physically, using general waste incineration. Recorded material will be deleted after the submission has been made in the relevant departments and files will be overwritten to make sure that they cannot be accessed at all. Electronic devices like memory sticks and cards that have been used will also be destroyed physically so that the data cannot be recovered.

### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations provide a guide on the limits that a researcher would have to consider within the framework of the study. It also protects the welfare of the research subjects. To protect the identity of research participants, pseudonyms are used in this study. Also, it was therefore imperative to obtain informed consent with the key informants on four ethical principles, namely, beneficence, autonomy, non-maleficence and justice (Beauchamp & Childress, 2009). The main thrust of informed consent was to treat the key informants with fairness and accord them an opportunity to participate in decision making on matters of concern. The participants were informed verbally about the purpose, description and procedures of the study. They were also informed that the host institution (University of KwaZulu-Natal) had approved the study. In terms of privacy and confidentiality, the researcher clarified that original names of the participants would not be utilised, but rather the study would make use of pseudonyms. Respondents were also advised that the study would be made available as a public document to assist them in enhancing public participation in local government. In keeping with Miller and Seltzer (2010), the researchers created a community of shared understanding and interest, and set a standard for his work that was higher than he could arrange for himself.

### **3.11 Study location**

As outlined above, this study was conducted in uMhlatuze municipality. The city is located northwest coast of KwaZulu-Natal province. It was established in December 2005 following the demarcation process. It has the deepest harbour in the continent. The city of uMhlatuze comprise of 34 wards with an approximate population of 384 449 (Stats SA, 2011) and 8 wards were selected. The ward committees that participated in this study were from townships, informal settlements and few suburbs. In terms of employment, the majority of people in the city depend on local heavy duty industries, fishing and informal economic activities. The vast piece of land in the city is set aside for foreign direct investment under the Richards Bay Industrial Development Zone (RBIDZ). The majority of the population in uMhlatuze are black South Africans and few other races that are mainly from the lower and middle class. The wards that were cover in this research were historically populated by blacks.

### **3.12 Limitations of the Study**

The first constraint of the study was the time factor. To manage the issue of time, the researcher made every effort to utilize all the time at his disposal effectively. Secondly, the research subjects sometimes failed to comply out of fear of victimization. To obtain their cooperation, the interviewees were informed about the study and were assured of confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms in place of their actual names in the research report.

### **3.13 Conclusion**

The main focus of this chapter was to outline the design and methods used in conducting the research. The study was qualitative and utilized qualitative research instruments to achieve the objectives of the study as per the research questions. Hence, data were collected through in-depth interviews. This chapter further detailed information of the field research that was conducted. It presented a discussion of the adopted research design, research paradigm, population, sampling and sample; the data collection methods; data analysis approach; data quality control; ethical consideration and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 will present the Results and Discussion of Findings.

## **Chapter 4: Presentation of Results and Discussion of Findings**

### **4 Introduction**

The chapter presents the results and a discussion of the findings from the research that was conducted through face-to-face interviews with the 2 uMhlathuze Municipal officials, 10 community members and 10 ward committee members. The objectives of this study were, first to explore the level of compliance by ward committees per the law and principles around public participation, transparency and access free to basic provisions; second, to assess the effectiveness of municipal communiqué plans in guaranteeing that ward committees and municipal councillors interrelate efficiently with citizens; third, to explain the effectiveness of systems designed for the community to report or complain concerning ward committees and ward councillors; fourth, to identify and assess the procedures that were used by ward committees to report back to the community and address community concerns regarding basic services provision; and last, to draw conclusions and recommendations that may come up positively to enhanced knowledge of ward committees in performing their duties.

Understanding the role of public participation in local governance is important in democratic South Africa, considering the various challenges to effective service delivery that have been experienced in different local municipalities around the country from about 2010. Exploring the views of community members, municipal officials and ward committee members was essential to understanding the key factors surrounding public participation in uMhlathuze Municipality. Analyzing and explaining the findings of this study help depict the limitations, advantages and opportunities of ward committees in enabling effective public participation towards service delivery in the uMhlathuze Municipality. The study sampled members of the uMhlathuze community and key stakeholders in the municipality and in the public service to help understand the lived experiences, expectations and perceived challenges to public participation and service delivery in the municipality within the framework of the Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) theory. In this regard, the EPG theory provides insights on how ordinary citizens can be capacitated to promote effective participation, deliberation and empowerment in making sound decisions and adopting strategic practices towards optimal service delivery. It also assisted in recognizing and understanding the legislative technicalities that hinder the capacity of citizens to participate effectively in development in their communities. Within the above context, this chapter first presents the demographic details of participants and the key themes that emanated from the interviews during this research. The

results on the perceived issues surrounding public participation and service delivery in the uMhlathuze Municipality are then presented and discussed. .

#### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

This section presents the demographic details of the participants. There were three categories of participants interviewed. These included 2 uMhlathuze Municipal officials, 10 community members from UMhlathuze Municipality and 10 ward committee members. Altogether, 22 participants were interviewed in the study. Table 4.1 provides the demographic details of the participants.

**Table 4.1 - uMhlathuze Municipality - Demographic Details of Participants in Ward Committees' Research (2020)**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Name of Participants (Coded Names)</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ward</b>
1	Official 1	Male	44	18
2	Official 2	Male	52	23
3	Community Member 1	Female	55	07
4	Community Member 2	Female	48	07
5	Community Member 3	Male	56	05
6	Community Member 4	Female	25	15
7	Community Member 5	Female	40	02
8	Community Member 6	Male	33	02
9	Community Member 7	Male	63	08
10	Community Member 8	Female	22	12
11	Community Member 9	Male	28	06
12	Community Member 10	Male	34	06
13	Ward Committee 1	Female	53	07
14	Ward Committee 2	Male	47	12
15	Ward Committee 3	Female	28	15
16	Ward Committee 4	Male	25	05
17	Ward Committee 5	Female	39	07
18	Ward Committee 6	Male	35	06
19	Ward Committee 7	Female	33	04
20	Ward Committee 8	Male	41	09
21	Ward Committee 9	Male	56	06
22	Ward Committee 10	Male	37	08



## 4.2 Identified Themes and Subthemes

Table 4.2 presents a list of identified themes and sub-themes based on the interviews that were conducted in June 2019 in uMhlathuze Municipality. The results of this study are presented through thematic analysis with recurring themes from the interviews collated, interpreted and guided by the objectives of the study and the common responses that the interviewees provided.

**Table 4.2: Key Identified Themes**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>
<b>Knowledge of the duties and roles of ward committees</b>	Understanding of procedures and roles of ward committees Working relationship between ward committees, community and municipality
<b>Perspectives of community members on the impact of ward committees</b>	Ineffectiveness of ward committees Inconsistency in communication Lack of platforms to communicate grievances Dysfunctionality of ward committees Increasing unemployment and poverty
<b>Political interests vs community interests</b>	Ward committees are partisan Political interests take precedence over community interests Key development issues in the community are compromised Difficulties in executing service delivery
<b>Poor communication and reporting</b>	Inconsistencies in participatory governance structures Lack of access to key information Lack of reporting on development issues to the communities Open cooperation between municipality and ward committees
<b>Lack of real power</b>	Weakening of ward committees Lack of delegation on ward committee powers by municipal authorities. Lack of knowledge on the limited roles of ward committees by the community members

### **4.3 Presentation of Results**

The results showed the various views on public participation and their impact on local governance in the Umhlathuze Municipality. Public participation involves the engagement of community members/citizens in deciding, planning and in the execution of development initiatives and programmes in the community. Cloete (2012) noted that public participation is a crucial process that seeks to promote accountability, transparency and governance. Scholars agree that when members of the community are engaged and organized together to participate actively in policy planning and implementation of service delivery, this results in effective public participation processes (Cloete, 2012; Creighton, 2005; Nanz & Dalferth, 2010).

This study found that various issues affect or contribute to the effectiveness of public participation in service delivery matters in the uMhlathuze municipality. Understanding the views of the sampled ward committee members, community members and municipal officials was essential in outlining the challenges and limitations to active public participation and service provision in the uMhlathuze Municipality. The results also revealed the solutions and opportunities for shaping public participation as a way to impact effective service delivery in uMhlathuze Municipality. The findings showed, as in Fung and Wright's (2000) study, the need for municipal governance and development to rely more on the commitment and participation of ordinary citizens in making sensible decisions that are pertinent to addressing challenges in the community. They reflect how enhancing the role of both ordinary people and ward committees in service delivery processes is an essential contribution that can facilitate sustainable processes and solutions towards democratic participation and development. The issues that stood out during the analysis of data include several themes (see Table 4.2) that are presented, analysed and discussed below. The identified problems that are presented in this section revealed various interrelated themes and ideas that are analysed and discussed with reference to the literature.

#### **4.3.1 Knowledge of the Duties and Roles of Ward Committees**

According to Ngamlana and Coopoo (2019:20), "Ward committees are a legislated participatory mechanism established to facilitate inclusivity of community groups and community structures in local governance." Ward committees are legislated participatory mechanisms that were enacted through Local Government Municipal Structures Act 117 of

1998 as per the guidelines of Section 72 of the South African Constitution of 1996. This legislation provides the basic guidelines on how public participation in South Africa should be executed at a local government level. The ward committees are tasked with inquiring, informing and advancing the interests of the community in their wards towards service delivery under the chairpersonship of the ward councillor. Ward committees are considered as vehicles for public participation and are crucial sources of information for development planning and effective service delivery on behalf of their communities in a South African municipality (Nzimakwe & Reddy, 2008).

Empowered participatory governance focuses on the importance of progressive institutional reforms to help stabilize and facilitate the smooth participation of structures within an institution. This helps in promoting deliberation, participation and empowerment through processes that are feasible and clear for every stakeholder to understand (Fung and Wright, 2000). Following EPG's tenets, it was essential to understand if all the interviewees in this research had full knowledge of what ward committees are, and how they are supposed to function within a ward committee? Therefore, the interviewees' responses were based on the procedures of how ward committees were expected to conduct themselves in facilitating public participation as per the legislation and regulations governing local government within the community. Sekgala (2016:2) noted that "ward committees were introduced in municipalities as community structures to play a critical role in linking and informing the municipalities about the needs, aspirations, potentials, and problems of the communities." Ward committees are considered an important structure in a community for facilitating public participation and serving as a bridge for local communities to interact with local state entities on matters of basic service delivery. They are considered essential advisors to the councillors in matters of interests to the community, and on specific issues related to service delivery implementation and policymaking (Piper & Deacon, 2009). It was therefore essential to understand if the interviewees understood the procedures, legal parameters and functions of ward committees in service delivery. Ward committees are members of the community and are chosen to participate and share the views of the community members they represent when it comes to development issues in their area.

Understanding the participants' knowledge on the roles and duties of a ward committee helped in analysing the views of the interviewees on the effectiveness of public participation and service delivery in uMhlathuze Municipality. This would also reveal if the municipality was

effective in performing its role in providing basic education to community members for their role in public participation and in clarifying their responsibilities as ward committee members. The results of the research in uMhlathuze municipality revealed that the interviewed participants (community members, ward committee members and municipal officials) demonstrated their knowledge of the procedures and roles of ward committees. The community members and ward committee members reflected their knowledge and views in keeping with expectations as set out in the literature on the systems and roles of ward committees on development processes in the community. One of the interviewees, a community member, shared the following:

The ward committees assist in communicating to us as the community to the municipality in addressing basic services delivery and other social issues. Ward committees are allocated to different portfolios, so the community reports their complaints. Yes, if we have complaints, we are allowed to report directly to the municipality, then the municipality will schedule the meeting to brief us in regards to our complaints if they are familiar to us all (Community Member 1, personal communication, June 4, 2019).

Another community member said,

The ward committees are supposed to share and represent views, and share with us relevant ideas that can help in shaping development within this community. However, that is not happening; the municipality and ward committees do not engage with us as the community. Even if there is a project implemented in the community, these structures do not consult with us (Community Member 3, personal communication, June 6, 2019).

The community members' comments demonstrated knowledge of the expected roles and duties of ward committees, and an understanding of what ward committees are, and how they should operate. In short, these two community members had knowledge of what ward committees are, and how they are supposed to serve. The statements of these two interviewees also suggested that ward committee members in uMhlathuze Municipality had a clear understanding of what ward committees are, and how they should operate. The responses from these two interviewees is therefore different from the perspective that Sekgala (2016) advanced wherein he stated that ward committee members may not have an idea of what they are supposed to do and what the structure is supposed to do. Furthermore, two ward committee members stated the following on the duties of ward committees:

In my understanding, the ward committee connects the municipality and the community, especially in being the middlemen, to represent the people's interest and ensure that the people's concerns are taken into consideration, which will be witnessed by better services delivery (Ward Committee 2, personal communication, June 5, 2019).

The second said,

As ward committees, we are obliged to organize and call the community meeting with all the relevant stakeholders if necessary. Usually, in community meetings we host, we convey the information from the municipality to the community and note community challenges that need the attention of the municipality. We are the eyes and ears of the municipality, also the voice of the community (Ward committee 6, personal communication, June 15, 2019).

The above sentiments parallel some of the views that were identified in the literature on how ward committees serve to encourage responsibility, responsiveness and democratization in neighbourhood government (Taylor, 2008). Their sentiments also show that the interviewees understood what it meant for one to be involved in the process of public participation. Another participant also reflected their understanding of the roles of the ward committees and reported as follows:

The ward committee plays a role in representing the community's interest to the municipality. It makes sure that there is clear sharing of information between the municipality and the community. Ward committees report people's concerns to the municipality through the ward councillors who chair the committees. They also play the role of informing the community on the municipality's plans, including the projects that will be implemented in the community area, and ensure that employment and the interests of the local people are well represented in projects (Ward Committee 3, personal communication, June 7, 2019).

Another participant also demonstrated this level of understanding:

Ward committees are a structure that was established to connect the community and the municipality in assisting with ... basic services delivery related problems. The central ward committee's roles and functions are to facilitate the relationship between the community, municipality and government officials. Ward committees also encourage people to be active

by attending community meetings and participate in all project planning and implementation. Hence, ward committees are a lower structure that reports all issues and grievances the community has (Ward Committee 5, personal communication, June 11, 2019).

The interviewee identified in the research as Ward Committee 7 emphasized the following:

Ward committees are mandated to function as a bridge among the community and the municipality. If the community is facing basic service delivery problems, the ward committee must report these to the ward council for engagements before communicated to the municipality. In all community meetings, the roles and operations of the ward committee are always emphasized. The ward committees then have the responsibility to facilitate war rooms where most societal problems are reported and tackled. If the municipality would like to meet with the community, it has first to address the ward committee on that specific matter before the committee organizes the logistics for the meeting (Ward Committee 7, personal communication, June 19, 2019).

The ward committee members demonstrated a good understanding of the procedures and steps they were supposed to follow in facilitating public participation. This understanding of systems and processes showed that ward committee members understood their assignments and roles within their communities.

One of the two municipal officials who was interviewed explained the role of ward committees. His views provided insight on the position of the municipality when it came to their knowledge and role in educating the community and ward committee members on the roles and duties of the ward committees. Municipal official 2 stated the following:

Ward committees are the central structure for facilitating participation between the community and the municipality. They were established to stimulate and improve the functioning of local governance. The connection between the ward committees and the municipality is that they ensure that basic service deliveries are enhanced. The relationship between the two is viable because we [the municipality] have been able to work with ward committees, hand in hand to improve the standard of the living within the communities. We often engage in training with ward committees and communities, informing them on how they should operate (Official 2, personal communication, June 17, 2019).

The responses referred to above revealed that community members, ward committee members and municipality officials in uMhlathuze Municipality had a clear understanding of the roles and duties of ward committees as far as development and public participation were concerned. Knowing how ward committees functioned showed how community members understood and considered these to be important structures that represent their interests in local government. However, knowledge of the structures alone should not be considered a guarantee for effective public participation and service delivery. In this regard, this research found that despite the knowledge of participants on the ward committee structure, the community members revealed that the ward committee was not effective in addressing the needs of the community on matters such as unemployment, facilitating development and service delivery. Moreover, responses from township and urban participants were not the same to the core, however the dysfunction of the ward committees were subjected to similar challenges.

#### **4.3.2 Perspectives of Community Members on the Impact of Ward Committees**

This study revealed that community members shared various perspectives on the impact of ward committees in participatory governance and service delivery in different wards in uMhlathuze Municipality. The community members who were interviewed revealed some negative perspectives on the responsibilities of ward committees in addressing the grievances that affected the community. The EPG theory suggests that it is essential to understand the scope of what limits the participation of people in governance and development processes (United Nations, 2008). Ward committees are a participatory governance structure that can facilitate democratization and development planning in South Africa's local governments (White Paper on Local Government, 1998).

Given the above understanding, the perspectives shared by the community members about ward committees help to reflect on the issues that affect or impact public participation and service delivery in the uMhlathuze Municipality. One interviewee shared the following perspective on the effectiveness of ward committees in ensuring service delivery for communities in uMhlathuze Municipality:

There is nothing straight forward on how the ward committee operates in this community. For example, there is a project running here but [local] people were not consulted nor were they employed. Many people are not working in this area but the municipality is brave

enough to bring external people to work on a project within our ward (Community Member 3, personal communication, June 6, 2019).

Poverty and unemployment were some of the critical issues affecting people in South African local government in 2019 and 2020 with the unemployment rate at 29% in the country (StatSA, 2019). It was expected that every community member would have had a platform to discuss their immediate concerns and challenges, which were mostly socio-economic and related to poverty and unemployment. Local government authorities were tasked with a mandate to promote economic growth and development, through working closely with the community (White Paper on Local Government, 1998). Given that ward committees were supposed to be the link between local government and the community in shaping development planning, it was heart-breaking that there was no clarity on projects that could help facilitate regional economic development and address socio-economic challenges in the community. Despite the defined responsibilities of ward committees to assist in participatory decision making towards the development interests of the community in local governments, they seemed to fail in fulfilling this obligation. The platform that was supposed to guarantee and express the voices of the local communities was the ward committees. Yet, this platform was identified as a problem rather than a solution. In keeping with the views of Nabatchi and Amsler (2014) and Sekgala, (2016), this was both a worry and a concern. The participants' responses suggest that the community members might consider ward committees to be ineffective. Such a view is echoed in the response of one of the community members:

In our ward, we are having problems with such structures [ward committees]; to us, it's like they do not exist because they are not assisting us at all. They only enjoy monthly stipends and further the interests of their political parties in meetings where they are supposed to be airing our views and grievances (Community Member 4, personal communication, June 8, 2019).

Another interviewee from the community provided a detailed explanation of the ineffectiveness of ward committees:

Well, I understand the role that ward committees should play in advancing basic services delivery. I would say ward committees have not yet managed to fulfil their duties in this role. There is still a long journey ahead, especially in transforming rural communities like this one. People are still living in an unhealthy environment which the government and



municipalities are always promising to develop, but with no meaningful results. There are platforms for one to launch grievances but they are not helpful. How can you report your complaint to someone who cannot facilitate any crucial decision on service delivery issues? Many issues have been reported, with no results or any progress in tackling them (Community Member 6, personal communication, June 15, 2019).

Another participant (community member 8) explained and gave examples of the long-term incompetence of ward committees. This interviewee stated:

I wouldn't say that ward committee is effective. They have been in place for a while but still we are experiencing issues of poor service delivery. Even if we can raise our voices and grievances when we feel suppressed, we never receive any response from the municipality. For example, we have reported the leaking of the pipes in street B, but it's been three years without pipe replacements or developments in this regard (Community Member 8, personal communication, June 22, 2019).

This response showed how bitter some of the community members were when it comes to the performance of ward committees in representing the interests of the people in development planning and policy interests. Given that ward committees are referred as "conduits for inclusive participation in local governance" (Ngamlana and Coopoo, 2019:19), the perspectives of some participants makes one agree with the assertions across studies that [ward committees] are not as operative as they are supposed to be (Collingwood & Reedy, 2012; Freedom House SA, 2017; Ngamlana & Coopoo, 2019). Within the EPG theoretical perspective, one would consider the ward committees under study in the uMhlathuze Municipality to be disempowered and lacking an effective voice in decision making, a situation that is detrimental to effective participation in governance. The uMhlathuze Municipality perspective also suggests that ward committees tend to be more inclined to represent political party interests than community interests. Though this phenomenon is explored in detail in the next section (4.4.3), it reveals how most ward committees uMhlathuze Municipality have failed to help the community in addressing the immediate challenges affecting them. In addition, it was evident that community members were losing their confidence and trust in ward committees. The interviews also revealed how the participants felt that they were neglected and lacked platforms whereby they could share their interests, challenges and problems. This is evident in Community Member 2's response, "To be honest, in this community we have no grievance platforms to report our issues. Moreover, ward committees are not functional and the municipality needs to attend to

this problem of the ward committee, given that it is dysfunctional” (Community Member 2, personal communication, June 4, 2019).

Some of the interviews considered ward committees to be dysfunctional, and this is a worrying issue. This suggested that ward committees were ineffective and lacked focus towards effective public participation and service delivery.

Local government development projects were expected to incorporate and integrate the views and ideas of the community as enunciated through the ward committees in eliminating unemployment and poverty within the communities (Freedom House, 2017; White Paper on Local Government, 1998). It was a matter of concern that the community members revealed and reflected how some of the on-going projects in uMhlathuze Municipality had not represented the values of integrated development planning and public participation as set out in the System Acts. Hence, it was clear that the community members experienced a lack of consultation and seemed to feeling unrepresented.

The above findings suggested that the ward committees in uMhlathuze Municipality failed to provide the necessary and relevant representation that the community expected. However, only one of the 22 interviewees showed little hope, but this interviewee did not give much credit to ward committees. This interviewee had the following to say:

I wouldn't say that we have clarity on the roles of the ward committee in this community. They should be involved in helping to represent the issues affecting the community, but it seems to be a challenging issue. Yes, there are grievance platforms but even though you report matters, there would be no feedback regarding what you reported. However, there is room for improvement if they are given a little push. I think we can still have some hope. (Community Member 5, personal communication, June 13, 2019).

Another community member advised as follows:

In my understanding, ward committees were designed to improve basic service delivery in local government. It is unfortunate that as the community, we are still facing dire social issues which include long-standing problems such as water and sanitation, housing and electricity. Yes, there are reporting platforms in place where we are encouraged to report our dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, our issues remain unresolved. (Community Member 7, personal communication, June 17, 2019).

Though Community Member 5 reflected that there was room for improvement, Community Member 7 pointed out the lack of response from ward committees in addressing some of the issues and challenges they reported. In general, these responses confirm the need for attention towards improving public participation and service provision in the community in uMhlathuze Municipality.

The findings presented and analysed above demonstrate that the ward committees in uMhlathuze failed to satisfy the interests of the communities as they were expected to do. Ward committees was supposed to be empowering in facilitating effective democratic participation, and encouraging and motivating all actors [municipality and ordinary people] to work towards effective service delivery in the community as per the guidelines of EPG (United Nations, 2008). The feedback given by the community members in uMhlathuze Municipality revealed that there was huge mistrust, a lack of confidence and a sense of dysfunctionality on the part of the ward committees. These sentiments resonate with some of the existing studies that were conducted on ward committees in South Africa. These studies concluded that ward committee failed to be inclusive in addressing the interests of community members (Freedom House SA, 2017; Ngamlana & Coopoo, 2019; Sekgala, 2016). The perspectives of participants revealed how the ward committees lacked a presence towards addressing the concerns of the community members and exhibited poor public participation engagement. One of the key factors that community members and some ward committee members identified as a hindrance to effective public participation and service delivery on the part of ward committee structures is putting political interests over community interests in the development agenda.

### **4.3.3 Political Interests vs. Community Interests**

Political interests are often identified as one of the key aspects that affect effective public participation and service delivery in most municipalities in South Africa (Sekgala, 2016). This is because political parties increasingly high jacked ward committees and advanced their interests over the interests of the community. Moreover, Smith and De Visser (2009) alleged that in most cases, ward committees were simply an extension of party structures. Thus, they did not represent a full range of the interests of the communities. The findings of this research confirmed these sentiments as the interviewed community members and some ward committee members shared how political interests have been a significant hurdle to meaningful participatory governance and effective implementation of service delivery programmes in

uMhlathuze Municipality. In short, the results revealed that the impact and effectiveness of ward committees in pushing community interests in uMhlathuze Municipality were affected by political interests. The community members and ward committee members interviewed reflected how most of the meetings about public participation towards service delivery and policy contribution were always diluted and dominated by the political interests of some ward committee members or the councillor. For example, one interviewee revealed the following:

We have problems with such structures [ward committee] in this community! It's like they don't exist because they are not assisting us at all. They only enjoy monthly stipends and further the mandate of their political parties. We have reporting platforms in the library [suggestion boxes] for our grievances in the community, but still there are no changes or response in regards to our complaints. We have decided to go straight to the municipality because ward committees are not assisting us in any way. However, they give special attention and support people who are affiliated to their political parties (Community Member 4, personal communication, June 8, 2019).

Another interviewee, Community Member 9 emphasized:

The [ward committee] structure would be more effective if it didn't mix politics with work. We do not know where or to whom we should report the ward committee and the councillor. Most of the time the ward committee never pays attention to our grievances because they consider us to be members of opposition political parties; therefore, our concerns are not taken seriously as compared to those of the ruling party. Even if we report the ward committee to the councillor it is useless since they belong to the same ruling party. (Community Member 9, personal communication, June 25, 2019)

The interviewees referred to above reveal the intensity of partisan participation of ward committees and how it has affected and destroyed the trust of community members in the ward committee structure. Though there are structures and procedures for the public to report grievances about service delivery, the participatory nature of ward committees Umhlathuze Municipality experienced difficulties. This forced the community members to jump protocols and procedures in the reporting of service delivery processes through ward committees and they reported directly to the municipality. Piper and Deacon (2009) argued that the interference of partisan ward committees in community development interests did not only undermine their independent role but also had a direct impact on civil society as it

undermined the role of civil society in engaging the municipality. This means that the people are left without any significant voice as one interviewee noted:

We understand that if there's any project to be implemented in the community, the ward committee together with councillor consults with us as the community and this is done through community meetings and war rooms. We share and raise our opinions regarding the implementation of projects in the community; however, in most cases, we are not heard and we end up protesting. (Community Member 9, personal communication, June 25, 2019).

Given the above perspective, one can understand why service delivery protests at the local government sphere are common in the country. Furthermore, the interviewees expressed how the community meetings which were supposed to serve as a platform for community participation were even hijacked and used by ward committees to advance political party interests in the uMhlathuze Municipality. Thus, Community Member 4 said, “The only information we receive from the ward committees is for community meetings, in which even if we attend they [i.e., the Ward Committee] always discusses the ANC agenda” (Community Member 4, personal communication, June 8, 2019). In the same vein, another participant said, “Ward committees do not empower me in any way; rather, they are obsessed with serving the interest of their political parties.” (Community Member 3, personal communication, June 6, 2019).

One of the ward committees confirmed how political agendas affected the role of ward committee in serving the interests of the people in service delivery. She stated:

Ward committees are structured and organized by the councillor on behalf of the municipality. It is easy for some members to be pushed in the structures to support the interests of the ward councillor. However, the ward committee must keep a good relationship with the community members, municipal officials and other stakeholders. This has not been the case for some of us. We find it difficult to keep good relationships in this community because other committee members are always pushing political agendas within the structure instead of the interests of the people. (Ward Committee 1, personal communication, June 3, 2019).

Another ward committee member said,

As ward committees, we are expected to represent the interests and suggestions of the entire community. But we have a problem here; some of the committee members have no interest in serving the people equally. They have other agendas whereby they try to push the interests of their political parties. (Ward Committee 2, personal communication, June 5, 2019).

Ward committees are expected to be neutral in representing the interests of the community (Ngamlana & Coopoo, 2019; Piper & Deacon, 2009). However, Modumo (2010) argued that considering that ward councillors are the representatives of ward committees in the municipal council meeting, they have the potential to pursue partisan interests. The responses indicate that most participants noted how some members in the ward committees were more interested in advancing partisan political party interests and building their political careers such that instead of representing the interests of the people, they supported the partisan interests of the councillor. The EPG theoretical framework allows the researcher to scrutinize and understand how people's participation in the process of governance is being limited (United Nations, 2008) and in this instance, by partisan ward committees. Ward committees are supposed to be apolitical, yet they seemed to be more politically aligned in the uMhlathuze Municipality. This affected the quality of their participation toward effective service delivery in the community. This is detrimental to the public participation and democratization process whereby the citizens are supposed to be actively involved in all the affairs of economic growth and development.

The findings of this study show how the responsibilities of ward committees in enabling effective public participation was weakened by political issues wherein the councillors pushed their development interests without any substantial checks. In short, they failed in taking a lead role in advising the municipality on the relevant solutions and policy formulations in advancing critical service delivery solutions that benefit the community, as Sekgala, (2016) suggested. The interviewees in the uMhlathuze Municipality study noted how ward committees tainted themselves by politically aligning themselves. For example, one community member noted:

Ward committees must include an independent body that is willing to serve the interest of the people and enhance basic services delivery. Those who are politically active must stick to their political parties. In the process, the municipality needs to be transparent because it has to resolve community problems, but to this point, nothing has happened. (Community Member 3, personal communication, June 6, 2019).

In terms of the above, another interviewee said, “I think ward committees need to work with all people despite their political parties because I believe that politics have divided society. So, community members are now failing to separate political and community meetings” (Community Member 5, personal communication, June 13, 2019).

The political interferences were even noted by one of the young people in the community, and they reflected their participation as well and said, “No. I have never had any interest, partly because these projects are mostly politicized, and I am not into politics” (Community Member 10, personal communication, June 29, 2019).

The interviewees outlined how ward committees were often abusing their roles not only for political interests but to give economic opportunities to those close to them. One interviewee shared her view and said, “The council needs to address the issue of politics in the ward committee because, at some point, when opportunities come to our leaders they always prioritize their relatives, comrades and friends, which is not good for democratic governance” (Community Member 1, personal communication, June 4, 2019).

Ward committees should be a platform where citizens can effect decisions of the municipal council. Ward committees were intended to assist the elected councillor in establishing connection between communities, political and governmental structures of the municipality (Ngamlana & Coopoo, 2019). However, if their involvement becomes motivated by political and economic gains, it compromises the role of participatory governance.

The literature reviewed also reflected that ward committees in most South African communities are often made dysfunctional as they depend on ward councillors to represent their views in council meetings, political parties and the municipality in pushing the agendas and interests of the community (Piper & Deacon, 2009). Scholars raised an important concern and argued that the way ward committee members are nominated and elected is directed by ward councillors who, in turn choose individuals who are in line with their political affiliations (Kabane, 2014; Sekgala, 2016).

Ward committees are expected to be actively involved in shaping the development interests of their communities. Thus, party-political issues were a considerable hindrance to the performance of ward committees in the uMhlathuze Municipality. The GEOMWCN, 2005, regulation 7 (3) and (4) emphasizes that in every local government decision-making process there should be a diversity of interests and gender representation which are advanced without

compromising the role of ward committees. Hence, the ward committee is expected and required to be a structure that represents the entire ward community irrespective of party affiliations. Exercising this practice by ward committees would reflect "the principle of equity and inclusiveness, which ensures that all members of the society, particularly most vulnerable, have a say in the running of that society" (GEOMWCN, 2005 regulation 7 (3) and (4)). Therefore, ward committees have to be independent in their participation and have to be distant from being an extension of political parties. This would help them perform their functions impartially, without any hesitation.

Whenever if political parties mandate commands ward committees, the unbiased representation of public become traded off (Sekgala, 2016). If the role of the primary participatory governance structure [ward committee] is compromised in representing the ideas and views of the local communities, it means development planning, budgeting and service delivery agreements are weakened, ignored and unmet. In uMhlathuze Municipality, the political interests of ward committees diverted the development of community projects, increased unemployment, and failed to address poverty challenges and poor service delivery. These views help explain why most scholars concluded that the role of the ward committee has been associated with failure when it comes to service delivery and public participation (Masango, Mfene & Henna, 2013; Sekgala, 2016). The performance of ward committees has been questioned and scrutinized because it is often impacted negatively on the lack of interest in realizing the objectives of ward committees and in the pursuance of their roles in representing and safeguarding the interests of the community in service delivery.

#### **4.3.4 Poor Communication and Reporting**

Van Rooyen and Mokoena (2013) argued that in every local municipality the ward committee has to make sure that there is effective communication between the council and the community. The ward committees must conduct surveys to know the necessities of the community consult with the locals and assist them on the key choices on development, advice on finances and service provision, and interconnect public information that citizens need to access in regards to relevant services (Van Rooyen & Mokoena, 2013). Ward committees are useful in serving various community interests which include "assessing needs of the community, spreading information, building partnerships, consulting the community and picking up local problems with services" (Sekgala, 2016:6).



The community members in uMhlathuze Municipality raised serious concerns accusing the ward committees of poor communication and failing to respond to any development matters about the community. One of the participants said the following:

When it comes to communicating and reporting on the basic services in the community, they [ward committees] are not open and available. For example, there is a current project of building a taxi rank; we were not consulted or informed about it and only a few local people have been appointed for employment. These people are related to the ward councillor. There is no communication at all here! In the case where water or electricity would be switched off for maintenance purposes, we as the community receive no prior warning to prepare [for it] (Community Member 4, personal communication, June 8, 2019).

Another participant stated:

We know that all the issues about development in the community have to be reported through the ward committees. The platforms to report grievances are there, but even though you report [matters], the feedback on our reported issues never comes back (Community Member 5, personal communication, June 13, 2019).

More so, the community members also revealed their frustration on the lack of communication and reporting on development preparation and execution in the community. One of the community members angrily commented:

I am no longer interested in anything that involves ward committees and the municipality anymore. As a community we have rejected them because our concerns have never been heard or taken seriously. They are not included in any developmental project within the ward despite our proposals and several attempts to have them included. The community is no longer willing to participate anymore. (Community Member 3, personal communication, June 6, 2019).

Another interviewee said:

I no longer have any interest in participating and contributing to anything relating to development planning in the community because as community members, we are never heard. It seems as if we were abandoned a long time ago. Even if we participate, there is no difference. We have been attending IDP programmes where the municipality gives the

community the opportunity to establish their priority projects to be done in the community with substantial amount of figures and funds presented, but not even a single project has ever been implemented. (Community Member 4, personal communication, June 8, 2019).

The community members expressed worrying concerns on how the ward committees and the municipality failed to provide any feedback about suggestions made during meetings. The interviews with ward committees and municipal officials confirmed that there were war room meetings and training programmes which were often conducted in the communities about development. However, the implementation of development policies and projects were never in line with the suggestions or interests of the community. One might argue that in terms of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution (section 152 (1) (e)) these procedures were only followed because municipalities are mandated to conduct programmes that encouraged the communities and community organizations to be involved in the local government matters (RSA, 1996). Therefore, the ward committees, as the structure mandated to enhance participatory democracy at the local government level, were often engaged in these processes (RSA, 1998). However, the research undertaken in uMhlathuze Municipality showed that after the ward committee and other municipality meetings, no further meaningful communication procedures were conducted with the communities.

The research revealed that young people in uMhlathuze Municipality think that poor communication and reporting in the community was due to a lack of convenient communication channels. Most young people in uMhlathuze Municipality lacked interest in participating in this research because they reflected how it reminded them of the poor development and progress they were enduring. For example, one young man who agreed to participate reflected on why most young people are not interested in the affairs of the Municipality:

I don't think that's the ward committees and municipality have convenient forms of communication for all social groups. I can certainly tell you that all young people in our community are tired; we are never heard and we are unemployed. All we witness all the time in this community are all political scams that are not beneficial towards development. As a young adult, I hardly have time to attend meetings organized by ward committees, and so do many young people, because they are poorly coordinated and do not represent us in any way. I firmly believe that they should attempt a more modernized approach that will engage various groups, such as the youth. I would suggest to my municipality to have an

App where all its news and relevant discussions will be seen and read. This is both convenient in terms of time and easy to access. (Community Member 10, personal communication, June 29, 2019).

There was a lack of relevant information that helped the locals to understand the development and service delivery processes in their communities. The concern that community members shared did not only reveal poor communication or failure of reporting but frustration against the participatory structures of ward committees and the municipality itself. Though Kabane's (2014) view seemed to exonerate ward committees as victims also, the discussions with the interviewees generally revealed that most ward committees in the uMhlathuze Municipality were more politically aligned. This situation affected their participatory role in communicating and reporting issues between the municipality and the community. Some of the ward committee members, as discussed under theme 4.3.3 above, reflected how their work could be made easier if other members were not politically aligned. Also, the alignment of ward committees with political parties and interests was one of the critical challenges that affected effective communication and reporting since they were also considered part of the problem.

The study also revealed, as did Sekgala's (2016) writings, how effective communication and participation in service delivery was driven by seasonal events and programmes such as elections or other relevant political related events. One of the participants revealed that there was always limited communication and poor service delivery except when it was close to elections with politicians seeking re-election. He said the following:

The municipality, along with ward committees, communicates with the community with regards to what is happening or the community development projects to be conducted, basic services delivery and community grievances on the occasional basis. I cannot say they communicate or interact with us as often as they are supposed to because that would be a lie. However, they become more active when elections are around the corner because they will be campaigning for their political parties (Community Member 7, personal communication, June 16, 2019).

This response revealed the incompetence that existed in uMhlathuze Municipality when it comes to communication and reporting development issues. It is essential to note that the use of communication and development implementation in the run-up to elections only can be regarded as vote-buying or clientelism, a point that Kabane (2014) has highlighted. This affects

the quality of public participation as it is reduced and linked to political events while it is supposed to facilitate development planning and implementation through non-political platforms.

Smith and De Visser (2009) argued that ward committees function efficiently as communication channels between the communities and municipal councils if they are equipped with effective and robust municipal communications strategies and have access to key information on decisions made at ward level. However, though the findings in uMhlatuze Municipality revealed that ward committees were often engaged in training programmes organized by municipal officials, there was no information that confirmed that there was continuous feedback on the critical decisions reached in the municipal council. However, municipal officials confirmed that ward committees played a role in compiling relevant information for the IDP programmes. One municipal official reflected as follows:

We have platforms for communicating information such as the municipal council meetings whereby the chairperson and the secretary of the ward committee are invited to engage the municipal's council based on the ward committee suggestions in ensuring better basic services delivery. We have the IDP programme whereby ward committees and community members compile the community priorities which need to be addressed, and the municipality respects such contributions as stipulated in the legislation. (Official 1, personal communication, June 12, 2019)

Another municipal official confirmed:

The ward committee, through its chairperson (the councillor), provides different contributions and various mechanisms on how to address social problems. The ward committees are also utilized as an active structure in designing the IDP programme to help in profiling and identifying the community's priorities along within the community. (Official 2, personal communication- June 17, 2019)

Though the views of the municipal officials revealed the participation of ward committees in some key processes, they did not provide clarity on any feedback processes to the community. The responses of the community members revealed how meetings were often meaningless since no positive feedback were obtained, rendering municipal communication strategies poor and one-sided.

#### **4.3.5 Lack of Real Power**

The EPG framework notes that people are more inclined to participate in governance if they feel that they have a common problem in which they are given an opportunity to participate in issues such as local development plans and input into matters such as the allocation of the budget (Fung and Wright, 2003). These aspects reflect how empowering people and facilitating participatory structures within a governance system play a crucial role in encouraging operative public participation processes. However, the research conducted in uMhlathuze Municipality revealed that ward committees lacked real power as a participatory governance structure to effect any real change toward policy decision making and in the implementation of service delivery. The role of ward committees as per the Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) is that the committees engage in a consultative process and make recommendations on behalf of their communities on the key development interests via the ward councillors to the municipal council. Raga and Taylor (2005) noted that ward committees are purely advisory structures and it is doubtful if they can ever make any meaningful contributions that are beyond recommendations. The interviews also revealed that the ward committees in uMhlathuze Municipality were no exception and lacked power to effect real, significant development change on service delivery and development initiatives. This was well captured in the following statement that a ward committee member made:

Ward committees do not have a lot of influence in decision making. There are procedures which the committees have to follow; the councillor is responsible for most of the important key decision making issues. In our committee, we are responsible for minor problems such as reporting if one of the community members lost the municipality's dustbins. (Ward Committee 4, personal communication, June 10, 2019).

Another ward committee member explained the weak position of ward committees in effecting real change by stating the following:

The ward committees have no influence on which project must be implemented and who should be employed. Though we can recommend, we are not the ones who have the final say. This weakens us and puts us in a compromising position with people. I can give you an example: There was a project of building houses for people and the procedure of implementing local projects recommends that some workers must be hired from local labour

but that did not happen because our chairperson (ward councillor) identified people unknown to us and he hired only a few of his favourites from the community. There was also another project of building a mall. The councillor again came up with his list of people who must be hired without any consultation with the ward committees. The ward committee could not do anything because they are only supposed to recommend and are not involved in making key decisions. (Ward Committee 10, personal communication, June 24, 2019).

The above sentiments show that ward committees have limited influence and control over key decisions on development issues in the community. On the basis of the study in uMhlathuze Municipality, the perspective that scholars such as Naidu (2011) advanced that ward committees have an oversight role in monitoring the performance of ward councillors and in reviewing the IDP processes in municipalities is challenged. According to Smith (2007), there is no clarity or description of the oversight responsibilities of ward committees on municipal and ward councillor performances within wards in the guidelines for the establishment and operation of municipal ward committees. The findings of the uMhlathuze Municipality study show that ward committees had no oversight influence; rather they had a legislative role of conveying information without any power to hold anyone accountable. This explained some of the perspectives of community members in uMhlathuze Municipality who regarded ward committees as "dysfunctional" and "useless" in effecting real change towards service delivery in the community. Also, the lack of power on the part of ward committees affected their position in the community as they were accused of failing to promote the interests of the people.

The Municipal Structures Act (1998) (in section 74 (b)) provides the municipal council with the discretion to transfer powers to ward committees (RSA, 1998). However, despite this stipulation and vested discretion, very few municipalities have utilized this discretion to delegate power to their ward committees to effect meaningful change (Smith & De Visser, 2009). Sekgala (2016) cites the Ministry of Provincial and Local Government (2007) which noted how this lack of power on the part of ward committees has resulted in them being viewed as powerless bodies and talk shops. Some of the views of community members in the uMhlathuze Municipality confirmed this perspective.

This section sums up the views of all the interviewed community members and their complaints about ward committees being ineffective, dysfunctional and powerless to facilitate meaningful development outcomes. Also, the uMhlathuze Municipality did not delegate any power to the

ward committees even though the committees claimed they had a good working relationship with the Municipality.

#### **4.4 Discussion of Findings**

Reflecting through the EPG lenses, it is clear that merely setting up institutions of participatory democracy is not enough if there are no proper complementary structures that empower and capacitate the institutions to enable ordinary people to make participation effective (United Nations, 2008). The findings in uMhlathuze Municipality revealed that public participation was ineffective and weak because there was no countervailing force that held the ward committees, ward councillors and municipal authorities accountable for effective participation. The uMhlathuze Municipality study highlights that empowering ordinary people and people-centered institutions such as ward committees within a community are essential towards establishing feasible and meaningful participatory governance outcomes. In short, empowered ward committees are critical to influence key policy decisions and address people's grievances on service delivery matters and their development interests.

The interviews with community members, ward committees and municipal officials of uMhlathuze municipality helped in generating meaningful results. Also, though interviewees demonstrated meaningful understanding of their roles and duties as ward committee members, they revealed a lack of detailed knowledge of legislative procedures on the powers of ward committees. This helps to explain why most community members regarded ward committees as a failure. In short, most community members seemed to be unaware that ward committees are given a communicative role to convey information on behalf of the community to the ward councillor. This, in turn, compromises the function and position of ward committees if the municipal council does not act on the information that ward committees provide.

The uMhlathuze Municipality case study highlighted the perspectives of community members on the role of ward committees. Generally, the community members expressed much bitterness and mistrust of the development processes in the community. They revealed that there was a lack of representation, communication and meaningful participation between them and ward committees. The findings also reflected on the challenge of partisan politics which highly compromised the participatory role of ward committees in the uMhlathuze Municipality. Ideally, ward committees are supposed to assume an impartial role, but this was not the case

as both ward committee members and community members confirmed that some of their community consultative meetings were often high jacked for partisan political interests mainly on the part of the ANC members in the ward committees.

Poor communication and reporting by the ward committees were also identified as one of the critical issues influencing effective public participation and service delivery in the uMhlathuze Municipality. Communicative participatory democracy is a two-way process. When people communicate with the government, they should get feedback on the issues and concerns they raised. . Ward committees are supposed to act as active communication agencies in delivering information and advising meaningfully at both ends of the communication network. However, this was not the case in uMhlathuze Municipality as the ward committees were accused of failing to report on the progress of the Municipality on the grievances of the communities at large. Perhaps this is because the ward councillors and the Municipality often ignored the interests of the community, making the work of ward committees difficult. Though ward committees demonstrated some knowledge of their roles, in practice they did not engage in any significant participatory processes.

Ward committees were also identified to lack real power to effect meaningful participatory roles. Most importantly, ward committee structures lacked the power to hold the ward councillors and the municipality accountable for failure to implement the suggested service delivery interests of the community. Also, ward committee members in uMhlathuze Municipality felt vulnerable and the community members consider them as a failure. However, considering that municipalities have vested discretion under the Municipal Structures Act (1998) to delegate powers to ward committees, it is important to note that there is a need to grant the ward committees the power to facilitate meaningful participatory governance processes that yield results for their communities. This institution of power to ward committees fits well into the EPG framework that suggests that there is a need to empower marginalized groups to help them influence key decisions in their favour (United Nations, 2008). Ward committees are a vehicle for participatory governance and it is critical, as per the recommendations of EPG to empower them with key decision making powers to help facilitate the effective participation of citizens in local governance.



## **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the results gathered from interviews on the role of public participation in the uMhlathuze Municipality. A thematic presentation and analysis of the findings was given to provide a detailed understanding of the importance of participatory governance to the community members, ward committees and municipal officials in the uMhlathuze Municipality. The EPG framework advanced the view that it is important to ensure that ordinary citizens are empowered to facilitate participation towards development and growth within their communities. The findings of the uMhlathuze Municipality case study revealed how the local community has no countervailing power that ensured that ward committees, ward councillors and the municipality are held accountable for failing to provide effective participatory governance and solutions to local community problems. Several themes were identified and discussed in this chapter. These included the critical knowledge of participants on ward committees' role and duties, the perspectives of community members on the impact of ward committees, how political interests affect community interests in development, poor communication and reporting, and the lack of real power on the part of ward committees to effect meaningful results. These results were also briefly discussed. The next chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations of this research.

## **Chapter 5: Research Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5 Introduction**

This chapter presents the summary and conclusions of the research on ward committees in uMhlathuze Municipality. It provides an outline of how the research was conducted, and presents a summary of the details in each chapter and the findings. . Through the EPG lens, the study reflected on the key objectives of the research and provided a detailed analysis of how public participation in uMhlathuze Municipality is inadequate and ineffective. The key questions that underpinned the research are presented and briefly responded to through a summary of how they were addressed in the study. Thereafter, a general conclusion of the research is given, followed by the recommendations towards policy development and further research.

#### **5.1 Summary of Research Findings**

The EPG, as theory, provided the framework to reflect on how democratic participation can be made effective towards service delivery, community development and socio-economic growth (United Nations, 2008). Moreover, the EPG highlights how empowered participation should be able to facilitate transformation through creating a balance of power in society to help poor or weak ordinary citizens to participate and support their cause (Fung and Wright, 2003). Reviewing the case of uMhlathuze Municipality, the study sought to understand the compliance of ward committees to the legislative guidelines on public participation in local governance matters in South Africa. Though the study established that ward committees were aware of their duties, it was clear that their participation was not effective. In the uMhlathuze community, there was huge neglect of people's voices and interests towards development. Poor communication hindered the participatory process was by on the part of the ward committees and the municipality. The ward committee lacked a sense of accountability and this resulted in frustration among most community members. Partisan politics was identified as one of the key factors that weakened the power of the ward committee structures. This study established that there was poor communication on the part of the ward committees and the municipality, and the structures and procedures for reporting and providing feedback on complaints or grievances by both the ward committees and the uMhlathuze Municipality were weak. The public participation processes in uMhlathuze lacked a reliable and clear system that could hold all

community actors accountable for their negligence of their participatory governance duties that benefit the community rather than individuals.

In this study, selected questions guided how to ward committees in uMhlathuze Municipality undertook their public participation role in local government. These questions were informed by the main objectives of the study and facilitated the gathering of data, and the presentation and analysis of the research findings. Therefore, the summaries of the research findings presented here relate to the key research questions that grounded this study.

Question 1: What is the level of compliance by ward committees with legislation and regulations about public participation, transparency and access free basic provision?

This question was addressed in the study, firstly, by reflecting on the legislative and policy frameworks that guide public participation in local government through ward committees. Secondly, the findings based on the interviews revealed the perspectives and experiences of the interviewees in terms of the compliance of ward committees with applicable South African legislation and regulations.

The Municipal Structures Act (1998) provides the legislative guidelines on how public participation should be conducted at the local sphere of government in South Africa. It stipulates the roles and procedures for appointing ward committees for each municipal council through the ward councillors. It also provides the basic procedures on how ward committees should function. The Municipal Structures Act (1998) stipulates the formation of ward committees as a legislated participatory mechanism. It outlines how these committees should operate as vehicles for participatory democracy in sharing, inquiring about, and reporting service delivery issues and challenges to the municipality through the ward councillor. The legislation also provides for reporting back to the community on these processes.

It was essential to understand if the participants who included the community members, ward committees and municipal officials understood the legislation, regulations, procedures and roles concerning public participation in uMhlathuze Municipality. The findings of this study, as presented and examined in Chapter 4, revealed that all the participants seemed to understand the role of communication and reporting that ward committees should play. However, the findings also showed that there was a lack of transparency on the role of participation when it came to delivering basic services. Most community members interviewed considered the ward committees to be ineffective.

The literature reviewed in this study indicated that public participation is a crucial process that seeks to promote accountability, transparency and governance (see, for example, Cloete, 2012). Most of the reviewed studies on the responsibilities of ward committees on public participation in South Africa showed that there was a lack of transparency in most service delivery processes (Ngamlana & Coopoo, 2019; Piper & Deacon, 2009; Sekgala, 2016). The municipal officials interviewed in uMhlathuze Municipality revealed that they have a good working relationship with ward committees. However, the responses of some ward committees in this study differed from these sentiments. The general finding of this study discovered that there was a deficiency of compliance, transparency and commitment on the part of the uMhlathuze Municipality to provide effective service delivery to local communities.

Question 2: How efficient are municipal communiqué plans in guaranteeing that ward committees and municipal councillors interrelate efficiently with the people? The role of ward committees was identified as a participatory mechanism to facilitate effective communication between the community and the municipality (Ngamlana & Coopoo, 2019). Therefore, communication was considered an effective mechanism to focus on in this study and to understand how to ward committees represent the interests of the people in uMhlathuze Municipality. It was also essential to understand the various loopholes that might be affecting effective service delivery in the Municipality, hence, the quality of communication within a participatory system needed to be examined.

The study found that the ward committees and uMhlathuze Municipality's communication and reporting were poorly undertaken. Previous studies showed that in most local governments in South Africa, there was poor service delivery and reporting on the part of municipalities and this resulted in continuous protests (Sekgala, 2016). Interviews conducted with the ward committees in uMhlathuze Municipality discovered that the committees had poor communication and reporting records on service delivery processes in the community. Community members had very negative perspectives on how the ward committees operated. Meetings for engaging communities on their service delivery interests were often conducted. However, the communities were never given any feedback nor did they witness any progress in service delivery in their communities. The research showed communication on the part of ward committees and the councillors often occurred effectively during the pre-election seasons only. Overall, the study found that there was poor communication and reporting on the part of

ward committees and the municipality on service delivery matters in uMhlathuze Municipality, thus weakening the role of public participation.

Question 3: What systems are in place for the community to report or complain about ward committees, and municipal councillors and how operative do these systems function? The findings of this study revealed that there were platforms for the public to share their grievances about development issues in the community through the ward committees, war room meetings and community meetings. Though these platforms were present, both ward committees and community members reflected on the challenges of partisan politics which often took precedence at most meetings and which ANC members mainly engaged in. The uMhlathuze Municipality study also showed that though there were platforms for reporting service delivery issues, there was a lack of accountability for poor performance on the part of the ward committees and municipal authorities when it came to effective service delivery. Most of the interviewees revealed that their ideas for service delivery were often set aside, and the projects that were undertaken by the ward councillors rarely employed community members as per the stipulations of local government development policy (White Paper on Local Government, 1998). The community members indicated that they resorted to directly reporting their grievances to the municipality due to the ineffectiveness of the participatory mechanisms. Unfortunately, they reported further that they did not receive any positive feedback or solutions from the Municipality for more than three years. One can conclude that there was a lack of effective platforms for the public to report or complain about the ward committees' and municipal councillors' poor performances, hence negatively affecting the quality of public participation in the community.

Question 4: How do ward committees report back to the community to address community concerns regarding basic services provision? The White Paper on local government (1998) outlines that the ward committees are mandated to give feedback to the communities about service delivery issues through public community meetings. However, the uMhlathuze Municipality study revealed that community members strongly indicated that they rarely received any feedback on any of the service delivery suggestions they had made. Various reasons were given to explain why there was a lack of reporting. However, scholars have indicated that when a municipality does not conduct any service delivery projects, the ward committees have no feedback to report on (Ngamlana & Coopoo, 2019; Sekgala, 2016). The uMhlathuze Municipality study highlighted that the members of the ward committees who

were interviewed were unable to give a definite response on how they reported back to the community.

Question 5: What models could be adopted to promote the effectiveness of ward committees in deepening public participation? Various means can be utilized to boost the effectiveness of ward committees in deepening public participation. One of the issues that the interviewees identified was the ward committees' lack of power to hold the ward councillors and municipality accountable. The Municipal Structures Act (1998) stipulates that the municipality is assigned with the authority to grant power and responsibility to the ward committees. Most of the community members suggested that if the ward committees were given the ability to influence policy and decision making processes directly, this could help deepen public participation toward service delivery. One of the young persons interviewed also suggested creating a community app to reach out mostly to young people in the community and to improve and promote communication with this cohort of the population.

## **5.2 Overall Conclusion**

The first chapter of this research presented the basic guidelines about public participation in South Africa and how local government carries the responsibility to facilitate local economic development through a participatory governance system. The chapter gave an orientation of the study that was undertaken in uMhlatuze Municipality. It outlined the background of the study, the problem statement, the key objectives and questions that guided the research. The second chapter presented the literature review and the legislative framework. It introduced and discussed the key legislative and policy framework on public participation in South Africa's local government, the existing studies on public participation, and how public participation has been conducted and executed in South Africa. Also, the local government theory with respect to the empowerment was explained. Chapter three outlined the research methodology of the study. The study utilized a research design that focused on a qualitative approach. The study interviewed 22 participants, and the methodology chapter explained how the interviews were conducted. Chapter four presented and discussed the findings of the research. Section 5 presented the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

To conclude this research, it is noted that the role of ward committees in uMhlatuze Municipality was highly compromised. There is still a long way to go for effective public

participation in uMhlathuze Municipality. The study revealed that there was ineffectiveness in the public participation processes in the uMhlathuze Municipality. Therefore, the following recommendations are made to promote further research and policy recommendations on effective public participation at the local government sphere in South Africa.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The recommendations drawn from this study are as follows:

- There is a need for the uMhlathuze Municipality to grant ward committees the powers as per the Municipal Structures Act (1998). This will enable them to effectively hold ward councillors accountable and provide the necessary checks and balances to ensure a thriving participatory democracy. Studies reveal that the municipality is vested with this power, but the uMhlathuze Municipality has not delegated these powers to ward committees. Hence this has weakened the role of ward committees to effectively make critical decisions that represent the interests of the people. In short, the uMhlathuze Municipality study recommends that local municipalities in South Africa need to delegate more powers to ward committees to facilitate more effective community participation in the affairs of local government.
- Municipalities should create different alternative communication platforms such as apps that can be used to communicate with the public, ward committees and municipality on the development processes. This can also attract young people to become actively involved in the development issues in their community. Further research can focus on the need for alternative communication platforms that can improve the role of ward committees to report back to community members on the service delivery challenges.
- There is need for uMhlathuze municipality to educate and guide ward committees about their duties and condemn behaviours of using ward committee power in promoting and serving their political parties.

## **Appendix A**

### **Interview schedule for in-depth interviews with ward committee members, uMhlathuze municipality officials and community members**

#### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

#### SECTION B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR WARD COMMITTEES

- How can you describe the parts and elements of ward committees in promoting public participation towards basic services provision in local government?
- What are the procedures and protocol through which your ward committees work?
- How do ward committee ensure that appropriate channels of legislation are being followed?
- Is there any preparation for ward committees and ward councillors?
- What challenges do you experience as a ward committee to operate within the legislation and regulations established to guide ward committees' functionality?
- What is the connection between political arrangements (political parties) and ward committees? Is this relationship meaningful? Please explain your response.
- How are ward committees established? What do you believe are the difficulties?
- What is the connection between ward committees, uMhlathuze municipality and government officials? Do you think this connection is sustainable? Kindly explain your response.
- How do individuals in your ward communicate with ward committees? Please explain your response.
- How should ward committees identify and cooperate with the municipality and



government to promote effective public participation towards the improvement of basic services delivery?

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR UMHLATHUZE MUNICIPALITY OFFICIALS

- What is the relationship between uMhlatuze Municipality and ward committees? Do you think this relationship is viable? Kindly explain your response.
- Do you think ward committees are open to a cooperation system? To what extent would they say they are advancing open cooperation between the municipality and local communities?
- Is there any training that uMhlatuze Municipality has given to ward committees? What preparation did the Municipality need to engage in? Did this preparation and training furnish the members of the ward committees with important skills and techniques?
- Does uMhlatuze Municipality strengthen ward committees' capacities? Kindly explain your response.
- Does the uMhlatuze Municipality seriously consider the contributions of the ward committees? Why do you think the Municipality's responds in this particular way to the input that ward committees provide?
- What are crucial strengths and weaknesses of ward committees in uMhlatuze Municipality? Are there any operational obstructions that you have encountered in respect of the functioning of the ward committees?
- What ought to be done to ensure that ward committees are completely settled and are powerful? Please justify your response.

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- What information do you get from the uMhlatuze Municipality, ward committees and ward councillor on the municipality's organization and administration, especially

regarding basic services delivery?

- How do you guarantee ward committees' responsibility and functions in your municipality? Are there any structures set up for you to report your grievances? , How successful do these structures work? Please explain your response.
- Have you taken an interest in contributing towards project planning and implementation of social policies in your community? If yes, how were you encouraged to do this? If your response is no, why do you not contribute towards these roles in your community?
- In your view, how do ward committees empower you to take part in community development? Kindly elaborate on your position.
- Kindly elaborate on what do you think your ward council can do to enhance the effectiveness of the ward committee to facilitate further benefits to your community?

Please explain your views on what do you think ward committees can play in promoting public participation to improve basic services provision in your community.

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