The Role of Ward Committees in Facilitating Community Participation in Municipal Planning: The Case of Wards 1 and 19 at Umzumbe Municipality

By

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was used and that my Supervisor was informed of the identity and details of my editor. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Town and Regional Planning in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine the role of Ward Committees in facilitating community participation in municipal planning. The main objective was to identify challenges currently faced by Ward Committees in discharging their responsibilities and to make recommendations that would improve Ward Committee's participation in municipal planning. A qualitative approach was adopted and data was gathered through focus group discussions and interviews. The findings indicated that one of the key impediments to Ward Committees having an influence on council decision making appears to be limited power that most Ward Councilors have within the deliberation processes of municipal councils. Moreover, the tensions around respective powers and functions of Ward Committees also highlight a larger fundamental issue affecting public participation and local government. This study found that the role of Ward Committee members in the Integrated Development Planning process is unsatisfactory. The findings indicated that the Ward Committees had limited knowledge of the Integrated Development Plan process despite the fact that they were expected to facilitate and take part in decision making. The study recommends training for Ward Committees on municipal process, clarity on their role and access to information on municipal planning. Ward Committees have a great potential to facilitate bigger community involvement and should be more integrated into municipal processes the study has established. It is therefore necessary that the role of Ward Committees be understood as being an instrument of community participation within a broader context of municipal governance.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER THREE: LEGISLATION AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
CDW	Community Development Worker
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
DCD	Department of Constitutional Development
DPLG	Department of Provincial Local Government
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

CHAPTER: ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The 1994 democratic elections in South Africa led to a new form of governance that emphasizes public participation in public policy making in all spheres of government, (Houston et al., 2001). Smith (2008) argues that, since 1994, there has been a widely observed commitment in South Africa to participatory governance within both government and civil society, which has been given legal standing and encouragement through the Constitution and other pieces of legislation. In support of this, the new government has provided a legal framework that necessitates the establishment and institutionalization of Ward Committees as vehicles to establishing participatory governance at the grass-root level. According to Nyalunga (2006: 45), 'participatory democracy entails a high level of public participation in the political process through a wide variety of institutional channels'. This is evident in the increasing participation of a variety of interest groups in various processes, as well as the establishment of all levels of the political structure. These include mechanisms for public participation for example, through integrated development planning processes, public hearings, petitions as well as policy–making discussions.

Following from above, this study attempts to focus on the role of Ward Committees in facilitating community participation in municipal planning. Umzumbe Local Municipality will be used as a case study to explore the role and the challenges faced by Ward Committees in carrying out their responsibilities in the municipality. The Municipal Systems (Act No. 32 of 2000) stipulates that Ward Committees have to be established to ensure and facilitate community participation in the Integrated Development Planning process. However, questions remain as to how effective this is in practice. This research aims to interrogate this. Ward Committees have been identified as the most important structures through which to involve communities in local government in South Africa.

Since 1998, when the Local Government: Municipal Structures (Act No.117 of 1998) provided for the establishment of Ward Committees, the local community has been included alongside councilors in the legal definition of a municipality. The local government legislation made a provision for Local Authorities to establish a system of participatory democracy at the local level in the form of Ward Committees (Houston and Liebenberg 2001:206). Since 1994, government has put in place policy and a legislative framework that seeks to promote participatory governance.

1

The notion of people's participation in all spheres of government is embedded in the South African Constitution. It obliges national and provincial legislatures to provide measures for public participation in their activities and to facilitate public participation in legislative processes. The Municipal Structures (Act No.117 of 1998) makes it compulsory for each ward to have a committee. The Ward Councillor leads the process of establishing a Ward Committee. The councillor in consultation with the people nominates members of the committee. A Ward Committee can be a fully-representative ward body enjoying full legitimacy but without basic capacity to lead community participation in development and democracy, (DPLG, 2005).

Ward Committees play an important role in local government. They work with the political structures and the councilors, to ensure that the municipality responds to the needs of the community and delivers the services that the community needs. They also work with the community to ensure that the community participates in the processes of local government in a way that helps the council to meet their needs. Ward Committees are required to build constructive relations between the local community and the council. They are attributed a special standing as an official municipal participatory structure. To help achieve this special role as an independent conduit between council and community, a great deal of effort has gone into regulating the election of Ward Committee members and specifying a code of conduct that encourages deliberative virtues such as honesty, good faith, the recognition of diversity and transparency.

1.2 Research Problem

In a country such as South Africa, public participation in local government is considered a basic democratic right of the people. Participation has been planned for at each level of government, and it is certainly integrated in policy–making or in its implementation. Public participation on issues of governance is both constitutional and legal in South Africa. Moreover, since 2001, Ward Committees have emerged as key institutional mechanism intended to contribute towards bringing about people-centred development, participatory and democratic local governance.

The rationale for Ward Committees is to supplement the role of elected councillors by creating a bridge between communities and political representatives as well as administrative the structures of municipalities. These committees have been set up in the vast majority of wards in municipalities across the country, (Putu, 2006).

According to Hicks (2006), 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. They were established to form the bridge between local municipalities and communities by facilitating proper communication. Ward Committees have an important role to play in actively taking part and determining core municipal business such as Integrated Developmental Planning, Budgeting and The Municipal Performance Management Process. She further argues that many municipalities have been struggling to put in place functioning Ward Committees. It is also unclear to what extent Ward Committees indeed bring community responses and proposals to bear on local government decision-making. Some are accused of serving as extensions of local councils, rather than as independent community structures (Hicks, 2006; Everatt and Gwagwa, 2005).

In Hicks's caustic summary (2006:2),

> "There is no clarity on the roles of ward councillors as opposed to proportional representation councillors, there are tensions between ward committee members and ward councillors, and limited resources available to enable ward committees to function."

Case studies that have been researched suggest that Councilors sometimes choose to service what they regard as their political mandates, which do not always conform to the interests and demands emanating from their committees (Putu, 2005). On the other hand, there is a perception that Ward Committees are sometimes "captured" and used to advance the material and/or political ambitions of specific individuals or interest groups. There is evidence that councils dominated by a single political party sometimes constitute and "define the operation of committees in ways which mute potential opposition" (Everatt et al., 2004:7), while some committees appear to be stacked with followers of councilors or interest groups in the ward (Hemson, 2007).

This study investigates the role of ward committees in facilitating community participation in municipal planning and the mechanisms that can enhance the involvement of the community in the development of the municipality.

1.3 Objectives of the Study and Research Question

The objectives of the study:

- To investigate the role and functions of Ward Committees and explore the importance of community participation in municipal planning;
- To identify challenges currently faced by Ward Committees in discharging their responsibilities; and,
- To make recommendations that would improve Ward Committees participating in municipal planning.

The research question that guided the study is as follows:

How effective are Ward Committees in enabling community participation in municipal planning?

The sub- questions used to assist in answering the primary research question are:

- What are the powers and functions of ward committees in ward 1 and 19 in Umzumbe?
- Are there any hindrances to participation of communities in the operations of Ward Committees?
- What can be done to encourage participation of communities in Ward Committees of ward 1 and 19 in Umzumbe?

1.3 Research Methodology

1.4.1 Introduction

This section provides a brief overview of the research methodology which was utilized to contextualize the empirical research of the study. It presents the process of collecting information from various entities.

This is followed by the presentation and discussion of the findings where applicable, the findings will be interpreted and integrated with the literature. To contextualize the research findings, the section firstly provide an overview of the research methodology used for the study. The section also explains how the sample was chosen and the importance of the sample. The first stage is the reviewing of the documents.

4

1.4.2 Research Approach

The collected data was analyzed using qualitative analysis and it would help in providing the role and functions of Ward Committees. Fouche (2002:270) describes qualitative data as a design that does not provide the researcher with a step–by-step plan to follow but is rather determined by the researcher's choices and actions. In this manner groups and individuals responses will be categorized into themes.

1.4.3 Case Study Area

The research was done undertaken in Umzumbe Local Municipality used two wards, ward 1 and 19 of KwaZulu- Natal province (see Map 1). Umzumbe Local Municipality is a local municipality falling within Ugu District Municipality. The municipality is one of the six local municipalities within the District of UGu. Umzumbe Municipality is the second large municipality within the district. The municipality incorporates 17 traditional authority areas comprising 19 municipal wards. The Umzumbe Council comprises of 19 Ward Councillors and 18 Proportional Representation Councillors. Ward 1 is the largest ward and ward 19 is the smallest ward. The community Survey (2007) indicates that "the total population within Umzumbe Municipality has been estimated at 176, 287 people which covers up to 25% of the District". According to Umzumbe Local Municipality's IDP 2009-2010, a large proportion of the population in the Umzumbe Municipality is poor, and is characterised by low levels of employment, limited and irregular household income, and inadequate levels of education and training. Umzumbe is one amongst the others in the country that are facing challenges in improving the quality of life. There is high level of poverty and unemployment as well as low economic growth in the area.

The two wards were selected based on accessibility of the wards by the researcher. The two wards were chosen because they were rural and were accessible by the researcher. A list of all the wards in Umzumbe Local Municipality was collected from the municipality. Information on the wards with high levels of poverty and low literacy levels were selected from the database. The researcher interviewed municipal officials and ward councilors. This enabled the researcher to obtain information and perspectives from diverse range of stakeholders. There was also a focus group discussion for the community members and ward committee members.

Figure 1: Study Area
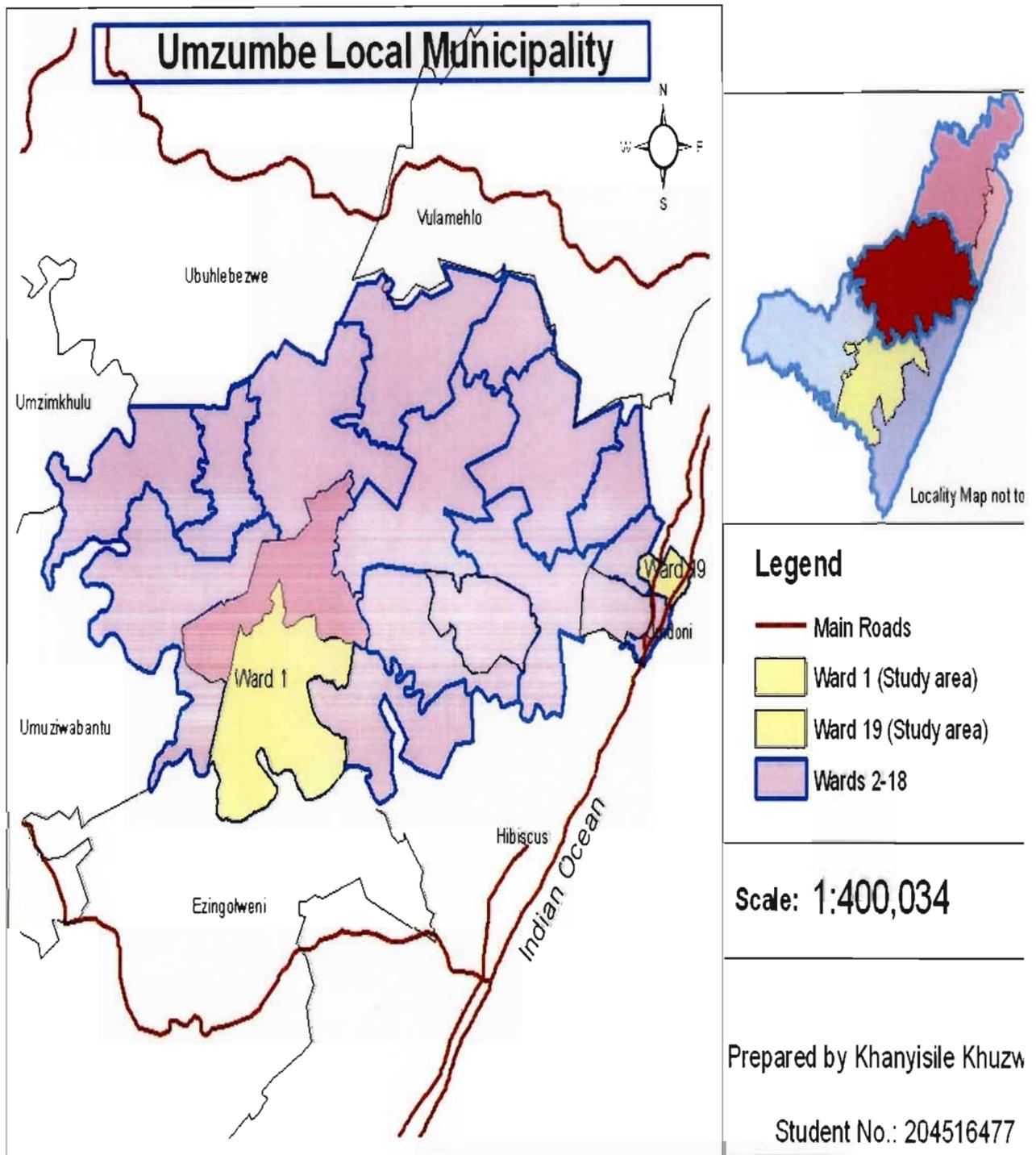
Source: Umzumbe Local Municipality Integrated Development Plan 2009/2010

1.4.4 Research Design

A case study of Umzumbe Municipality was used for the study. It was selected because there are so many developmental initiatives taking place in the municipality. The case study design enabled the researcher to focus on one area, which assisted the researcher to interrogate issues in-depth. This led to the provision of a detailed description and analysis of processes as voiced by participants.

The Umzumbe Local Municipality is one of the six local municipalities within the Ugu District. It is comprised of 19 wards. The areas used by the researcher were Wards 1 and 19 to analyze the role of Ward Committees in facilitating participation. Ward 1 is rural and ward 19 is semi rural and the challenges they face are not the same. According to Municipal Integrated Development Plan (2007), ward 1 is faced with a huge electrification backlog, low household densities, bad terrain and lack of infrastructure. Ward 19 has greater services than ward 1.

The data for the study is qualitative and the researcher used a case study design. Bassey (1999:58) explains that a case study is an investigation that is conducted in a specific location at a specific time. The case study research enables a researcher to explore important features of the issue being studied and draw convincing conclusions. Fouche (2005:272) confirms that a case study is a deep inquiry or a detailed analysis of a system or an event and the examination is done in a specific space and time. The research can be carried out on a single or multiple cases, over a period of time.

Fouche (2005:272) explains that a case study is the observation of a practice, action, event, programme or individual, in a particular place and time. Patton (1990:54) emphasizes the importance of case study research by saying that it provides rich information. This means that case studies help the researcher to understand and know more about an individual, organization and social that is being studied. Furthermore, high-quality case studies can help the audience of the research to understand what is happening (Yin, 1994:2-3).
Moreover, Stake (1994: 240) expresses that case study research enables a researcher to teach what he or she has learned by providing material for readers to learn on their own. The readers learn about things told as if they have experienced them.

1.4.5 Research Population and Sample Size

Data collection for this study varies according to the sources of data and it focuses on both primary and secondary data sources. The sections below outline the research sampling methodology, type of sampling technique used, primary and secondary sources and the kind of information collected from various data sources and how the data was collected from various sources and how it was analyzed. There was a need in this study for the researcher to select people who could provide information related to their knowledge and experiences related to the topic under study in order to have in-depth understanding of the roles and functions of Ward Committees.

1.4.6 Instrument Development and Data Collection

Stage 1: the researcher started by reviewing relevant municipality documents on Ward Committees and community participation in order to find relevant information about the topic. The list that follows shows the type of documents the researcher reviewed: the Annual reports for Ward Committees 2006, 2007 and 2008.

Each document provided a detailed report about programmes or activities that were carried out annually by Umzumbe municipality departments.

- The Ugu District Municipality Annual Reports;
- Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees' (Notice 965 of 2005) document;
- Creating Development Oriented Ward Committees – a challenge for newly elected ward committee's seminar. This is a report that states how elected ward committees should operate.

This review of documents helped the researcher understand the types of problems that affect the community. The limitation of this method is thought to have been the fact that key informants have protected and prevented access to other information that they thought it is confidential.

Stage 2: the researcher used the focus group method to collect data from the community. The focus group involved interviewing people in groups discussing issues that were presented to them during focus group discussions. Five sets of questions were developed. Using focus group discussions helped in examining the experiences and concerns of people who are living in Umzumbe Local Municipality.

The advantage of using the focus group discussion method is that it encourages debate and discussion by local people around key issues related to local development planning and governance.

Focus group discussions were held within Umzumbe Local Municipality with Ward Committee members and community members. There were between six and twelve people per group. The researcher took notes and facilitated discussions simultaneously. Participants signed a consent form to show their willingness to participate in the research. A second set of questions were formulated for municipal officials and ward councillors. Municipal officials were interviewed separately and an interview schedule was used. This comprised of semi structured interviews with the researcher completing the interview schedule as the interview proceeded. The researcher used a tape recorder for interviews and focus group discussions. Participants were informed about the recording and consulted to this method of record keeping.

1.4.7 Officials from Umzumbe Municipality

1.4.7.1 Ward Councilors

A Ward Councilor is a person elected by residents within the ward during local elections to represent people in municipal council and is the chairperson of the Ward Committee. A Ward Councilors' role is to encourage and channel community and neighborhood engagement, local issues and local choice. Ward Councilors are elected as the people's representatives.

1.4.7.2 Ward Committee Members

Ward committee members are representatives of the community elected by the community together with the Ward Councillor. They are representatives of the people in the wards and they are required to have skills related to the empowerment of other community members and in order for them to perform their duties as representatives of the community effectively.

1.4.8 Use of Secondary Data

Secondary sources of information included a variety of books, journal articles, newspaper articles, government publications, the Ward Committee Resource Book, IDP Frameworks, Municipal Business Plans, research reports and DPLG National Policy Framework on

Public Participation and theories on community participation and municipal planning. Additional information was drawn from relevant pieces of legislation and Municipal Integrated Development Plans.

1.5 Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data through the following five stages, as outlined by Cresswell's Model (1998).

- Collecting and managing data: through an interviews and focus group discussions, the researcher elicited data and used a tape recorder to capture discussions in respondents own words. The researcher took handwritten notes. The interviews were conducted in English and isiZulu understood by both the researcher and the respondents. After the interviews, the researcher used the tapes to create transcripts which together with the handwritten notes of the respondents were stored.

- Reading and memoranda: the researcher guided the transcript in order to get a sense of the themes that have emerged. During this reading process, the researcher's role was to make notes of significant phrases, key concepts and ideas.

- Classifying: as the text being scrutinized, the researcher highlighted the themes and phrases that carried the same meaning. Using colour coding, different themes were identified.

- Interpretation: the researcher considered the various pieces of information to create a holistic picture of the meaning of the described situation.

1.6 Ethical Considerations

There are inescapable ethical considerations in any intervention in people's lives and it was essential that every effort be made to avoid harmful consequences for participants. According to Bisman and HardCastle (1999) some of the important research ethics that should be considered when one is undertaking a research are:

- Informed Consent: A consent form was signed by informants to depict that they were not coerced into taking part in the research.

- Confidentiality: It was explained to participants that their participation in the research would remain anonymous. Participants were frequently reminded about the confidentiality of their information so that they feel protected and safe to say whatever they want to contribute to the study.

1.7 Limitations of the study

There are several limitations in using this methodology, namely it does not pick up full range of beliefs and behaviors surrounding a research topic, especially if the topic is deemed sensitive according to local standards. Furthermore, interviews and focus group discussions provided information in a "designated place" rather than in a natural field setting. In addition, the logistical problems in getting groups of people together at specific times are common. This was particularly experienced with focus groups of municipal officials and councilors since it was difficult bringing them together.

1.8 Structure of the dissertation:

This dissertation comprises of five chapters which are outlined in more
The first chapter provides an introduction and explains the background to the study, the rationale and reasons for doing the study, the objectives of the study, the problem statement, research question and sub-questions, and the research methodology are outlined as part of this chapter.

Chapter two presents the theoretical and conceptual framework on community participation in municipalities. It reviews literature on public participation in local governance including the rationale for public participation as well as the challenges in facilitating the role of Ward Committees in executing their responsibilities.

Chapter three examines the implications for policy and practice in South Africa regarding the role of Ward Committees in facilitating development in rural communities.

Chapter four presents and analyses the research findings generated from the focus group discussions and interviews with various participants in relation to the literature.

Chapter five concludes the research and makes recommendations

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of the literature that informed the study. In this section, the researcher provides various viewpoints on the key concepts reflected in the research topic and indicates how these respective concepts have been used in the study. It deals with the theoretical context on community participation, governance and ward committees as well as Integrated Development Planning. The chapter also reviews the literature on community participation in local governance including the rationale for community participation, the role of local government as well as the structures or methods that can be used for effective participation. The purpose of this research is that it seeks to highlight the importance of Ward Committees as engines driving community participation. An overview of the Integrated Development Plan as a strategic process enabling community participation will be presented as a tool that enables interaction with the community on issues of development. The conceptual framework of this chapter also provides a theoretical overview on issues of community participation and how these apply to the South African local government system.

In the South African context, various mechanisms have been put in place to foster community participation. However fostering community participation is still problematic in local municipalities. Evidence of this observation is provided by authors such as Bekker, (1996), Houston and Liebenberg (2001:283), who state that around the world practitioners, analysts and activists are struggling with the issue of participation in governance.

In South Africa, Ward Committees are proposed as the main channel for community participation in local government. Williams (2006:2) further emphasizes that participatory models of governance and decision-making are profoundly influenced, if not shaped, by the contradictions, tensions, conflicts and struggle based on political relations of power and also the economic and ideological tools at local levels. Piper and Deacon (2008) argue that the lack of public participation is getting consideration in South Africa from both government and civil society; laws and policies that do exist are ignored.

Various mechanisms have been put in place to foster community participation but institutions do not follow the constitutional processes when facilitating participation in their legislative processes.

This research seeks to examine the role of Ward Committees in facilitating community participation in municipal planning.

According to (Hicks (2006) community participation currently constitutes an important element of the South Africa government's policy in the preparation of an Integrated Development Plan on local government level (Van Rooyen, (2003:126). Integrated development planning involves new and complex governance and planning processes for South African Local Authorities.

However, recent studies have shown that it is extremely difficult to meet the demands of participatory processes in the compilation of IDPs. According to Houston (2001:210), this is attributed to a lack of experience with participation in municipal governance. Often complex technical issues involved in planning and the municipal budget, a lack of capacity amongst elected officials and senior local council staff, and sometimes problematic relations between elected councilors and participatory structures in the community contribute to a context where real participation is impossible. Participation promotes legitimacy and public support for the policies and programmes of the Local Authorities and thereby ensures democratic stability. The Department of Constitutional Development points out that the participation civil society in the Integrated Development Plan process would ensure the fullest support of residents and stakeholders; mobilize community and private sector resources to make the most of growth and development strategies; and provide a foundation for future development initiatives, (Department of Constitutional Development, 1997:7).

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Public Participation

2.2.1 Governance as a Form of Public Participation

The concept of governance refers to the role of the state in society. The World Bank defines governance as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (World Bank, 1994). The World Bank however, prescriptively assumes that good governance implies liberal, free market–orientated democracy (World Bank 1994 and Leftwich 1993). The evidence for this assertion is that, the concept of governance is concerned directly with the management of the development process, involving both the public and the private sectors.

However governance has been described as "both a broad reform strategy and a particular set of initiatives to strengthen the institutions of civil society with the objective of making government more accountable, more open and transparent, and more democratic. (Monique, 1997: 4 quoted in Gaventa and Valderrama).

In broad terms, governance is about the institutional environment in which citizens interact among themselves and with government officials.

2.2.2. The Shift from Government to Governance

Governance is the process of governing while government is the body that does the governing. According to Venter (2006), government is defined as the body within an organization that has authority and function to make and the power to enforce laws, regulations or rules. In general, government refers to a civil government – local, provincial or national. The government has to ensure that all structures enable the public to exercise a meaningful say.

The 1994 democratic elections in South Africa led to a new form of government and governance which emphasizes public participation in public policy making at all levels of government. According to Department of Provincial and Local Government (2002), this new form of governance is also stipulated in the South African Constitution (1996) and this mandates that all public policy processes should encompass democratic participation of the people. For local government, this implied new approaches to development planning that led to the introduction of the Integrated Development Plans in 1996.

As Beall (2001:360) has indicated, the critical shifts associated with the 'new institutionalism", (North, 1990; Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom et al., 1993; Tendler, 1997 cited in Beall, 2001) have been accompanied by a conceptual shift from government to governance, with a crucial distinction between government and governance being the role of civil society. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has also pressed the importance of governance. It suggests that participation needs to take into account the different needs and claims of groups in civil and political society. Since 1994, the responsibilities and opportunities vested in local government have multiplied.

14

Among the changes have been a widening of the focus from delivery to include long-term strategies such as poverty reduction, social and economic development and the greater importance accorded to citizen participation (Beall et al., 2002).

Coetzee (2000:12) argues that developmental local government should adopt a strategic, creative and integrated approach to governance so as to involve actively seeking partnerships with all role players that contribute to the development of an area, including the organization of the state, the private sector and communities.

In this manner, municipalities can fulfill their core responsibilities in a way that has a lasting and profoundly positive impact on the quality of life of the people they serve. Some analysts question whether formal institutionalized participatory mechanisms are the most effective ways for boosting participatory governance. Friedman (2006:3), for example has claimed that the structures and channels in South Africa are "intrinsically hostile to effective participation by the poor" and mostly benefit affluent groups. Instead, he proposes that participatory governance be understood as a process in which citizens have rights, employing methods and channels of their choice (within the constraints imposed by a democratic order) to compel governments to deal with them on their terms, not those convenient to power-holders. Citizen's participation in government and in particular that of the poor is more likely therefore, not when governments create formal mechanisms to ensure it but when they develop attitudes and institutions accessible to citizen action.

Recent studies suggest that to make governance work effectively, it is necessary to bring in the demand side of governance, namely citizens and their organizations and to work on supply and demand together (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001). The notion of participatory governance defined as 'the process of collective decision-making in the public domain where government is one stakeholder among others and citizens affected by decisions are included' (Hague et al., 1998).

According to Knight et al (2002:82), the idea of participatory governance has caught on and is now in style among many international institutions. The World Bank for example, considers 'participation' as a means of making its development projects function better, of helping people to cope with the economic consequences of adjustment policies, and of countering the threat to governability posed by the rising exclusion of people policies. The Bank also looks to participation as an indispensable dimensions of environmental and population- control policies (Stiefel and Wolfe, 1994).

Knight et al (2002) further argue that a key insight in this assessment is that, such government actors "worked outside the institutional framework". It can be concluded from this that, without the institutionalization of inclusive forms of development practice, community-level organizations seem condemned to remain small-scale, ineffective and excluded from decision-making arenas. Alternatively, they appear destined to be used instrumentally by governments and development institutions concerned more with implementation and delivery than with genuine pro-poor processes of urban governance.

Finally, Beall (2001:372) pointed out that public action is important in terms of ensuring local democracy. The study also reveal that the urban poor value the role of outside agents and do not always have the energy, skills or inclination to participate in governance on terms set by government or other development institutions.

2.2.3   The Role of Local Government

Local government is a sphere of government that interacts most closely with the people. It is a sphere of government where service–delivery takes place (Cameron & Stone, 1995) and the municipal council is accountable to communities in their localities. As Houston (2001) has indicated, the South African government has committed itself to instituting wide-ranging participatory processes in the different spheres and institutions of governance in the country. The attempt to introduce participatory and direct democracy is evident, in addition to institutions and processes at national and provincial levels, in the policy formulation and planning processes of local government structures. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996) mandates local government "to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities and encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government."

As Houston et al (2001) have indicated local government legislation has two consistent themes: the developmental role of Local Authorities – planning, implementing and monitoring; and the obligation imposed on Local Authorities to consult with "residents, communities and other stakeholders" in the performance of their tasks. This has been supplemented by the Policy Framework on Local Government set out in the White Paper on Local Government. 16

Measures have also been introduced to transform the functions of local government in South Africa to emphasize development rather than regulation, as was the case under the previous dispensation. In combination, developmental local government is defined as " local government committed to working 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" (White Paper 1998).

2.2.4. Participation in Local Governance

Deevy (1998:2) defines participation as about "giving people a real 'say' in decisions that affect their lives. This means that they must have access to decision –making structures in order to exercise this "say". He further argues that "to achieve this, participation must be based on the understanding that not all groups and members of the communities have the same opportunities to make their voices heard."

The National Policy Framework (2005) defines participation as:
"A democratic process of engaging people, deciding, planning and playing an active part in the development and operation of services that affect their lives. It is also legislated in the Municipal Structures (Act No.117 of 1998) that most channels for participation provide opportunities for citizens and communities to engage with local government through structures and processes such as Ward Committees, integrated development planning and consultation in service delivery processes. Many citizens and community based groups use these participatory mechanisms." (Van Donk 2007: 487).

According to van Donk (1998:43) appropriate participation means "enhancing the participation of members of the community through information dissemination. People have a right to know who in the municipality is responsible for what, where to go with questions or complaints, and how decisions made by the municipality will impact on their lives and neighbourhoods. Also without the relevant information, people cannot be expected to make meaningful contributions to community issues and debates". It is a constitutional requirement in all democratic countries that people participate in development initiatives that affect their lives. Democracy requires that all people have access to resources which could empower them as well as the right to exercise their power in such a way that they are able to participate in public affairs (African National Congress, 1994: 120).

The participation of the communities builds trust between the Local Authorities and the people. If the communities are involved, they will have a very strong sense of ownership and accountability. They will feel that they participated in the plan "for themselves, and not for others".

Furthermore, through collective action people become more united and more confident about solving their problems (African National Congress, 1994:147). Studies suggest that the concept of participation has been related to rights of citizenship and to democratic governance. More recently, the definition of participation in development has often been located in development programmes, as a means of strengthening their relevance, quality and sustainability (Putu, 2006). There may be many reasons for low levels of public participation, but one reason that has particular relevance for participation in different processes is a perception among the public that their input will not be given adequate consideration.

Another significant limitation for civil society's participation in developmental local government is "the technical nature of contemporary government" (Pauw, 1999:148). This has a number of consequences, such as the capacity inequality between government officials and representatives of civil society, which creates unequal power relations. Thus, civil society participants may have a limited impact on the planning process, with the process driven largely by the Local Authority. (Rubenstein, 1995:74).

According to van Donk et al (2008:489), participation is a fundamental feature of the integrated development planning process. In theory, this process provides space for such participation through forums held with community representatives and municipal officials. They further acknowledge that the level of participation has never been higher in South Africa, given the history of exclusion during Apartheid. Different authors argues that participation through integrated planning processes has been superficial (Davids 2005, Houston 2001, Kohler 2000, Mathye 2002), highlighting the limited nature of participation through such processes in practice.

2.2.5. Structures for Effective Public Participation

It is important to encourage other forms of public participation such as workshops and the forums as well as community structures e.g. Community Development Workers (CDW) created to facilitate development.

18

There are a number of different options for public participation to be encouraged which are outlined in more detail below.

a) Public hearings

Public hearings are one important tool to enhance public participation. These are formal meetings with a scheduled presentation being offered. According to Sewell and Coppock (1997), public hearings may be held in strategic areas closer to the communities. Moseley, Cherret, Sewel and Coppock (1997) argue that these forms and tools of participation are appropriate at different stages of the development process and with different groups.

It therefore means that applying these forms of participation will depend on the phase of the Integrated Development Plan process as well as the category of the people and their role in the process.

b) Focus or interest groups

These are groups of concerned individuals who share the same interest. This method of public participation can be used to gather information on community opinions.

c) Public meetings

These are open and flexible platforms to share information and discuss issues. This is the most common method of public participation.

d) Workshops

These are seminars gatherings of small groups of people led by a small number of specialists with technical expertise in a specific area. (Mogaladi 2007:12) asserts that, the aim of these workshops is to educate the public about the role of the municipalities or government, how it functions and how the communities can participate in the workings of the municipalities.

As South African Local Government Association (2006) indicated, one way of creating communities to participate effectively in local government is to put the people into social action groups that constantly liaise with their constituencies to take up a mandate on issues impending social progress, and take action to challenge injustices and propose changes. It can be argued that this will only happen if people know their privileges and understand that they have the option to exercise these rights. Without knowledge and understanding of their rights, they will not challenge injustices by the Local Municipality. As noted by SALGA (2004), it is therefore crucial that people be conscientised about the possible change they can achieve through active participation in democratic processes in their lives. It can be seen that people should be informed about their roles, rights and responsibilities in the whole development process.   19

This is an important part of the content of a capacity building strategy. (Mogaladi, 2007: 37). The advantage of providing stilt training to communities is that the quality of participation and public policy making will be improved. This is supported by the view that an "educated citizen is enabled to exercise his or her judgment, contribute to the debate about planning and is aware of societal problems and the difficulties of finding solutions to them" (Boaden et al., 1987:167). Masango (2002: 62) advocates for "public education, capacity building for participation, reforming attitudes towards participation, and publicizing local government affairs as some of the important factors to be considered in any capacity building programme aimed at improving and sustaining public participation.

As Van Donk et al (2007:515) indicates, when a democratic sphere of local government was created in 1994, an argument was made that it would be the most accessible sphere to local communities. The ward committee system would be the constitutional vehicle through which non-political associations that represent community interests engage government. This committee would then facilitate community interests through ward councilors to the municipal council. Currently local government sphere is the governmental institution closest to the people. However, this does not necessarily guarantee sufficient participation or the efficiency of the system (Rautenbach & Malherbe 1998). Other important aspects of accessibility include the modes of communication and interaction between officials and communities and the location of municipal offices within the community.

As Hicks (2006) argues, functional Ward Committees are ideally placed to facilitate community based planning. In many instances, community members are committed to community development, but lack capacity and real empowerment to fulfill this role. Furthermore, in municipal planning processes, Ward Committees could facilitate dialogue between community members and their municipalities. For the Integrated Development Plan and budget processes, for instance, committee members could facilitate community deliberation within wards on community needs and priorities, and then feed this information through to municipality planning and budgeting processes. The same process could be undertaken for IDP reviews, with community reflection and feedback on municipality implementation and performance being gathered at Ward level, and fed into municipality review processes. Ward Committees could provide feedback to communities on the outcome of their recommendations, and on final planning decisions.

2.3 The process of Integrated Development Planning (IDP)

Integrated Development Planning is a process through which municipalities prepare a strategic development plan for a five-year period (DPLG, 2005). It involves the municipality and its people in finding the best solution to achieve effective sustainable development (DPLG, 2005). The integrated development plan is the principal strategic planning instrument that guides and informs planning, budgeting, management and decision making in the municipality (DPLG, 2005:75). The White Paper on Local government (1998) describes the IDP as one of the key tools local government has in coping with its new developmental role. However, the IDP is a legislative requirement and it has a legal status and it supersedes all other plans that guide development at local government level (DPLG, 2000).

Integrated Development Planning (IDP) offers opportunities for communities to be involved in determining the priorities of the IDP (MacKay, 2004). He further argues that, an IDP promotes participatory decision-making at local government level and promotes sustainable development. Van Donk (2007:489) argued that community participation is a fundamental feature of the integrated development planning process. In theory, this process provides space for participation through forums held with community representatives and municipal officials.

Parnell et al (2002:6) point out that a strategic planning model has been mainstreamed in municipal practice through the compulsory formulation of an IDP. Strategic plans are powerful tools to enable organizations to transcend the limitations of the present. Parnell et al further argue that the particularly promising aspect of the IDP model is that it seeks to promote a future-oriented, problem -solving approach within local government and the citizenry. It aspires to provide a framework for diverse communities, citizens and interest groups to enter into public dialogue and debate about the desirable future that they want to construct. Through this continuous act, the IDP model generates a momentum for constructing new shared values and visions to inform how best to negotiate the tensions between restitution, redistribution and maintenance of standards that are normative for certain privilege groups. According to Houston (2001:13), the South African government has committed itself to instituting wide-ranging participatory processes in the different spheres and institutions of governance in the country. This is evident in addition to institutions and processes at national and provincial levels in the planning processes of local government structures.

Municipal authorities for example, are legally committed to involve civil society in the formulation of municipal budgets, planning and developmental priorities. Thus, integrated development planning involves new and complex governance and planning processes for South African local authorities.

2.4 Roles and Functions of Ward Committees

As Putu (2006:14) has indicated, Ward Committees are part of local government and an important way of achieving the aims of local governance and democracy as mentioned in the South African Constitution of 1996. These structures are a committee of not more than 10 members of a ward and the Ward Councilor is the chairperson. Its role is to facilitate participatory democracy; disseminate information help rebuild partnership for better service delivery; and assist with problems experienced by the people at ward level. Putu further argues that Ward Committees are established to enhance participatory democracy in local government.

A Ward Committee has no executive powers but serve as an independent, advisory structure for the Ward Councilor and the council. The Municipal Structures Act states that a Ward Committee consists of the councilor representing the ward in the council who shall also be the chairperson of the Ward Committee. It should be acknowledged therefore, that ward committees were established to serve as instruments for public participation and sustainable local government. The success of Ward Committees is very dependent on the capacity of its members to exercise their powers, perform their functions and play their roles. (Nyalunga, 2006).

Ward Committees have been identified as the most important structures through which communities get involve in local government in South Africa. According to Piper and Chanza (2006:18), as the sphere of government closest to the people, post –apartheid South African local government has been given a new mandate to involve communities in municipal governance. Various pieces of legislation have been put in place and they all call for a system of 'participatory governance' or community participation. Perhaps the main 'invited space' designed by government for this purpose is the Ward Committee system. Ward Committees are representative advisory bodies who assist Ward Councilors intended to facilitate communication and mobilization between ward councilor and the community.

This system of allocating Ward Committee members portfolios ensures that each Ward Committee member has a particular role to play within the ward (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005).   22

Furthermore, this system also allows them to develop experience and understand issues related to other portfolios. According to the Department of Provincial and Local Government (2004), the purpose of a Ward Committee is to promote participatory democracy by assisting communities and community organizations in the municipal processes such as municipal budget, IDP and review process, municipal performance management system, by –laws and provision of municipal services.

The role of Ward Committees is to make sure that the voters directly participate and partake in decisions made by the council. They should be part and parcel of the processes and structures that affects their lives as ordinary citizens. The Ward Committee should be set up in a way that it can reach most sectors and areas in the ward. The Ward Committee's main tasks are to communicate and consult with the community in respect of development and service plans (Nyalunga, 2006:45).

The work that Ward Committees are doing and the role that they are playing must be part of Integrated Development Plan and service delivery. There should be a good partnership between the ward committees and community development workers. Ward Committees and ward committee members represent Ward Councilor. The community development workers that provide a link to government service delivery must make this link strong. (DPLG and Government Gazette, 2005: 14).

2.5 Key Issues and Challenges to Community Participation

A democratic government in South Africa brought with it calls from political office bearers for public participation in public affairs (Masango, 2005:52). These calls were, according to the author, accompanied by the promulgation of legislation that encouraged public participation in governance and policy making. Decentralization of governance in South Africa was intended to ensure that both government and the community grew closer to each other. Gonzalez (1998:10) argues that decentralizing functions increases official's knowledge and sensitivity to local problems and needs. Yet the assessments of IDP's have tended to underline the need to boost the knowledge, interest and participation of communities in the planning processes.

Harrison (2003:26) cites Rauch's assessment that project proposals emanating from Integrated Development Plan's tended to reflect community needs and that the public did have "adequate opportunity to be informed and to comment on the contents of the plan".

Indeed, participation, in Rauch's view "did not yet move much beyond assessment of prioritized needs." Subsequently, the IDPs of many municipalities have come to reflect at least some of the inputs solicited from the public (DPLG, 2006; Moodley, 2007).

According to Hicks (2006), many municipalities have been struggling to put in place functioning Ward Committees. Often when committees are in place, their status is ill-defined and they operate in clumsy and unpredictable manner (Hicks, 2006), or they appear to be paralyzed by in-fighting or stand-offs with councilors (Hemson, 2007). Some are accused of serving as extensions of local councils, rather than as independent community structures (Hicks, 2006; Everatt and Gwagwa, 2005). It has also been noted that the ability of Ward Committees to function effectively as communication channels between municipal councils and communities is constrained by poor communication strategies and a lack of accessible information at a Ward level.

Afesis-Corplan (2003) noted that "without a proper understanding of the targets and indicators for development as set out in the IDP, and the ability to disaggregate these to their own ward areas, and Ward Committees cannot be expected to provide any empirical or qualitative feedback on municipal delivery strategies and performance" Smith, (2008:16).

Putu (2001) points out that another set of issues related to the limitations of powers of Ward Committees. These limitations are legislatively imposed by the Municipal Structures Act which limits the powers of ward committees to simply providing advice to ward councilors and receiving inputs from communities. Although the Act makes provision for municipalities to delegate certain powers and duties to ward committees, it appears that few municipalities have done this in any meaningful sense.

Another more criticism of civil society participation in political structures and processes is that participation becomes an end in itself, instead of a means to achieve certain objectives. In other words, a civil society participation programme may be judged as successful simply because there is widespread public participation in the programme. By distinction, it should be argued that a participation programme can only be judged to be effective if the participants, through their participation, "have some influences over any resultant decisions" (Sabela & Reddy, 1996:5).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has given a summary of the intentions of the research. It has unpacked key terms that make up the topic of the research. The research explained the key issues surrounding the participation in local governance, and the role of local government. It is followed by a brief overview of key issues and challenges related to Ward Committees that have been highlighted in other literature. It has also focused attention on the element of the Ward Committees and Integrated Development Plan with specific reference to community participation. It has also discussed how community participation forms an important element of the South African government's policy. Ward committees have been identified as the most important structures through which to involve communities in local government in South Africa. It is therefore necessary that the role of ward committees need to be understood as being an instrument of public participation within a broader context of municipal governance. The next chapter will discuss the legislation that illustrate the way in which Ward Committees function and provide the framework for how municipalities interact with communities.

CHAPTER 3: LEGISLATION AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter on policy framework gives a critical account of how conducive the environment in South Africa is, in enabling all spheres of government to facilitate public participation. In South Africa, community participation is shaped by the Constitution and also supported by other important pieces of legislation. The legislative framework on Ward Committees comprises four main documents: The South African Constitution (1996), the White Paper on Local Government, the Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998) and the Municipal Systems Act (No.32 of 2000). Legislation describes the way in which local government should function and provides the mandate for how municipalities interact with communities.

In South Africa, community participation has become a fundamental theme in the field of development as a model for addressing and balancing the injustices of the past. The concept of community participation is highlighted in a number of policy documents relating to Ward Committees. The government has provided for a legal framework that necessitates the establishment and institutionalization of Ward Committees as vehicles to establish participatory governance at the grass root level (Nyalunga, 2004).

Since 1994, there has been a widely observed commitment in South Africa to participatory governance within both government and civil society, which has been given legal standing and support through the South African Constitution and other pieces of legislation. Government has committed itself to instituting wide ranging participatory processes in the different institutions of governance in South Africa. In South Africa, Ward Committees are proposed as the main channel for community participation in local government. The local government legislation has made provision for local authorities to establish a system of participatory democracy at the local level in the form of Ward Committees Houston et al (2001:206). The notion of people's participation in all spheres of government is embedded in South African Constitution. Section 118(1) of the Constitution makes provision for the public to have access to provincial legislature and to be involved in legislative processes. The Constitution of South Africa (1996) and key legislation such as Chapter 4 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (2000) and Chapter 4 of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (1998) provides a powerful legal framework for participatory local democracy and Ward Committees in particular. Ward committees were included in the legislation as a way of providing an opportunity for communities to be heard at local government.

3.2 Constitution of South Africa (1996)

The Constitution of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996: Chapter 7) states that it is the objective of local government "to encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matter of local government". This requires a cooperative approach, an "effective partnership" where "local authorities provide strong leadership for their areas and their communities". Therefore, the institution of local government , as stated by the Constitution " should enhance opportunities for participation by placing more power and resources at a closer and more easily influencial level of government" (Mogale, 2005:136). The Constitution further states that provincial government must promote the development of local government capacity to enable municipalities to perform their functions. A municipality must structure and manage its administration and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community and to promote the social and economic development of it.

3.3 White Paper on Local Government

The White Paper on Local Government (1998:17) defines developmental local government as "government committed to working 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." It requires a great deal of "interaction between local authorities and their communities to ensure that all stakeholders are at least informed about the expectations of the community and the ability of councils to deliver services" (Bekker, 1996:32). The legislation is one of the most important benefits of civil society participation in local government and it also enhances the potential for local authorities to meet the expectations of the residents of a municipal area.

The characteristics of a developmental local government are spelled out as follows in Section B of the White Paper on Local Government (1998):

- Maximising social development and economic growth – "the powers and functions of local government should be exercised in a way that has maximum impact on the social development of communities."
- Integrating and coordinating – "developmental local government must provide vision and leadership for all those who have a role to play in achieving local prosperity."

- Democratizing development – "municipalities can render support to individuals and community initiatives, directing community energies into projects and programmes which benefit the area as a whole."
- Leading and learning – "developmental local government requires that municipalities become more strategic, visionary and ultimately influential in the way they operate."

Coetzee (2000:12) argues that "a developmental local government should adopt a strategic, creative and integrated approach to governance so as to address challenges related to service delivery. This involves actively seeking partnerships with all role players that contribute to the development of an area, including other organizations of the state, the private sector and communities." In this manner municipalities can fulfill their core responsibilities in a way that has a lasting and profoundly positive impact on the quality of life of the people they serve. The White Paper on Local Government (1998) laid a rigid foundation for the establishment of pro-poor developmental local government, strong citizen participation a central element (Pieterse, 2002). It also highlighted the importance of "democratizing development, empowering and redistributing", while seeking a balance between regulations and facilitating community involvement.

Theoretically, the importance of community involvement is captured well in the legislative framework. This ideal is expressed in the notion of "integrated development planning", which states that "local government must be committed to work with citizens and groups within the community to find ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives". This would ultimately render it possible for citizens to monitor performance of their government. As Fukuyama argues, "holding government agencies accountable to the public is to some extent a matter of institutional design and internal checks and balances, but ultimately , it is the people who are responsible for monitoring its performances and demanding responsive behavior" (Fukuyama, 2004:40).

The White Paper provides local municipalities with the opportunity to develop structures that would ensure meaningful participation and interaction with the councilors. It further gives general outlines on the system of Ward Committees, their functions, roles, powers and duties and the administrative arrangements.

The main role of Ward Committees is the facilitation of local community participation in the decisions which affect the local community, the articulation of local community interests and the representation of these interests within the municipality.

The White Paper on Local Government (1998), stipulates that "municipal councilors should promote the involvement of citizens and community groups in the design and delivery of municipal programmes". Local government structures must "develop strategies and mechanisms to continuously engage with citizens, business and community groups".

As Marais (2007) has indicated, since 1994, the responsibilities and expectations vested in local government have multiplied. Among the signal changes has been a widening of the focus from delivery to include long-term strategic endeavors such as poverty reduction, social and economic development, and the greater importance accorded to citizen participation (Beall et al., 2002 cited in Marais, (2007)). Since 2000, a range of adjustments have heralded speedier service and infrastructure delivery. Additional legislative provisions have been introduced, local government systems have been reorganized, the intergovernmental fiscal system has been rearranged, and an elaborate planning system has been devised (Everatt and Gwagwa, 2005).

Liebenberg (2001:216) argues that the idea of civil society participation in developmental local government has supporters and detractors, as well as benefits and limitations. Perhaps the most significant argument for civil society participation in developmental local government is the recognition in the post-apartheid era, that local government structures are primarily responsible for serving the needs of the residents and stakeholders in their areas.

One of the tools of developmental local government pointed out in the White Paper is the IDP. There are many areas where there are legislative mandates for community participation, but the core mandate is the Integrated Development Plan process. An Integrated Development Plan is a strategic planning process for an area that gives an overall framework for development. It aims to coordinate the work of local and other spheres of government in a coherent plan to improve the quality of life for all the people living in an area. The aim of the IDP is to plan for the development of the municipality and all its communities. The IDP is based on community needs and priorities. Through the IDP the community has the opportunity to participate in identifying their important needs (DPLG, 2005: 141).

According to Houston et al (2001), the Department of Constitutional Development (DCD), which is charged with developing policy on local government and providing assistance to municipalities, stipulates that a system of civil society participation is likely to follow three phases. In the first phase at the IDP "initial outreach", the municipalities build a relationship with stakeholders in the community and establish a common vision for development.

In this first phase the municipalities identify and embark on a programme to involve all interest groups in the participatory processes. The second phase termed "internal focus and restructuring", involves adjusting the institutional structure and functioning of the municipality. This would require a change of attitudes amongst existing staff, the acquisition of appropriately skilled people for the new role, and the establishment of new structures to enable popular participation. The final stage, the establishment of a "normalized system", allows for ongoing community participation following the determination of the appropriate "rules of the game" for public participation (DCD, 1999a cited in Houston, 2001:215).

As Houston (2001) has indicated, civil society participation in developmental local government is geared towards legitimizing the new local government system, and will most likely be achieved if citizens feel they have ownership of local government programmes. Civil society's participation in local government provides various non-governmental structures with a "veto right" in the planning process (Rubenstein, 1995:72). Representatives of civil society structures in the planning process can always raise the "opposition of the people" to any aspect of a development plan that they disagree with. Thus, since the process is aimed at reaching consensus, civil society structures can hamstring the IDP process. This is recognized in the White Paper with a clear warning that "participatory processes must not become an obstacle to development, and narrow interest groups must not be allowed to 'capture' the development process". Therefore, it is important for municipalities to find ways of structuring participation which enhances, rather than impedes service delivery (Houston et al, 2001: 219).

3.4 Local Government Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998)

The Municipal Structures Act provided for the establishment of municipalities in accordance with the requirements relating to categories and types of municipality. The Act sets a criterion for determining the category for municipality to be established in an area.

It also defines the types of municipality within each category and the appropriate division of functions and powers between categories of municipality.

This Act also made provision for internal regulatory systems, structures and office bearers of municipalities. In addition, the Structures Act provides for appropriate electoral systems.

Chapter 3, section 19 of the Municipal Structures Act requires a municipality to strive with its capacity to achieve the objectives set out in section 152 of the Constitution namely to develop mechanisms to consult with community and community organizations in performance of its functions and exercising its powers.

Chapter 4 (part 4) of the Act requires that the municipality must establish Ward Committees with the objective of enhancing participatory democracy in the local government. The Act makes a provision for the establishment of Ward Committees as a possible way of encouraging community participation in matters of the municipality.

3.5 Local Government Municipal Systems (Act No. 32 of 2000)

Another important piece of legislation which laid a framework for the local government system was the Local Government Municipal Systems (Act No.32 of 2000). The Systems Act, as it is commonly known, provides for "the core principles, mechanisms, and processes that are necessary to enable municipalities to move progressively towards the social and economic upliftment of local communities, and ensure universal access to essential services that are affordable to all". The Act, notably, provides for community participation as a means to bring about service delivery (Fukuyama, 2004:14).

Section 29 (1) (11) states that municipalities must determine methods "to consult communities and residents on their needs and priorities." They must also determine methods to provide for their participation in the drafting process and the review of the integrated development plan. Ward Committees are the structures of government that make it possible to narrow a gap between local municipalities and communities, since Ward Committees have the knowledge and understanding of the citizens and communities they represent. Through the Act, all municipalities should foster community participation in local government through building the capacity of the local community to enable it to participate effectively. The Act further mandates municipalities to use their resources and annually allocate funds in their budget for the purpose of achieving effective participation of local communities on the affairs of the council, and creating an environment for this culture to strive.

According to Nyalunga (2006), the role of Ward Committees is to make sure that the electorate directly participate and partake in decisions made by the municipal council. They should be part and parcel of the processes and structures that affect their lives as ordinary citizens. According to Marais (2007:7), the Municipal Systems Act requires that all municipalities develop an IDP in a manner that actively engages citizens, and emphasizes the importance of building capacity and allocating resources for community participation.

Methods for helping achieve strong participation include IDP forums, ward committee and public meetings and budget consultations. Public participation in local governance and development currently occurs in a variety of forms that range from the opportunity to vote in local government elections to participating in ward or municipal public meetings, organizing petitions and in project committees.

The Municipal Systems Act (2000) stipulates that municipalities must involve local communities in the development, implementation and review of municipalities' performance management systems. They must also allow communities to participate in setting appropriate key performance indicators and targets (Putu, 2005). The Act provides for community involvement in local government planning and budget processes, as well as in monitoring and performance review activities. Section 5 of the Municipal Systems Act (2000) highlights the rights and duties of the public in relation to municipal functions. Section 5 (1) (i) argues that the public should be able "to contribute to decision making processes", and should be informed of pertinent council decisions.

Chapter 4 requires that municipalities build the capacity of communities, stating in section 16(1) (a) that "a municipality must establish appropriate mechanisms, processes and procedures to enable the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipalities". Section 17 of the same Act requires the creation of conditions that can enable participation by disabled, illiterate and other especially disadvantaged section of communities. The Municipal Systems Act shows that South Africa is committed to local government and service delivery using a decentralized system of government with strong community involvement" (Everatt and Gwagwa, 2005).

3.6 Municipal Planning and Performance Regulations 2001

The set of Regulations requires that a municipality through appropriate mechanisms and procedures established in terms of Chapter 4 must involve the local community in the development and implementation as well as review of the municipality's performance management systems.

In particular, it allows the community to participate in the setting of appropriate key performance indicators and performance targets. Section 15(1) (a) of the Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulations further says that if there are no other municipal wide structures for community participation, a municipality must establish a forum. The forum must be representative and enhance community participation in the Integrated Development Plan. In addition, the forum must enhance public participation in monitoring and reviewing performances.

3.7 Municipal policies and by-laws regulating ward committees

Most municipalities appear to have introduced their own municipal policies, and in some cases, by-laws to regulate the powers, functions and operation of Ward Committees. The provisions outlined in these policies and by-laws appear to be taken from the Structures Act and the Guidelines for the establishment of Ward Committees.

3.8 Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000

The Promotion of Access to Information (Act No. 2 of 2000) promotes a culture of transparency, accountability, freedom of information to the people to have access to information and requires that if government institutions want to withhold the information it should be justified (Mackay, 2004). The Act gives access to state and other information required for the protection of rights. According to the Act, this means that the public have a right to access any information or records of a municipality, especially if by doing so they are requesting this information exercise for the broader public interest. Through the Act, the people will be involved in public debate on issues that affect them. These issues will be tabled on the agenda for IDP related discussions. According to the legislation, it is evident that the new system of local government offers opportunities for all the people to become actively involved in Local Government issues and makes it compulsory for each municipality to create an environment and to set up systems that makes people participation in local governance effective. 33

3.9 The Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees

The guidelines for the establishment and operation of municipal Ward Committee are prepared by the Municipal Systems Act. The guidelines supplement legislation by providing Guidelines to municipalities, Ward committee members and councilors on procedures to be followed in establishing ward committees, how they are intended to operate and the conduct of ward committee members. The Guidelines prepared by Provincial Local Government (Notice No.2649 of 2003) require ward committees to prepare an annual capacity building and training needs assessment for members of the committee.

Ward committees are required by the Guidelines to meet at least quarterly. Public meetings should also be convened regularly. These meetings are supposed to enable the ward committee and ward councilor to register the concerns and inputs of the community with regard to service delivery and other issues in the ward, and report back to the community on issues that affect the ward.

3.10 Conclusion

The statutes reviewed in this section show the way in which local government should function and also provide the framework on how Local Government interacts with communities. Community participation forms an important element of South African government's policy. The policy document outlines procedures to be followed in order to make it a legal policy document. All relevant policies and associated legislation place participation at the very head of the system of local government. Since 1994, government has put in place policy and legislative frameworks that seek to promote participatory governance.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter covers research findings outlined in terms of themes. The results are verified by findings of the literature. The findings indicate similarities and contradictions in the views of the community and Ward Committee members as well as municipal groups. The chapter also looks at the challenges experienced by Umzumbe Municipality in facilitating the role of Ward Committees. The structuring of wards in Umzumbe municipality was undertaken in consultation with the Planning Department and Speaker's Office of the Municipality. Data was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews with municipal officials responsible for overseeing Ward committees and ward councilors in selected wards.

4.2 Themes identified by Respondent Groups

The findings from groups are presented in an integrated manner. Where applicable, the findings will be supported by precise citations of the respective respondent group's views which were obtained during the focus group interviews. The data analysis process identified themes such as mechanisms for participation, needs identification, decision making and meetings. These are discussed below.

4.2.1 Mechanisms for Participation

The municipal respondents highlighted the lack that Ward Committees are established to enhance participatory democracy in local government. A Ward Committee has no executive authority but serves as an independent, advisory structure for the Ward Councilor and the council. Ward Committees are the formal channel of communication between the local communities and the council. Thus Ward Committees should be the eyes and ears of the people, so as to play a key role in ensuring that communities have a say in government decisions. A Ward Councilor represents the committee in the municipal council and is required to mediate between communities and the municipality, ensuring that local government works in partnership with the public around service delivery and development.

One of the community respondents described the close relationship between the Ward Committee and the community thus:

> *"when you talk about the ward committee members you are talking about the whole community because the ward committee stands for the community as a whole."*

The findings indicate that Ward Councilors have a central role in determining the effectiveness of Ward Committees. Wherever there are good relationships between Ward Committee members and the ward councilors, and where councilors are motivated and involved, the performance of the committee is greatly improved. Ward 19 of Umzumbe municipality provides a good example of this. It would appear that within the current arrangement, where ward councillors are the mandatory chair of ward committees and are responsible for ensuring that the committees meet, they have a critical influence on how well the committees perform their roles and functions. Both the municipal and community respondents agreed that the ward committees are the sole mechanism established to enable community participation in the affairs of the municipality. The establishment of these committees is described as a participatory process which is decided upon by the community through the electoral system. The focus group discussion with the community members revealed that:

> *"When we elect ward committee members, we call a community meeting of that ward and it is upon the community members to elect members of the ward committee".*

The Municipal Structures Act requires that Ward Committees represent a "diversity of interests". Members are expected to represent the interests of the ward as a whole; they are not elected as representatives of specific local structures or interest groups. The Ward Councillor represents the committee in the municipal council and is required to report back regularly to the committee. The committee serves as an institutional channel of communication and interaction between communities and municipalities (Bolini & Ndlela, 1998).

The community respondents pointed out that the Ward Committees system is an opportunity for communicating concerns that need municipal attention. Ward Committees are the most direct form of access that people have to the government. They therefore need to facilitate communication between the community and the municipality. They also need to keep the community updated on issues affecting the community; on what is happening in the municipality and how community problems are being addressed.

The community respondents perceived the ward committee system as an opportunity for communicating concerns that needed municipal attention. The findings revealed the close relationship between the community and the ward committee. The community perceived the Ward Committee system as an opportunity for communicating concerns that needed municipal attention.

4.2.2 Needs Identification

Regarding the involvement of the community in the prioritization of the identified needs, the municipal respondents were of the view that a key function of the Ward Committee is to provide a representative forum that speaks out on their needs, concerns and interests of the community. This function means that Ward Committees need to identify the community needs and their involvement in the process of prioritizing needs. Due to the fact that ward committees' represent the community, they should involve the community in the process of identifying, prioritization and monitoring needs. These findings are in alignment with remarks found on Ward Committees Training Manual (2005:134) which remarks that a key function of the Ward Committee is to provide a representative forum that speaks out on the needs, concerns and interests of the community.

Both the municipal officials and community respondent groups acknowledged the role of community participation in needs identification and the listing of priorities during the initial phase of the IDP process. The community respondents perceived their role as one of identifying needs which they wanted to be addressed in their wards. Respondents reflected on this participation as follows:

> "Community participation occurs when the community has a list of things that needs to be done in the ward and unitedly work hand in hand with the Municipal authorities."

Regarding to community needs, the community respondents agreed on their role as one of identifying and generating a list of needs in their wards. However, what needs to be done about these was perceived as the concern of the municipality. The needs identification process therefore gives the community an opportunity to air their opinions about development issues which they feel are lacking. This finding indicates that both the municipal and community respondents were in agreement that the community participates in the IDP process by providing information about their concerns that need to be addressed.

37

This finding is in alignment with Gaunt's (1998:291) remark that within local governments, only an informational or review process of community participation is accepted as adequate. It appeared from ward councillors that although people participate and highlight their needs at ward level, the municipality prioritizes for the wards, but does not involve the people during this prioritization process because of limited budget. This indicates that some of the things that the community identifies in the ward IDP through ward committee meetings cannot be delivered. This is largely a function of the unequal power relations between the municipality and the communities.

4.2.3 Decision making

The Ward Committee respondents revealed that the development of the IDP requires significant decision making with municipal stakeholders and the community. There were however, contradictory views on when and by whom decisions should be made. The community respondents expressed concerns regarding their participation in decision making as they perceived the process as a top-down approach by the municipality. Their concerns were expressed particularly in relation to the community's ability to influence decisions. They were of the opinion that the IDP process was conducted in a quick manner resulting in little chance to influence decisions:

> *"The municipality has a tendency of calling a meeting and tells the community that the budget is for this and that and there is no information that comes from the community to inform the municipality on the IDP."*

Initial attempts to prepare IDP's occurred under difficult circumstances, as Harrison has noted (2003:10). However, he credits IDPs with, among other things developing a more participatory form of local governance by achieving a stronger focus on the basic needs of disadvantaged communities, and increasing municipal 'ownership" of planning process. These remarks reveal that the community respondents perceived decision making as a rushed process controlled by the municipality and merely handed down to them for acceptance or implementation. Staples (2004:199) agreed with the community respondents' responses that an inefficient process usually produces a less than satisfactory decision and a "rush to judgment which almost guarantees a product that will not be widely embraced."

38

The community respondents indicated that they feel left out and perceive their participation in decision making as of little importance. The Ward Councillor agrees with this view and noted that in times of budget constraint, participatory decision making may not be perceived as a high priority. He further argues that one of the key analyses of the effectiveness of the Ward Committees is their impact on council decision making. Recent studies suggest that Ward Committees are not having a significant influence on the decisions made by the council and how resources are allocated at ward level.

One of the key obstacles to Ward Committees having an influence on council decision-making appears to be limited power most ordinary ward councillors have within the deliberation processes of municipal councils. As Oldfield (2008:494) points out,

"...Ward councillors are functionally challenged if there is no explicit way in which ward committee concerns structurally become part of council agenda. Bound by the political party caucus processes and party structures, ward councillors often sit lower in political party hierarchies with proportional representation councillors shaping party policy decisions."

The study findings confirmed the views that decision making in the IDP is performed only by the municipality.

4.2.4 Meetings

According to the municipal respondents, ward committees are required to meet at least quarterly, public meetings should also be convened regularly. These meetings are supposed to enable the ward committee and the ward councillor to view the concerns and inputs of the community with regard to service delivery and other issues in the ward, and to report back to the community on issues that affect it. Both the ward councillor and ward committee members participate in the meetings. Public meetings are constructive in publicizing projects and providing open debates. They could be optimal platform for municipalities to share information about the needs of their communities and to give clarity on issues related to IDP. The municipality and ward councillors could use these meetings to promote public participation on developmental issues (MacKay, 2004). The findings revealed the reason for poor attendance at community meetings as there's lack of confidence in the municipality.

Community respondents perceived the failure of development initiatives to transform community needs into tangible benefits as a discouraging factor which impacted on people's attitudes to meetings.

This view was captured in a community respondent's assertion that:

> "...We always attend meetings and our needs are not being met, we are sick and tired of these useless meetings".

This comment reflects Makgoba and Ababio's (2004:278) finding that sometimes municipalities fail to respond to community needs and expectations owing to a lack of finances.

This is usually seen as a failure on the part of the municipality in addressing their problems resulting in the community disassociating itself from its municipality. The Municipal Systems Act requires that all municipalities develop an Integrated Development Plan in a manner that actively engages citizens. IDPs offer opportunities for communities to be involved in determining the priorities of the IDP (MacKay, 2004). An Integrated Development Plan promotes participatory decision-making at local government level and promotes sustainable development. It ensures the development and integration of local government activities in a co-operative manner.

The municipal respondents agreed that the Integrated Development Plan serves as a basic tool for local government and society to engage at a local level and with various stakeholders and interest groups. It enables local authorities to streamline resources to meet basic needs through the prioritization of programmes whilst at the same time, maintaining the existing economic and social infrastructure. The Act emphasizes the importance of building capacity and allocating resources for community participation. It still provides for various mechanisms and procedures for taking into account the diversity of communities. Methods for helping achieve all this include IDP forums, ward committee and public meetings, "road shows" budget and consultation. In addition, councillors are required to engage with community members through stakeholders meetings (Hicks, 2006).

When the researcher asked about the quality of participation at the Integrated Development Plan meeting, the planning manager mentioned that quality was quite shallow. The Ward Councillor said communities raised issues relating to service delivery at the meetings.

He further asserted that it would be good for the community to hold pre- IDP meetings where issues that affect the communities are discussed and then selects a couple of people to present these problems in the official IDP process. The municipal respondent also mentioned that people consider IDP meeting as a political meeting. They sometimes go off the target and get involved in political discussion which is not the main aim of the IDP. The Ward Committee members made a distinction about attendance of meetings between those who could and those who could not afford payment of services. Where low levels of service delivery were evident, the municipal respondents observed a high attendance.

> "...most of the community members who attend all the meetings are those who have many challenges in their wards".

The ward councillor however, expressed his frustration with the lack of service delivery in the municipality.

> "... I hate to be in government now because community members put us under pressure as ward councillors and we sometimes fail to deliver".

The ward committee respondents indicated that meeting days and times should take account of the working patterns of residents. Weekday meetings for example, tend not to work well in wards where many residents have to commute long distances to and from work and often discourage women from attending since the meetings are held late.

The findings revealed that a number of community respondents found the meetings useful, although there was frustration about the lack of follow-up on the issues raised at the meetings. Municipal respondents also perceived contradictions in meeting attendance to be influenced by the level of service delivery in the communities with more affluent communities seeing little need in attending community meetings.

4.3 Key issues and challenges facing Ward Committees in Umzumbe Municipality

4.3.1 Representation on Ward Committee's

Research done by Smith (2008:11) indicates that, the most important concern has to do with the way representation on ward committees is constituted. In particular, allegations have been raised that ward councillors have a direct hand in picking ward committee members in line with their political affiliations. This has resulted in to the charge that Ward Committees are often only an expansion of political party structures and do not include the full range of interests within communities.   41

It is also assumed that Ward Councillors, in their role as chairpersons of the committees, are able to manipulate deliberations and decisions to reflect the mandate of the political party they represent, rather than the real needs and aspirations of the community. Another issue that was raised by respondents in discussions is that ward councillors are not independent. Sometimes it is perceived that they fail to make their own decisions.

The community respondents indicated that, *"When we come up with creative constructive ideas, you become a threat to them...."* the respondents further argued that,

> *"When we have elections for ward committee members in our communities; the councilors already have the names of the people they want elected."*

This situation makes some Ward Committee members become puppets of these councilors because they do not contribute, but are told what to do (SA Local Government Briefing, 2005:28). Case studies, evidence has shown that it is questionable whether representation is wide-ranging and meaningful.

Although efforts have been made in the process of nominating and electing the committees to ensure that some level of representation of key sectors and geographical areas is achieved in the composition of the committees, the process of representation in most of the cases appears to be structurally inadequate. This is because the level of consultation between the members and their geographical areas often inconsistent or insufficient. This is especially in the case of sectoral representation where the level of consultation with and participation of the broader stakeholder groups within the sector appears to be shallow.

The problem is that ward committee members have not been equipped with the necessary skills through training to be able to effectively consult with their communities. According to Department of Provincial and Local Government (2003), the main objective is to ensure that representation on ward committees is derived from a democratic and an inclusive nomination and election process. In many cases, nomination and election processes appear to have been inconsistent, which has compromised the quality of representation on Ward Committees. In the case of large wards, there have been concerns that the size of ward committees is inadequate to ensure full representation of all interests and geographical areas within the ward. Hence, even as far back as 2003, there has been the suggestion to allow some flexibility in the size of Ward Committees. This would require amendments to section 73 (2) b of the Municipal Structures Act. There have been no serious moves to

bring about this change although the idea that Ward Committees may have sub-committees as one way of broadening representation has been promoted.

Ward committees are largely perceived as ineffective in advancing citizen participation at the local government level. Their ineffectiveness is caused by lack of skills, capacity building and inadequate training. The community members have certain expectations of what they expect of their ward committees, however the ward committee members and councilors have different expectations.

Representation has proven to be a difficult matter, while capacity and resource constraints hinder overall effectiveness. Tensions between the ward committees and councilors add further complications. Case studies suggest that councilors sometimes choose to service what they regard as their political mandates, which do not always conform to the interests and demands emanating from their committees (Putu, 2005). There is a perception that ward committees are sometimes "captured" and used to advance the material and/or political ambitions of specific individuals or interest groups. There is evidence that councils dominated by a single political party sometimes constitute and "define the operation of committees in ways which voiceless potential opposition" (Everatt et al., 2004:7), while some committees appear to be stacked with cronies of councilors or interest groups in the ward (Hemson, 2007). Confrontations with councilors are said to be commonplace, with allegations of corruption or misconduct sometimes used to stoke community protests (Hicks, 2006).

It is not surprising to discover that empirical evidence about ward committees does correlate with an observation about decline in trust in local government. Hemson (2007:12) also pointed out that,

> "The ward committee system is not strengthening confidence in local government since these are not working on their best capacity."

4.3.2 Access to Information by Ward Committees

The community respondents articulated fears about lack of information especially regarding the outcome of community issues which they had reported to the municipality. The municipality perceived the current flow of information as informed by government legislation. The findings revealed that the lack of information from the municipality to the Ward Committees has created problems amongst committee members and they were losing the community's confidence.   43

The flow of information is important in order to secure informed planning and decision-making. It has also been noted that the ability of ward committees to function effectively as communication channels between municipal councils and communities is constrained by poor municipal communication strategies and a lack of accessible information at ward level.

The same constraint applies to the ward committees' role in relation to communicating municipal budget information. This is usually only available in highly technical and inaccessible formats and is rarely packaged in a way that would provide useful information on budget allocations at ward level. In some instances information is construed by logistics on spatial issues. With reference to municipal planning processes, where ward committees could potentially play an important communication role, a report by Afesis-corplan (2003) noted that "without a proper understanding of the targets and indicators for development as set out in the IDP, and the ability to disaggregate these to their own ward areas, ward committees cannot be expected to provide any empirical or qualitative feedback on municipal delivery strategies and performance." The same constraint applies to the ward committees' role in relation to communicating municipal budget information. This is usually only available in highly technical and inaccessible formats and is rarely packaged in a way that would provide useful information on budget allocations at ward level.

The municipal respondents indicated that legislation made provision for the ward councilor to link with the community to provide the community with feedback on issues raised. Councilors are flexible and they are accountable to the residents in their wards.

4.3.3 Participatory Skills

Focus group discussions revealed a shortage of skills in Ward 1 of Umzumbe Municipality. The community mentioned that education profile of ward committee members in the ward reflects lower levels of skills. The findings revealed that many ward committee members were not clear about their roles and how to carry out their functions. The need for ward committee members to receive capacity building training is widely recognized and is encouraged by the Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees. The Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998) and the Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000) also place a duty on municipalities to make provision for capacity building to enable active community participation. The ward councillor of ward 19 in Umzumbe Municipality argues that a significant barrier to capacity building of Ward Committees appears to be lack of funding at municipal level.

Studies have indicated that although levels of support to Ward Committees appear to vary greatly, some municipalities have allocated budgets of up to R50 000 to each of their wards, many municipalities have not seen sufficient need to budget for capacity building and training of ward committees. The ward councillor of Ward 1 in Umzumbe Municipality revealed that, the same applies to the often raised issue of refunding of ward committee members for out of pocket expenses, such as for transport or use of cell phones, or what some suggest more contentiously should be a basic stipend to serve as an incentive for the community work performed by ward committee members. Lack of access to resources such as computers, printers, photocopiers has also been a constraint on the effectiveness of ward committees. Many municipalities appear not to be able to budget adequately for such resources.

4.3.4 Capacity Building and Training

Some ward committee members felt the training was effective; they also had the view that it helped the committee members and councilors to understand their role and to become more effective. One of the municipal respondents mentioned that since 2006, when the new council took over the municipality, many training courses have been organized by the municipality for both ward committees and councilors. They both have been trained in their roles and responsibilities, legislations (Municipal Systems Act, Financial Management Act, and Municipal Structures Act) and on municipal policies. However, financial resources for all the above mentioned training are not adequate. He further argued that,

> *"Umzumbe Municipality does not generate income because it is a rural municipality and does not collect rates from residents; therefore it depends on both national and provincial government to provide funding that will assist the training of both ward committees and ward councilors."*

The municipal respondents further mentioned that,

> *"this funding is not enough because it does not cater for issues such as transport and meals during training. The majority of ward committees are not working; therefore, they are unable to pay for transport.*

The committee was perceived by both the councilor and the ward committee members interviewed, to be functioning very well, although the need for further training for members was raised. Ward committee members pointed out that they would like to have more training on how to help their communities. They also suggested it would be useful to learn how other ward committees operate. The ward councilor suggested that it might be useful to set up some kind of peer exchange program for ward committees. The councilor believes the committee needs further training, as he put it,

> *"for them to deliver services to the community", they need to learn more about their roles, how to determine the performance of the municipality and how to engage with the budget process.*

The ward committee member interviewed said "we need more training in order to know exactly what must we do."

The community respondents felt the feeling that ward committees were not empowered enough to participate fully in the IDP process due to lack of training. They view training as an important aspect of capacity building which would allow informed participation in the municipal planning.

The findings suggest that the municipality should take steps to encourage the public to participate fully. Community development in the development of both the Integrated Development Plans, and local government budget is mainly essential because resources are scarce. It provides people with an opportunity to present their needs and concerns and enables them to be involved in the process of prioritization. Ward councilors and ward committee members can influence decisions on which local government activities should be prioritized. During the budget negotiations, councilors should therefore advise the community how key decisions will affect them.

4.4 Relationship of Ward Committees to other structures

Studies indicated the fear that ward committees have competed with, undermined or displaced other channels and spaces for community participation at local level (Schmidt, 2008; Oldfield; 2008, Piper and Deacon, 2008). As Mathekga and Buccus (2006:12) also note, "South Africa entered the new political era armed with a culture of participation." However, it would appear that, instead of drawing on the richness of this participatory culture and the host of structures it has given rise to, most municipalities have come to rely solely on ward committees as the only legitimate conduit for engaging community members.

Ward committees have thus been set up in competition with, or even to the disadvantage of, a range of other structures and processes through which citizens also participate in local governance. As Schmidt (2008:13) puts it, the bigger problem with ward committees is not that they are dysfunctional or lack a compelling rationale, but that they have crowded out many more appropriate and effective forms of participation. They are typically the beginning and the end of the discussion about participation. The community respondents revealed that the common assumption is that we have ward committees in place – therefore we have substantially fulfilled our participation compliance requirements.

It does not help that the 2005 Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees imply that ward committees have exclusive claim to legitimacy, declaring that they are the "official specialized participatory structure in the municipality" (Chanza and Piper, 2006). However, as Oldfield (2008:492) argues,

> "...ward committees cannot be understood as the only avenue for participation at neighborhood level." "Ward committees can only be effective when they are complemented by pragmatic more inclusive mechanisms for participation."

Oldfield (2008:492) further argues that the introduction of ward committees is part of a process over the past decade in which processes and spaces for participation have been formalized, with the result that "the nature of engagement between communities and local government has become increasingly procedural and technical." The danger herein is the possibility that the formally created, government sanctioned "invited" spaces such as ward committees crowd out other spaces through which citizens prefer to participate on their own terms.

4.5 Ward Committee support from the Municipality

According to the Ward Councilor of Ward 19, the ward committee does not receive sufficient support from the municipality, and this leaves committee members feeling discouraged. The ward committee member interviewed was satisfied that the committee was receiving enough support from the municipality. However, ward committee members complained that it does not get enough support from municipal officials -- for example, the councilor explained that he tried repeatedly to get planners from the municipality to attend a ward committee meeting to discuss town planning issues in the ward but no-one responded to his requests. According to the members of the committee interviewed, they bring issues to the ward councilor's attention but the councilor is largely powerless to do anything about them. 47

The ward committee member's of ward 19 in Umzumbe municipality felt strongly that community members should be involved in all stages of a community development project. Community participation should start with the planning phase and continue through the implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases.

There was a strong feeling from these participants that projects should be "owned" by the community and that planning should occur from the bottom, upwards. In other words, .they felt that they should be consulted before any projects are suggested and that they should make an input regarding possible municipal projects that would benefit the community.

They pointed out that decisions about projects were made by the local authority and the community was then informed. The committee was then expected to market the idea to the rest of the community, gather support for the project and become involved in the implementation of the project.

4.6 Relationships of ward committee members with other role-players

According to one of the ward committee member interviewed, the committee has a good relationship with the councilor assigned to the ward. He attends community meetings. The committee was also reported to have a good relationship with the general community, although the member indicated that some community members who have ambitions to become councilors sometime cause problems. The relationship between the committee and community development workers was also reported to be good and the committee appears to draw regularly on the support of the CDW for the ward.

The findings revealed that it should be acknowledged therefore that ward committees on their own do not appear to be the only answer to facilitate community involvement in decision making at the local government level. The processes of community participation must be all inclusive and should accommodate a wide range of role players.

4.7 Relationship between the ward councilors and the committee

It was apparent that there is a very good working relationship between the councilor and the ward committee members. The members reported that they were very happy with the support they receive from the councilor.

One member said, *"we are working together with the councilor. He doesn't take any decision without consulting us."*   48

The members who were interviewed indicated that they are unclear about the role of the councilor.

Ward committee members mostly felt satisfied with the level of support they receive from their ward councilors. In general, ward committees also appear to have a good relationship with residents in the ward. However, a couple of respondents were of the view that the community faith may deteriorate if service delivery delays. The finding shows that ward committees are mostly invisible although they regularly play a useful role. Ward committees are chaired by ward councilors. In most cases, conflict erupted due to the fact that the ward councilors wanted to satisfy their political mandate rather than improving the lives of citizens. It was also found out that citizen participation is about power between the citizen and politicians. The problem was the control of ward committees and process of participation, the setting of the agendas; procedures were usually in the hands of the politicians who in some cases were barriers for effective involvement of citizen.

4.8 Conclusions

In conclusion, this chapter presented the research findings of the study under themes such as mechanisms for participation, needs identification, decision making and meetings. The chapter also highlighted the key issues and challenges facing Ward Committees in Umzumbe Municipality. Chapter 5 will discusses the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter draws conclusions based on the key findings discussed in chapter 4; and it also relates aims and objectives of the research and the research questions; as well as making recommendations.

The study investigated the role and functions of ward committees and explored the importance of community participation in municipal planning. The Local Government legislation makes provision for local authorities to establish a system of participatory democracy at the local level in the form of ward committees. These ward committees were introduced in municipalities as community structures to play a critical role in linking and informing the municipalities about the needs, aspirations and problems of the communities. A Ward Committee is intended to be an institutionalized channel of communication and interaction between communities and the municipalities.

It is clear that Ward Committees have great potential to bridge the growing division between communities and municipalities, and facilitate greater community involvement in municipality planning. Ward committees therefore are also potentially powerful actors that are positioned as pillars of democratic local governance and development and can influence and mobilize communities around particular issues.

The findings indicated that one of the key impediments to Ward Committees having an influence on council decision making appears to be the limited power most ordinary ward councilors have within the deliberation processes of municipal councils. The tensions around the respective powers and functions of ward committees also highlight a larger fundamental issue affecting public participation and local development. Public participation is a legislative requirement in South Africa's IDP and municipal processes. Public participation is expected to expand local democracy and enhance local development initiatives. This study found that the role of Ward Committee members in the IDP process is unsatisfactory. The findings indicated that the ward committees had limited knowledge of the IDP process despite the fact that they were expected to facilitate and take part in decision making.

In relation to the role of ward committees, the findings revealed that the central role of ward committees is the facilitation of local community participation in decisions which affect the local community, the articulation of local community interests and the representation of these interests within the government system.

The research question was answered in chapter 3 and section 2.4 of this dissertation which clearly demonstrated that ward committees are largely perceived as effective in facilitating community participation at the local government level. The first two sub-questions were answered by the findings in Chapter 4 (see 4. 2.1, 4.2.2 and 4.3). Section 5.2 will responds to the third sub-question.

It could be concluded that the role of Ward Committees in facilitating community participation in municipal planning process is not clear. The lack of community participation creates a perception amongst community members that they are completely dependent on the municipality. This discourages communities from engaging in finding solutions to their problems. The findings indicated that there was lack community participation in the decision making process of the Integrated Development Planning. The community respondents perceived the current decision making process as controlled by the municipality, lacking consultation with the community. It was concluded that the role of Ward Committee members in decision making is unsatisfactory. The findings indicated that the Ward Committees knowledge and understanding of their roles and functions despite the fact that they were expected to facilitate and take part in it.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Communication strategies

Municipalities should have communication strategies in place to enable support to ward committees. The function of ward committees should be to act as a communication channel between communities and the municipality. The ward committee's main tasks are to communicate and to consult with the community in respect of development and service delivery. Ward committees thus bring about communication between communities and their political representatives. Ward committees exist as the primary vehicle for public participation in municipal affairs.

The legislation for local government obliges municipalities to provide support to the ward committees and to build their capacity. However, the form of this support and the institutional and financial investment is at the discretion of the municipality. The municipality can also be commended on the effectiveness of the programmes in making ward councilors and ward committees know their roles and responsibilities in the various stages of the IDP process.

In order for community participation to have maximum impact, an enabling environment for participation should be created and this includes addressing institutional obstacles as well as the capacity gaps within the community. In municipal planning processes, ward committees could facilitate dialogue between community members and their municipalities. For the IDP and budget processes for instance, committee members could facilitate community deliberation within their wards on community needs and priorities.

In order to facilitate such processes, ward committee members would need training on municipality processes and clarity on their role within these and would need to have access to information on planning and budget options. Municipalities would need to provide for effective communication channels and ensure that information is readily accessible and widely distributed. The communication between the local government and communities must be improved especially around service delivery matters.

5.2.2 Capacity building training

Ward committees cannot function effectively without undergoing capacity building training. The problem is that ward committee members have not been equipped with the necessary skills through training to be able to effectively consult with their communities. There is a need for further capacity building of both councilors and ward committee members. The need for further training was identified by all respondents as an immediate priority. Ward committees need training on the IDP and municipal budget processes and on the powers and functions of the different spheres of government. Although the legislation provides a broader policy framework for all the municipalities to build the skills their local communities to enable them to participate effectively in municipal planning processes, the municipality should still have its own training and empowerment policy. The Municipality should develop a capacity building policy which combines a skills development strategy which includes the provision of easy access to information and resources.

5.2.3 Independent structures within the community

Ward committees should be independent structures embedded within the community. Ward committees are established to enhance participatory democracy in local government. A ward committee has no executive powers but serves as an elected advisory structure for the ward councilor and the council. The committee is meant to act as a channel between communities and municipalities ensuring that local government works in partnership with the public around service delivery and development. It is therefore necessary that the role of ward committees be understood as being an instrument of public participation within a broader context of municipal governance. Municipalities should take the role and functions of ward committees seriously and provide for their role and functions innovatively within the specific municipal context. Ward committees should provide feedback to communities on planning decisions. In order to facilitate such processes, ward committees would need more training on municipality processes and clarity on their role within these arenas and would need to have access to information on municipal planning. One of the key obstacles to ward committees having an influence on council decision-making appears to be limited power most ordinary ward councilors have within the deliberation processes of municipal councils. Ward committees have a great potential to facilitate bigger community involvement in municipal planning.

5.2.4 Integration into municipal IDP processes

Ward committees should be more integrated into municipal IDP processes. Integrated development planning processes are regarded as central to engaging community in decision making. These include IDP forums, road shows and budget processes as well as ward committee meetings. The processes of community participation must be all inclusive and should accommodate a wide range of key role players. The different forms of participation must be acknowledged and valued. Municipalities must take more initiatives to engage with community members. It should be acknowledged that, ward committees were established to serve as instruments for public participation and sustainable local government. The role of ward committees is to make sure that the voters participate and partake in decisions made by council. They should be part and parcel of the processes and structures that affect their lives as ordinary citizens. The ward committees should be set up in a way that they can reach most sectors and areas in the ward. The development of the IDP requires significant decision making with municipal stakeholders, among who is the community. Ward committees are widely seen as a cornerstone of the IDP process.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions for municipal officials of Umzumbe municipality

- What in your opinion is the role of ward committees?
- What can be done to mobilize people to demonstrate an active interest in ward committees?
- What should be done to ensure that ward committees are fully established and are effective?
- How do you ensure that ward committees are inclusive and nonpartisan?
- Which factors do you consider in designing capacity building strategies and policies for communities to participate effectively in the IDP process?

- How should ward committees relate to other public participation forums?

- What programmes does the municipality have to empower ward 1 and 19 to fully participate in decision making?

- How does the municipality assess whether or not ward committees have participated effectively in the IDP process?

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group guide for ward committee members

- What challenges do you face in engaging with your municipality or other government departments?
- In your view do you think municipality is capacitating ward committee members adequately to participate effectively in the IDP process? In what way does the municipality capacitate you?
- Is there any training for ward committee members and ward councilors?
- What was your experience of being invited to participate in the IDP process?
- What problems do you encounter as a ward committee member in your ward?
- What are the roles and functions of ward committees in local communities or in service delivery?
- How can your community participate in local government issues?
- What are some of the difficulties you have experienced as a ward committee member?
- Does your ward committee participate in the budgeting process? If not, how do you think your ward committee can participate in the budgeting process?

Focus group guide for community members

- What information do you receive from your municipality, ward committees and ward councilor with regards to municipal planning and service delivery?
- Have you participated in IDP processes? If yes, how was this facilitated? If No why?
- In your view, how do ward committees enable you to participate in IDP processes?
- What role do you think ward committees could play in the municipality?
- If you feel your council does not provide services adequately, what do you think your ward committee can do to improve the situation?