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INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Understanding the Role of Ward Committees in Advancing Community Participation in Umbumbulu.

by

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Professor Sagie Narsiah (Supervisor)

DECLARATION

I, Zanele Pinky Sangweni, declare that:

1. This research report is my original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for assessment.
2. All sources used in this research have been acknowledged.
3. I followed all ethical guidelines and protocols for conducting this research, including obtaining the necessary approvals and consent from the participants.
4. I am responsible for the accuracy and authenticity of the data and information presented in this report.

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Supervisor: Professor Sagie Narsiah Signature……..

ABSTRACT

The study aimed to understand the role of ward committees in promoting community participation in Umbumbulu, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Umbumbulu is a rural area with a strong reliance on traditional values and subsistence livelihoods, as well as inadequate access to essential services. The study examines the role of ward committees in advancing community participation in Umbumbulu, investigates the methods used to promote it, identifies opportunities and challenges, and provides suggestions for promoting effective community participation in Umbumbulu. This study employs the Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) theoretical framework and emphasises the importance of including ordinary citizens in government decision-making processes to achieve equitable and successful outcomes. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants in Umbumbulu. Purposive sampling techniques were used to select all participants, and the data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings show that while methods for participatory governance exist, political, social, and administrative constraints hinder the implementation of community participation.

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List of Abbreviations

CBO Community-Based Organisation

CBP Community-Based Planning

DDM District Development Model

EPG Empowered Participatory Governance

IDP Integrated Development Plan

LLP Law Popular Participation

NGO Non-Government Organisation

PB Participatory Budgeting

PPC People Plan Campaign

SDBIP Service Delivery and Budgeting Implementation Plan

UKZN University of KwaZulu-Natal

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study explores the dynamics of community participation, examines the factors that influence its effectiveness, and identifies strategies to enhance its impact. The study examines the role of ward committees in advancing community participation in Umbumbulu, a rural area in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study aims to better understand the factors that hinder community participation by examining the experiences, perceptions, and practices of ward committee members, community leaders, and residents. This study explores the influence of the South African Constitution and the South African legislature on community participation in governance through ward committee structures. Section 195(1)(g) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) stipulates that transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible, and accurate information, and that community members should understand that community participation leads the development process. Sections (16) and (17) of the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) mandate that local governments encourage community participation by establishing procedures for petitions and community input, public gatherings, and consultations.

The principal aim of this study is to examine whether ward committees encourage community participation. The study assesses the prospects and challenges of ward committee structures in achieving community participation in Umbumbulu. It is anticipated that the study findings will provide evidence for policymakers to inform strategic planning that encourages community participation in community affairs. This chapter outlines the dissertation's overall structure and summarises it. It sets out the research background, research problem, objectives, and the study's significance. It introduces the research topic, describes the research context and

evidence, and states the research problem under investigation. It further discusses the study's significance and presents the dissertation's structure. Finally, it provides guidance and context for this research project.

1.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

This study investigates the role of the ward committee in promoting community participation in Umbumbulu, a rural area comprising two wards (96 and 100) in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Umbumbulu, like other Black areas in South Africa, faced oppression under apartheid, which segregated people by race and led to the economic, political, and social exploitation of Black people without any meaningful contribution to the decision-making process (Maphazi et al., 2013). Despite the end of apartheid, South Africa still faces inequalities, even with people's participation in the voting process. The democratic government introduced a new structure of ward committees. According to the South African Local Government Association National Conference (2016), the introduction of ward committees in 2000 was intended to improve community participation and achieve good governance at the local sphere of government in South Africa.

Community participation is a vital component of a democratic state, encompassing meaningful communication with citizens willing to engage in the planning process. However, the local government's top-down approach has been a significant challenge to implementing community participation. Citizen participation in community affairs ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, resulting in more inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance. Despite its significance, community participation remains a complex and challenging phenomenon, with varying levels of success across contexts.

Community participation is an important aspect of democratic government and enables citizens to contribute to decision-making processes that affect their lives. Ward committees, as grassroots structures, play a crucial role in facilitating community participation

in local government. However, the effectiveness of ward committees in advancing community participation remains a subject of debate. Participation is a cornerstone of good governance and an integral component of the policy-making process. Community participation has values and principles, including active democracy, as reflected in its role in planning and managing local development processes (Mokoena & van Rooyen, 2012). These authors also point out that community participation is core to any modern public management system in a democratic state. However, after almost 31 years of democracy, South Africa still faces the daunting task of achieving meaningful community participation in government institutions. Local government in South Africa has a duty to lead the process of building participation in democracy in the local community. The ward committee system should be a mechanism to increase community participation through the legislature and legal framework.

The legal framework for community participation in South Africa's local government is set out in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996. It guides local government councils in their efforts to involve citizens and community organisations in local government matters. Section 152(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) outlines that the objectives of local government are to encourage community participation, advance development, and include communities in the decision-making process. Ward committees were introduced as the voice of the voiceless in society to guide and lead communities at the local government level. Section (19)(1) of the Municipality Structures Act (117 of 1998) mandates local municipalities to pursue the purpose outlined in Section 152 of the South African Constitution, which includes creating strategies to communicate with the community and its organisations in the achievement of their operations and practices.

Unfortunately, the ward committee structure has not been effective in promoting community participation. A range of tools and legal frameworks is available to guide and encourage local government in promoting community participation. Section (11)(3)(a) of the

Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) mandates local governments to formulate strategies and operational plans and to develop and adopt policies, including setting timeframes for service delivery. Despite a solid legislative framework and participatory structures such as ward committees, South Africa's participatory democracy has not achieved the anticipated improvements in service delivery, the identification of community needs, or a lack of trust among government officials, politicians, and communities (Esau, 2009, cited in Silima & Auriacombe, 2012). Regrettably, over the past decade, public discontent with local government service delivery has grown, as evidenced by the rising number of community protests and violent incidents nationwide. The lack of community participation has led to an increase in protests as a novel means of expressing concerns. The study assesses the implementation of the ward committees' mandates to promote community participation.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 Research Problem

Ward committees have been the subject of earlier research, with scholars such as Smith and De Visser (2009), Reddy and Govender (2013), and Tshishonga (2022) making significant contributions to the field. However, there is a notable absence of scholarly work specifically addressing strategies to encourage community participation in the rural area of Umbumbulu within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Although ward committees exist within the eThekwini Municipality, community participation remains insufficient to drive meaningful development in Umbumbulu, while inequality, unemployment, and poverty continue to affect the community. This underscores the critical importance of fostering broader community participation by providing accessible platforms for residents to voice their concerns. The Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) and the Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) give effect to the South African Constitution’s provision on community participation in municipalities.

Political leaders frequently weaken their positions by interfering in processes. At the same time, some ward councillors lack essential skills and information, while ward committees have limited resources to perform their duties effectively (Himlin, 2005; Piper & Deacon, 2009; cited in Sekgala, 2016). There are established mechanisms to enhance community participation in local governance processes. Ward committees are empowered to make recommendations to their respective municipal councils on matters affecting their communities (Sekgala, 2016). Despite this, communities still face barriers to effective engagement with their local municipal councils. These challenges have led to limited representation of community interests, insufficient feedback mechanisms, and a recurring sense of disconnection from decision-making processes.

This disconnect prevents genuine community participation. This, in turn, leads to poor service delivery, neglected community needs, and a lack of confidence in local government. According to Woldemariam and Narsiah (2014), unequal access to basic services such as water may reflect deeper socioeconomic and institutional disparities rather than a technical problem. Umbumbulu's ongoing service delivery problems also reflect this reality. The local government's top-down strategy discourages community participation in planning initiatives, leading to inadequate development. To address these challenges effectively, community members need to collaborate with the ward committee and participate actively in public affairs. However, the ward committees, which are supposed to serve as the community's leadership in collaboration with the ward councillors, have not fulfilled their duties. The study will assess the extent to which ward committee mandates are implemented to encourage community participation in Umbumbulu.

1.3.2 Aims and Objectives

1.3.2.1 The aim of this study

The study aims to understand the role of the ward committee in advancing community

participation in Umbumbulu, a rural area in the eThekwini Municipality.

1.3.2.2 Research Objectives.

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine and understand community participation on the part of the ward committee of Umbumbulu.
2. Investigate methods that are used to promote community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu.
3. Identify prospects and challenges in promoting community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu.
4. Provide suggestions to promote effective community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu.

1.3.2.3 Research Questions

The following questions guide this study's understanding of the role of ward committees in advancing community participation in Umbumbulu.

1. How does the ward committee of Umbumbulu understand community participation?
2. What methods are used to promote community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu?
3. What are the prospects and challenges in promoting community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu?
4. What suggestions can be made to promote effective community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study's significance lies in its discussion of community participation in local governance and decision-making processes. The study assesses the ward committee's functioning, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses and its role in facilitating community

participation. It offers insights into how the ward committee and other local governing structures work to encourage community participation. The study provides a context-specific understanding of community participation in the Umbumbulu community that might guide future research. The study enables communities to actively participate in their development by clarifying the ward committee's function. The results can be used to improve ward committee operations, guide policy decisions, and increase community participation. The study findings can also be applied in comparable situations to encourage community participation and efficient municipal government.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

1.5.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines the study's background and context, the importance of this research, and the problem statement, including the study's aims, research questions, and objectives. It also discusses the significance and relevance of the research.

1.5.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The chapter critically reviews the existing literature on community participation. It analyses the key concepts, theories, and frameworks and identifies gaps and limitations in the current literature. It further explores the theoretical framework that guides the research and its application to the study.

1.5.3 Chapter 3: Study Area and Research Methodology

This chapter outlines how the research was conducted, the research design, and the approach. It further explains the data that were collected, discusses the sampling strategy, and describes the data analysis procedures. The chapter outlines the ethical issues.

1.5.4 Chapter 4: Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The chapter presents the data collected in this study, analyses the data, and interprets the results. The chapter compares the findings of this research with the existing literature and

conceptual frameworks, and it identifies key themes, patterns, and trends.

1.5.5 Chapter 5: Conclusion.

The chapter presents a summary of the main findings and recommendations, discusses the study's contributions and limitations, and makes recommendations for future research. It also reflects on the research process and lessons learned.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on the operation of ward committees to encourage community participation in the Umbumbulu rural area of the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The chapter examines the historical context of community participation in South Africa, tracing its evolution from apartheid to the current democratic government. The study centres on the theoretical foundations of community participation, particularly emphasising Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG), which serves as the central concept of this research. The literature review examines various aspects of community participation, including its importance in democratic government, the procedures and techniques that ward committees use, and the obstacles and opportunities that arise when promoting successful community participation.

The study also emphasises empirical research and case examples from both local and international contexts, and offers a comparative perspective on the operation and impact of ward committees. Following the literature review, the theoretical framework section provides an in-depth analysis of the EPG principles, underscoring their significance to the research and their applicability within the context of Umbumbulu's rural area. This section also explains how EPG informs the study design, research techniques, and data analysis. This chapter seeks to lay a strong framework for understanding the dynamics of community participation in Umbumbulu and the potential of ward committees to improve democratic governance at the local level, drawing on insights from the literature and theoretical perspectives relevant to this research.

This chapter reviews the literature on the research undertaken in this study and presents a theoretical framework that underpins it. It discusses the major concepts, debates, and gaps in the literature that inform the current investigation. The literature first addresses community participation, then local government in relation to the study topic, and finally ward committees. The theoretical framework comprises the following sections: understanding empowered participatory governance, global cases of EPG implementation, the relevance of EPG in South Africa, and the application of EPG in Umbumbulu. These aspects are followed by a conclusion that summarises both the literature review and the theoretical framework. This chapter examines important aspects of the research conducted in Umbumbulu and how it contributes to establishing a strong foundation for the following chapter.

2.2 Historical Context of Community Participation

Community participation has evolved significantly since its inception in the early 1960s as a component of government policy related to urban renewal initiatives in the United States and the United Kingdom (Churchman, 2012). Many nations have adopted principles based on accountability, transparency, and inclusivity. Given this history, the post-apartheid South African government believed that the ideals of community participation had to be adopted. Before 1994, as mentioned earlier, South Africa's apartheid system excluded the majority of South Africans from decision-making. Community participation was limited to the white racial group, and other racial groups faced discrimination. Ward committees were among the new bodies created by the post-apartheid government in 1994 to promote inclusive governance. The aim of establishing ward committees was to foster inclusive, participatory governance, especially at the local government level. Moreover, community participation has matured in the last few decades across numerous nations worldwide and in a wide range of planning and design situations (Churchman, 2012). Ward committees were established to give the underprivileged population a voice through participatory governance.

2.2.1 Establishment of Participatory Governance

Community participation is often regarded as the backbone of good and inclusive governance, benefiting both the community and the government. As mentioned earlier, participatory governance was established in the 1960s to foster community participation. Community participation in governance refers to the direct or indirect involvement of interested parties in the formulation of plans, policies, or programmes in which they have a stake (Quick & Bryson, 2016). Creighton (2005) asserts that community participation is a process of integrating public needs, values, and concerns into business and government decision-making. Community participation remains crucial for enhancing responsiveness and accountability in local government. According to Pypers and Bassuday (2016), effective community participation enhances responsiveness and accountability within municipalities. According to Narsiah (2025), institutional injustices and colonial forces that prioritise economic efficiency over inclusive and democratic decision-making often inhibit community participation in land reform. The suppression of the voices of the masses hinders the pursuit of their interests.

It further involves dialogue and involvement, with the ultimate objective of making better decisions that the general population supports (Creighton, 2005). The ward committee structure is essential for advancing marginalised groups and ensuring their views are included in political and economic decision-making. This restores their ability to influence development priorities (Arnstein, 1969). Citizens can share their concerns and provide unique insights into their community's challenges and strengths. This helps maintain context-appropriate, sustainable solutions that foster service delivery (Molepo, Maleka & Khal, 2015). Equitable participation is challenging because not all voices are equally considered, raising concerns about incomplete representation (O'Neill, 2001, cited in Turnhout, Van Bommel & Aarts,

2010).

The post-1994 South African government adopted various policies and legislative frameworks to support participatory government. Section 152(1)(e) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) encourages citizen engagement in local governance by requiring local governments to include community members and organisations in decision-making processes. However, the spirit of citizenship has been undermined, and these constitutional protections have effectively been rendered hollow (Good Governance Learning Network, 2011). Legislative frameworks at the local government level also support community participation. The Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000) promotes community participation in municipal decision-making processes. Section 72 of the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 provides for the creation of ward committees in each ward of a metropolitan or local government. The ward committee aims to foster participatory governance in the municipality.

Ward committees established under the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 aim to promote democratic governance at the local level. Section 73 of the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 sets out the functions and powers of ward committees, including fostering local government, advising ward council members, determining community needs and priorities, participating in municipal planning and budgeting, monitoring service delivery, fostering community relations between the municipality and its citizens, mediating conflicts and resolving issues, and advancing good governance. However, ward committees lack executive authority, which limits their effectiveness. The White Paper on Local Government (1998) introduced the notion of developmental local government and encouraged community participation through methods such as ward committees.

The legal and regulatory frameworks define the roles of ward committees and outline their operational functions. Ward committees, while not possessing decision-making authority, play a vital role in shaping decisions by effectively conveying public opinions to the municipal

council. This communication is facilitated by the ward councillor, who serves as the committee's chairperson. Turnhout, Van Bommel, and Aarts (2010) concurred that the primary objective of community participation is to achieve consensus on community development. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge community diversity when considering this constructive attribute in policymaking. Interpreting communities and community interests is problematic, and community participation assumes a common perspective, treating all units similarly (Turnhout, Van Bommel & Aarts, 2010).

2.2.2 Institutionalisation of Participation

The institutionalisation of participation involves the introduction of a legislative framework and policies to guide its implementation. As mentioned earlier, several legislative frameworks and policies were adopted in South Africa in the post-1994 period. Section 78 of the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 addresses the establishment of ward committees. It states that the local government (i.e., a municipality) has a duty to take reasonable steps to ensure that ward committees are established and function effectively. The legislature provides a roadmap for enhancing community participation, outlining strategies to make it both effective and efficient. By following these guidelines, we can create vibrant and engaged communities where everyone's voice matters. For example, the Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000) sets out the procedures municipalities must follow to encourage community participation. It also establishes mechanisms, processes, and procedures for participation in municipal governance (Craythorne, 2003).

These mechanisms assist with the formation and election of ward committees, define the role of citizens in community participation, set out how government officials should conduct community participation, and cover the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) processes, which include community participation in changing municipal development plans. The success of community participation in municipal affairs depends on its focus (Craythorne, 2003).

Furthermore, the legislature tasks municipalities with establishing appropriate frameworks, protocols, and guidelines to enable the community to participate in municipality affairs.

The mechanisms of the Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000) aim to promote accountability, transparency, and community-driven decision-making in local governance by addressing and handling complaints and petitions submitted by local community members (Craythorne, 2003). Attending to complaints and petitions supports community-driven decision-making. Piper (2009) highlighted the importance of public consultation in various aspects of government, including budgeting, service delivery contracting, the Performance Management System, the IDP review, and bylaws. According to Craythorne (2003), the municipal council, as well as other governmental bodies and municipal office-bearers, are required to hold public meetings and hearings when appropriate.

These meetings are for consultation with established community organisations and, if necessary, traditional authorities. Moreover, the local community is informed about the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998. The Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000) provides for participatory governance and genuine local government decision-making procedures by creating structured platforms for community participation that comply with legislation and involve a wide range of stakeholders. However, the constraints imposed by local government structures prevent meaningful participation. To overcome these challenges and limitations encountered during the process and to ensure the effectiveness of participation initiatives, structured community participation processes are necessary (South Africa Department of Public Service, 2010).

Four main elements make up community participation processes: (1) the problem or circumstance; (2) the systems, procedures, and administrative structures that facilitate participation; (3) the administrators; and (4) the people (King, Feltey & Susel, 1998). The way participation initiatives are currently structured in South Africa makes these elements

problematic. The citizen is positioned at the farthest point from the problem, while the administrative administrator is depicted as the agent closest to the structures (King, Feltey & Susel, 1998). This creates challenges, as citizens should be closer to their issues because they are the ones who understand their wards and can prioritise them accordingly. According to Quick and Bryson (2016), participation is the act of engaging in governance, whether restricted to specific actions, such as holding a town hall meeting or conducting a citizen poll, or defined by a series of procedures, such as holding public hearings or engaging in another consultation process. Local governments may face challenges when promoting community participation, some of which are beyond their control. Strong community assistance and more specialised, responsive solutions may be developed to address local issues. Community members collaborate to achieve similar goals, and community participation processes are designed to promote social cohesion and trust.

2.2.3 Critique and Limitations of Participation

Community participation challenges include corruption, a sense of entitlement, mutual distrust, slow bureaucratic reform, failure to implement laws and regulations, varying capacities among local civil society organisations, reliance on leadership, and changing national regulations on freedom (Tshishonga, 2022). Relationships between citizens and the institutions that influence their lives are characterised by a global legitimacy crisis (Gaventa, 2002). Further, people in the North and the South express growing disenchantment with their governments due to worries about corruption, a failure to address the needs of the impoverished, and a lack of a feeling of community with elected officials and bureaucrats (Commonwealth Foundation 1999; Narayan et al., 2000, cited in Gaventa, 2002). Sain and Soni (2025) asserted that corruption undermines trust in government institutions and discourages citizens' faith in government. While citizens may want to engage in community activities, government corruption can deter their participation. Entitled politicians, government officials,

and elites make it hard for citizens to engage in community participation (Sain & Soni, 2025). The Commonwealth Foundation (1999) conducted a study across more than 40 countries and found that citizens were becoming increasingly disenchanted with their governments due to corruption, their governments' inability to meet the needs of the impoverished, and the lack of involvement or ties with fellow citizens. Moreover, most citizens are not adequately trained to understand their rights and the functions of government to address their concerns.

Insufficient citizen knowledge of political processes poses a significant challenge to participatory democracy in South Africa. Furthermore, conflicts and low citizen involvement in municipal governance stem from a lack of confidence between residents and municipal officials, which impedes coordinated action. The effectiveness of participation frameworks is further diminished by slow progress in bureaucratic reforms and non-compliance with current policies (Booysen, 2007). Significant barriers to participatory democracy in South Africa include limited civic education and inadequate knowledge among community members of political processes and governance (Mafunisa, 2004). These factors typically lead to low confidence in the local state and a limited ability to hold leaders accountable or influence governance processes.

Mutual distrust stems primarily from corruption and a prevailing sense of entitlement. Government officials lack trust in citizens to make decisions, while citizens do not trust the government to protect their interests (Sain & Soni, 2025). The right of individuals to think, discuss, and make decisions on matters affecting them should be recognised as a fundamental aspect of development (Ngele, 2002, cited in Silima & Auriacombe, 2012). Thompson (2007) asserted that participatory processes should not hinder development and that narrow interest groups must not be allowed to capture the development process. This challenge undermines the efficacy of participatory governance and, consequently, hinders the attainment of the desired outcomes. Therefore, governments must prioritise implementing laws and regulations

to enable meaningful community participation in governance processes (Sain & Soni, 2025). The term "participation" does not imply forced or superficial participation by communities. Instead, it means involving citizens from the beginning of a project and maintaining engagement over time.

Many individuals may have a limited understanding of governance, including the cycles of government policy formulation and the legal mechanisms available to combat corruption and the abuse of power. Consequently, citizens often resort to public demonstrations to express their grievances (Sain & Soni, 2025). Individuals with limited knowledge of the issues affecting them often suggest solutions. According to Mbuyisa (2013), the lack of community participation in governance can be attributed to the mistaken belief that all citizens have equal access to their rights. Additionally, community participation in local governance is likely to be high when leaders from both the executive branch and legislative councils are committed to reform. When leaders fail to encourage citizen engagement, protests emerge as a crucial means for people to voice their opinions on public policy (Sain & Soni, 2025). Furthermore, community protests in South Africa typically stem from a lack of interaction and involvement between the community and the municipality (Booysen, 2007). There is a lack of community participation among those responsible for promoting and facilitating participatory democracy (Mbuyisa, 2013).

The implementation of policies and regulations is paramount to the success of any government in guiding administration and protecting its citizens. Pypers and Bassuday (2016) explain that community participation takes two forms: active communication and collective problem-solving tools. While some effective policies and regulations have been established to encourage community participation in the design and decision-making processes, their practical implementation often restricts citizens to merely observing government-organised events. According to Modise (2017), the rise in service-delivery protests and marches indicates

that participatory democracy poses a significant challenge in democratic South Africa. Good governance and transparency can be achieved through community participation, and people have to be part of the development process. Moreover, community discontent has become increasingly common in South African communities (Hough, 2009, cited in Mbuyisa, 2013). Ward committees, in collaboration with elected councillors, should play an important role in raising awareness of the challenges facing their municipality and ward, and, together with the citizens of their ward, they should create practical solutions to these challenges and other problems.

The Ward committee represents the community's interests, needs, and concerns to municipal authorities and other relevant parties. A Report by the Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government (2005) asserted that the primary function of a ward committee is to serve as a formal communication channel between the community and the council. Maphazi et al. (2013) point out that community participation should establish a direct connection between the community and policymakers within a bureaucracy. Community participation is usually encouraged to enable community decision-making; however, it is difficult to involve everyone, leading to incomplete representation of other citizens (O'Neill, 2001, cited in Turnhout, Van Bommel & Aarts, 2010). Community participation treats the community as a set of similar units with a common perspective, but fails to recognise the problematic character of interpreting communities and community interests (Turnhout, Van Bommel & Aarts, 2010). It is a beneficial component; however, government officials should consider community diversity in this context and use it as a tool to tackle challenges in the wards.

Modern insights into community participation reveal significant opportunities for institutionalising it, but also highlight important limitations. There is a strong desire for more inclusive, empowered, and accountable involvement that symbolic gestures cannot meet.

Tackling the gap between policy rhetoric and lived experience requires addressing structural disparities, strengthening local capacity, and redefining participation as a dynamic, ongoing, context-specific process directed by community members. Gaventa (2002) emphasised that strengthening the processes of participation, namely how disadvantaged communities exercise their voice through innovative forms of consultation, deliberation, and mobilisation intended to inform and influence larger institutions and policies, has received increased attention.

2.3 Communication in Community Participation

Community participation is impossible without effective communication networks. According to Swargiary (2024), effective communication has long been a foundation of human connection, linking individuals, societies, and civilisations. In agreement with Vejseli and Kamberi (2021), communication is a process and part of human identity; without it, humans would not exist today. Furthermore, Craythorne (2003) highlighted that true communication is the exchange of information, in which the council informs the public about a proposed policy and receives feedback. Amin (2022) emphasised that, since several facets of society are involved in the growth process, communication is essential. Most importantly, communication takes various forms, each with its own strengths and limitations (Swargiary, 2024). Communication requires the ward committee to adopt measures to ensure everyone in the community is informed about developments.

Effective traditional and modern communication methods are available. Ward committees should take into account the specificities of their area, whether rural or urban, to determine which type of communication will be most beneficial in their wards. According to Pacheco (2023), traditional media include radio, television, magazines, and newspapers, whereas digital media (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram), online news websites, blogs, and podcasts are considered mass media. According to Swargiary (2024), digital media have revolutionised communication, making it faster and more adaptable. In

contrast, traditional communication methods are maintained and improved to meet the population's needs for both entertainment and education. Ward committees need to choose effective digital media to ensure smooth, efficient interactions (Sahar & Amin, 2022). Accordingly, mass media may be used effectively to communicate with diverse audiences. Mass media can also use traditional communication channels to drive societal change worldwide.

The media's role is extensive, with both limitations and opportunities in the transmission of information. According to Sahar and Amin (2022), mass media enable 24-hour communication with a large, anonymous, and international audience, thereby overcoming transnational communication challenges. Furthermore, Pacheco (2023) highlights that the media is a primary source of information, providing news, current events, and analysis to the public. In addition, understanding these forms enables individuals to select the most effective techniques for conveying their messages across diverse contexts, whether professional or digital (Swargiary, 2024). However, the ease of sharing information online has led to the rapid spread of fake news and misinformation, reducing trust in media sources. In the digital era, fake information is increasingly challenging the reliability of information (Pacheco, 2023). The importance of the media can be emphasised as a powerful means of transmitting information and fostering community participation. It should be used in local government to assist ward committees in fostering communication.

Local government and ward committees must involve the mass media in information dissemination. Moreover, it is beneficial for municipalities to enhance communication, provide training and administrative support to ward committees and council members, and engage them in public consultations on the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), the budget, by-laws, and service agreements (Piper, 2009). Craythorne (2003) argues that for this type of communication to be valuable, the council must acknowledge any positive contributions the public raises when

debating draft policies. In other words, the council must first establish its systems, processes, and procedures before communicating them to the public for community feedback (Craythorne, 2003). In addition, ward committees have a responsibility to ensure that the community and the council communicate more effectively, as clear and timely communication is essential for increasing openness, improving public engagement, and ensuring that service delivery programmes reflect the needs and priorities of the community (Van Rooyen & Mokoena, 2012, cited in Sekgala, 2016). Therefore, ward committees must introduce various mechanisms to encourage community participation, such as online platforms, community radios, and community WhatsApp groups. Too often, government officials and council members view public comment as an obstacle to be overcome rather than as a component of the social contract in government (Craythorne, 2003). Communication and involvement to be meaningful, both the local government and the ward committee must foster a culture that values public opinion as an important aspect of democratic governance, rather than as a procedural responsibility.

2.4 Local Government Evolution

There are three spheres of government in South Africa, namely the national, provincial, and local. Each sphere of government plays a specific role in developing local communities. According to the South African Cities Network (2022), local government is one of the three distinct spheres of government with legislative and executive powers. Local government works closely with local communities and is responsible for decentralising power to constitutional institutions such as villages, municipalities, cities, towns, districts, counties, and other local institutions. The decentralisation of authority and power to constituencies is a key characteristic of local government, with elected representatives governing the national, provincial, and local institutions (Bulmer, 2017). Local municipalities have been legitimised as a sphere of public administration, shifting the focus from providing governmental service delivery liaisons to advancing aims and principles at the local government level. Section 16(1)

of the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) requires local government to develop local governance that encourages formal government to represent participatory governance. The aim is to enable the public to participate in government affairs and exercise their democratic rights.

The White Paper on Local Government (1998) advocates developmental local government, which aims to democratise development, build social capital, empower marginalised groups, integrate public and private investment, and maximise the impact of municipal functions on social development and economic growth (Department of Constitutional Development, 1998, cited in Parnell & Pieterse, 2013). Local governments face a variety of problems that may affect their capacity to provide efficient services and meet community demands. According to Mashamaite and Mankolo (2018), local governments in South Africa are distinguished by and face significant challenges, including high unemployment and poverty, poor or insufficient services, stagnant local economies, a lack of skills needed to drive local economic development, limited administrative capacity, and poor policy implementation. Rondinelli (2006) asserted that in many developing nations, the central government's insufficient administrative capabilities hindered the expansion or enhancement of service delivery. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive approaches that include stakeholder participation, innovative solutions, and judicious resource allocation. Furthermore, competent staff who understand the importance of inclusion and its role in advancing good governance are needed for effective implementation.

Government officials are supposed to assist the community and ward committee members by providing information and knowledge on development that a councillor should lead. According to Modise (2017), the voice of the people should be represented in decisions made by the government and lawmakers at all levels, from the ward to the national level, thereby enabling people to own the sovereignty of the governmental system. Thabanchu (2011) argued that corruption and mismanagement are common in local government, leading to

ineffective service delivery as funds are diverted for personal use rather than invested in growth. These challenges continue to affect local government in South Africa, even though community participation is seen as an important quality of a democratic government.

International experience has shown that one way to achieve community participation in government structures is through policy and legislation that establish structured, institutionalised frameworks for participatory local governance (Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005). Section 152(1)(b) of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) states that the objective of local government is to ensure the sustainable distribution of services to local communities. According to Tshishonga (2022), the legislative frameworks were intended to radically transform local government from its rigidity into an instrument for advancing local democracy and developmental service delivery. The main focus of government officials and ward committees should be to build partnerships and, more specifically, to foster participative democracy (Silima & Auriacombe, 2012). A closer look at this matter can provide insight into how we can better connect the dots between implementing policies and achieving successful governance that the ward committee leads.

2.4.1 Integrated Development Planning

Local government has developed tools and mechanisms to encourage community participation and address its developmental challenges. One of these tools is the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), which aims to accelerate service delivery and provide a legal framework for economic and social development within local government (Asha & Makalela, 2020). According to Craythorne (2003), the concept of Integrated Development Planning was first introduced into municipal law when Act 97 of 1996 amended the Local Government Transition Act of 1993, requiring metropolitan councils to have an IDP and allowing district councils to develop and implement an IDP for a local, rural, or representative council. The IDP aims to integrate, develop, and manage a South African municipality's area of jurisdiction in

accordance with general principles (Craythorne, 2003). Parnell and Pieterse (2013) noted that the particularly promising aspect of the IDP model is its aim to promote a future-oriented, problem-solving approach within local government and the citizenry. The process emphasises that participatory democracy, led by ward committees, is central to this consultative and democratic approach. A democracy is a form of government in which the people, or citizens, formally hold sovereignty (Raadschelders, 2003, cited in Modise, 2017). Furthermore, Modise (2017) stated that democracy is about the people's business and their involvement in national governance.

The South African Constitution of 1996 stipulates that a municipality must adopt an IDP. It requires a municipality to structure and manage its administration, budgeting, and planning processes to prioritise the community's basic requirements (Craythorne, 2003). Section (23)(1)(a) of the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) guarantees that all stakeholders work towards achieving the local government goals outlined in Section 152 of the Constitution. In summary, municipalities should adopt plans based on developmental considerations. The IDP is grounded in sound planning and the prioritisation of a local municipality's development. An assessment of the municipality's current level of development must identify communities that require essential municipal services (Craythorne, 2003). It aspires to provide a framework for diverse communities, citizens, and interest groups to enter public dialogue and debate the desirable future they want to construct (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013). The IDP model generates momentum for constructing new shared values and visions to inform how best to negotiate the tensions between restitution, redistribution, and the maintenance of standards that are normative for certain privileged groups (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013). It is a basis for developmental local government. It enables a municipality to advance strategic plans and budgets that incorporate the perspectives of the local community, businesses, and civil society organisations (Asha & Makalela, 2020). According to Dlamini and Reddy (2018), the IDP

approach encourages community participation and is a key tool of local government for development. Although the IDP exists, the top-down approach remains unchanged, despite the IDP's intention to promote a bottom-up approach.

The Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 sets out what must be included in the IDP but does not specify its substance (Craythorne, 2003). Local government officials and IDP forum members need to understand the IDP implementation process to improve and expedite service delivery at the local level (Asha & Makalela, 2020). Participants state that ward committees should be active in areas such as the IDP process, municipal performance management, the annual budget, council initiatives, and other critical activities and programmes, as they influence residents (Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005). A municipal council's development priorities and objectives for any current term include local economic growth goals and internal transformation requirements (Craythorne, 2003). The IDP establishes a framework for comprehensive and participatory development planning, and the ward committee is critical to ensuring community participation, representation, and monitoring throughout the process. Municipalities may enhance the efficacy and impact of IDP activities by empowering ward committees and increasing community involvement, thereby fostering more inclusive and sustainable local development.

2.4.2 Municipal Finance and Budgeting

Budgeting is a crucial component of financial planning, control, and assessment in public-sector organisations. The Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003 aims to ensure the responsible, long-term management of the finances of local government entities, including municipalities and other organisations. Craythorne (2003) notes that the relevant clauses require each fiscal year that a local council allocate funds for the municipality's needs through an annual budget. According to Zweni, Yan, and Uys (2022), a budget is a financial plan that estimates revenue and expenses and authorises specific expenditures for work in the

public interest over a given period, using public funds. The annual budget must follow the prescribed format and include a balanced operating budget, so that appropriated operating expenditure does not exceed realistically anticipated revenue for the year, plus such amount of the prior year's accumulated surplus as is available for operating expenditure, or less such percentage of the prior year's accumulated deficits as may be prescribed (Craythorne, 2003). Before the budget is presented and adopted, all relevant data must be carefully examined and considered. This includes the municipality's vision and mission, council decisions and resolutions, and service delivery priorities.

According to Craythorne (2003), municipalities are required to provide a cost report detailing their work for each fiscal year. Financial reporting is crucial, as several reports are prepared to provide information on various operations, including financial activities. Unlike previous legislative sessions, this bill establishes a rigorous budget process that requires the councillors for financial matters to ensure that a draft annual budget with the prescribed details is prepared at least a prescribed number of days (or, if several days are not prescribed, at least four months) before the beginning of each fiscal year, and, after the draft budget is completed, to follow the community participation process (Craythorne, 2003). Politicians and administrative staff in a municipality should be aware of their respective duties and responsibilities in managing the community's finances. Municipal finance and budgeting are important aspects of local government, as they guide project planning and service delivery. Community participation should be considered an important element when planning. Due to their direct impact on service delivery, resource allocation, and project planning, municipal finance and budgeting are essential for efficient local governance. Community participation must extend beyond consultation to include active participation in financial procedures, ensuring that community concerns are represented in municipal spending decisions to increase responsibility and legitimacy. According to Narsiah (2011, 2020), excluding communities from

key governance processes often compromises accountability and exacerbates ongoing service delivery problems. As a result, incorporating communities into financial planning procedures strengthens the local government's legitimacy and improves transparency. Participatory budgeting and inclusive financial decision-making can be crucial tools for matching municipal resources to the real needs of citizens in places like Umbumbulu, where service delivery limitations are common.

2.5 Ward Committees: Roles and Realities

Ward committees are advisory institutions established by the post-1994 South African government to promote participatory democracy within the local government sphere (Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005). Ward committees are established in each ward of the country's municipalities to enhance communication between communities and elected councillors. When formed, a ward committee comprises 10 elected community members, including the councillor who serves as chairperson. According to Modise (2017), the appointment of ward committee members in South Africa is morally and legally sound, as it is governed by national law. Furthermore, it must be legal, as members must be registered voters, South African citizens, and residents of that ward (Modise, 2017). Ward committees improve communication between elected councillors and community members, encourage community participation in local government, identify and understand community needs and priorities, and assist with service planning, budgeting, and monitoring (Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005). Ward committees lack executive or legislative powers and derive their mandate and legitimacy from legal and policy frameworks enacted by the South African government.

South Africa currently practices multi-dimensional participatory democracy within a constitutional and electoral framework. According to Modise (2017), various initiatives have increased engagement between the government and the public, influencing political and policy

decisions through elected committees. These committees, formed under the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998, are tasked with advancing democratic governance at the ward level. Residents can participate in decision-making processes through ward committees, which promote inclusive governance (South Africa, 1998). Ward committees advise ward council members on issues such as policy reforms, development, and service delivery (Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005). According to Nyalunga (2006), ward committees help determine community goals and ensure that local development reflects the actual needs of the populace. Furthermore, ward committees and municipal planning instruments such as the Service Delivery and Budgeting Implementation Plan (SDBIP) and the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) are crucial to their success (South Africa, 2000). Ward committees are responsible for monitoring service provision within the ward and informing the municipality of any issues to hold service providers accountable (Piper & Deacon, 2008).

The purpose of the ward committee is to facilitate information flow and enhance communication between the local administration and the populace (Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005). Despite limited authority, these committees typically mediate local conflicts and promote harmony within the community (Buccus et al., 2007). According to the Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government (2005), ward committees promote accountability, transparency, and responsiveness in local government by encouraging active community participation. However, the challenges they encounter hinder their effectiveness. Ward committees in South Africa have had mixed results, with both successes and significant obstacles. Ward committees have successfully encouraged community participation in some municipalities and provided a platform for residents to engage in local administration (Piper & Deacon, 2008). In certain circumstances, the ward committee has monitored service performance, identified shortcomings, and increased local accountability (Good Governance Learning Network, 2008). In addition, Buccus et al. (2007)

contend that there are real instances of ward committees using participatory values in South Africa.

The eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality's ward committee has effectively collaborated with municipal officials to address service delivery backlogs. Furthermore, the ward committee oversaw the IDP consultation process and facilitated exchanges between the community and municipal departments to ensure that community needs were addressed (Buccus et al., 2007). This showcases their ability to solve problems collaboratively and practically. Municipalities provide capacity-building services to help ward committees work more effectively (Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005). However, ward committees also face obstacles, such as a lack of real power; as advisory bodies, they have minimal influence over actual decision-making, which frustrates them (Mkhize, 2015). Furthermore, ward committees face political interference in their elections or selections, as the structure is politicised, a situation that breeds distrust among community members (Houston & Liebenberg, 2001). Ward committees also face resource constraints, including funding, transport, and the administrative support required for optimal performance. In addition, due to ineffective feedback systems, community members believe that the municipal government does not address their concerns (Good Governance Learning Network, 2008). The analysis by Narsiah (2011) suggests that weak formal participation mechanisms contribute to persistent service delivery challenges, as communities resort to informal or oppositional forms of engagement to have their needs recognised.

Ward committees are significant participatory democracy structures grounded in South Africa's law and policy frameworks. However, their activities are strongly dependent on governmental will, municipal assistance, community trust, and member empowerment. Community members rely on their elected representatives to make decisions that will benefit their communities. A report by the Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local

Government (2005) stated that one of the objectives of ward committees is to improve residents' engagement in municipal decision-making, as they are a direct and unique link to the council. According to the South African Cities Networks (2022), ward committees were established to promote social cohesion, based on the principle of "the people shall govern". The idea was to give citizens a voice in the community and prioritise their concerns. According to Craythone (2003), a ward committee has the authority to refer issues affecting their ward either directly to the ward councillor or, via the councillor, to the council, executive committee, executive mayor, or sub-council, depending on the councillor's position within the council.

Ward committees primarily monitor functions, and their overall aims are to enhance the economic empowerment of communities; improve infrastructure and services; strengthen local democracy and accountability; and promote social cohesion, nation-building, and the integration of communities across class, race, culture, and religion. Ward committees were introduced as a system of local government best placed to give practical meaning and substance to the basic political commitment to democratic governance (Silima & Auriacombe, 2012). The overall function of the ward committee is to represent the ward, working towards sustainable service delivery, social and economic development, and the safety of citizens. According to Modise (2017), the ward committee's goals are twofold: first, to encourage community participation in decision-making processes that directly affect the community; and second, to articulate and reflect the community's interests. The ward committee must consult with its members, research their needs and interests, and make sound community decisions. According to the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, the ward committee is responsible for facilitating communication between the ward councillor and the community, and between the ward and the local council.

The ward councillor controls the channels of communication between the community and local government. Notably, there is no direct channel of communication between the

administration and the ward committee (Craythorne, 2003). Ward committees rely on the councillor to report to the council. Moreover, inadequate resources often hinder ward committees' ability to meet residents' expectations (Silima & Auriacombe, 2013), ultimately affecting their effectiveness in representing the community and collaborating with the local administration. According to the Report by the Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government (2005), the ward committee enhances community participation through strategies set out by local government. Another difficult issue is the ward committee's role, as an independent civil body, in monitoring the performance of ward councillors.

The ward committee serves as the community's leadership. It is responsible for ensuring that key local government processes are followed, including Integrated Development Planning, municipal budgeting, and municipal performance management (Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005). These processes are vital to local government development and involve citizens, helping to establish good communication between citizens and government officials. Ward committee mechanisms are in place in Umbumbulu; nevertheless, there remains a communication gap among the ward committee leaders, the councillor, and the community. According to Piper and Deacon (2008), a competent, cogent, and dedicated councillor is essential for the ward committee structure to operate effectively. The effectiveness of the ward committee structure also depends on a competent committee to guide it.

The eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality is primarily urban, but it also includes rural areas within its boundaries. Unfortunately, most citizens in rural areas have a limited understanding of how local government works, and therefore, few actively participate in local governance. According to Thompson (2007), local governments should develop a strategic plan to educate and empower rural community members. Capacitating community members is paramount to ensure they understand their roles and rights. One way to achieve this is to train

ward committees to assist their communities within their designated areas. According to the Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government (2005), without ward committee structures, the system of democratic government and developmental local government cannot be said to be based on the people. Democracy is about the people and their participation in national governance (Raadschelders, 2003, cited in Modise, 2017). Furthermore, the voice of the people should be represented in the decisions made by the government and lawmakers at all levels, from the ward to the national level (Modise, 2017).

In general, the ward committee has little influence over local council decisions (Smith, 2003, cited in Silima & Auriacombe, 2012). The council may also assign responsibilities and authority to subcouncils. This is preferable because ward committee members are not councillors and because the council remains liable for any actions taken under its delegated authority (Craythorne, 2003). According to Parnell and Pieterse (2013), ward committees undertake specialised functions and report back to the whole council, and each has an analogous department over which it exerts significant authority. Despite their active participation, ward committee members find it difficult to achieve their goals because they are not represented on a municipality's council. Furthermore, ward committees are often under-resourced and may therefore fail to meet residents' expectations (Silima & Auriacombe, 2012). The efficacy of the ward committee should lead to a more satisfactory outcome for residents and the local administration.

2.5.1 Challenges: Political Interference and Skills Gaps

The community participation strategy aims to give ordinary people a voice and an opportunity to share their ideas. However, political interference in wards often hinders the functioning of ward committees. According to Narsiah (2020), developmental achievements can be seriously jeopardised by declines in community participation, especially during crises. Effective service delivery is inherently political and participatory. Ward committees in many

municipalities are seen as extensions of the ruling party rather than as autonomous entities (South African Cities Networks, 2022). Arnstein (1969) argued that people are placed on advisory committees or boards to engineer and secure their support, under the guise of promoting community participation. The ward committee should drive community participation, rather than merely facilitate it. This bottom rung of the ladder represents the political powerholders' perversion of participation, reduced to a public-relations vehicle (Arnstein, 1969). Narsiah (2019) shows how centralised political authority frequently undermines community participation in South Africa's local governance system, raising important concerns regarding the breadth and efficacy of participatory democracy in influencing development outcomes.

The Report of the Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government (2005) states that ward committee members are mandated to represent the interests of their communities, regardless of political affiliation. According to Parnell and Pieterse (2013), collective organisations and pressure groups may enable people to wield significantly more power than through the voting box. Efforts could focus on reforming municipal administrative and political systems to better respond to citizens' needs, as in South Africa's civic movement in the 1980s (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013). Thabanchu (2011) provides evidence that ward committee members frequently support the same political party as their ward councillor, making it difficult to prevent party politics from interfering with the ward committee's work.

Political parties require their councillors and members to ensure that those in office are party members. According to Narsiah (2011), formal participatory processes in local government often fail to adequately capture community voices, highlighting the need for alternative platforms through which marginalised groups can express their dissatisfaction and demand accountability. Representatives lose sight of the varied contributions people can make on the ground, and, as a result of their immoral actions, participatory democracy vanishes

(Modise, 2017). Political institutions require local governance to strike a delicate balance between leadership competence and opportunities for greater engagement and involvement (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013). The ward committee loses its effectiveness and accountability when it fails to represent the community's interests. According to Modise (2017), the selection of ward committee members should transcend party, individual, and collective politics. It should, therefore, remain devoted to the needs of the local populace. Ward committee members must possess greater expertise and insight than council members because they represent their communities and serve as advisory bodies. Fung and Wright (2003) argued that in participatory experiments, most governments are unable to bear the political and practical costs of establishing participatory decision-making procedures, even when they possess the necessary "political will". Rather than true community participation, the bottom rung of the ladder represents the powerholders' perversion of participation, using it as a public relations vehicle (Arnstein, 1969).

In politics, attempts to shift power to arenas where "ordinary people" are influential typically result in the removal of those who already hold it and can oppose the changes (Fung & Wright, 2003). Problems in local governance have highlighted the interrelationships among elected representatives, government officials, political committees, and departments (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013). Poor service delivery has resulted from political representatives on the ward committee abusing their positions of authority. Objectives of participatory governance include holding the government accountable, ensuring sustainable service delivery, promoting social and economic advancement, fostering a welcoming environment, and increasing community participation in local government. The ward committee must make an effort to boost community participation by encouraging locals to attend meetings, voice their problems, and offer suggestions for community development.

The South African Cities Network (2022) highlighted the progressive transfer of

power to the state, the frequent co-optation of engaged community members, state-led growth, and increased financial centralisation. These factors have, essentially, prevented civil society from contributing to local concerns. According to Narsiah (2011), successful community participation encompasses a wider range of civic activity that represents both cooperation with and resistance to governmental power, going beyond institutionalised methods. According to Parnell and Pieterse (2013), many people prefer to spend their time on non-political pursuits, and social and economic constraints limit their political involvement. Political parties' meddling in ward committee matters typically undermines the efficacy of these committees and disregards community opinions. According to Parnell and Pieterse (2013), leadership stems not only from the government but also from a wide range of community members, such as principals and parents. The community includes people with diverse expertise necessary for achieving community participation. While they may not hold political office, their impact on the community is undeniable.

These individuals shape opinions, inspire change, and foster connections, demonstrating that influence extends far beyond the ballot box. These individual contributions can assist the ward committee in its functioning, but the legal framework does not permit them. Ward committees work with elected councillors to enhance development. Section (17)(1)(a) of the Municipal Systems Act, No. (32 of 2000), provides that municipalities must develop mechanisms for community participation, including through political structures, among other participatory processes. Section (17)(1)(d) of the Municipal Systems Act, No. (32 of 2000) stipulates that the participation of the local community in the affairs of a municipality must take place through councillors. Allowing community members to participate in governance processes and to have an impact on local development projects gives ward committee structures the opportunity to be part of participatory democracy.

The eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality has created conditions for active

participation through the ward committee. However, the active participation of the rural population remains problematic, and some challenges must be addressed (Nzimakwe & Reddy, 2008). Political influence may occasionally affect the ward committee's independence and decision-making processes. Ward committee neutrality may be compromised when political interests shape their goals or debates. Political agendas may influence decisions, jeopardising the committee's transparency and accountability to the ward community's needs. Therefore, preserving public confidence and boosting successful community participation in local governance requires strengthening openness, encouraging community scrutiny, and guaranteeing that ward committees function independently.

In rural communities like Umbumbulu, ward committees can be more influential and effective in promoting local development and community participation by working closely with the community. Section 152(1)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, provides that one of the objects of local government is to promote social and economic development. Despite the challenges that ward committees may encounter in their interactions with local government, such frustrations should not hinder their ability to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. The community's leadership role entails the local government's commitment to deliver the outcomes residents desire (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013). These outcomes depend on the ability of individuals in positions of authority to understand their responsibilities and roles in addressing the community's problems. Given that the incompetence of municipal officials and ward committees sometimes hampers community participation, these officials and committees need to be strengthened.

The lack of skills development undermines the effectiveness of the ward committee and poses a challenge for it. Moreover, the ward committee and community members appear to have limited training or understanding of local government processes (Nyalunga, 2006). Modise (2017) asserts that for ward committees to perform their work effectively and

efficiently, members need specific qualifications. However, those with the identified skills and qualifications may have other commitments and may not be available for election. Modise (2017) argues that members of ward committees must meet specific requirements based on their status, duties, and authority for the committee to operate effectively and efficiently. In most cases, ward committee members are unskilled or unemployed. In response to this issue, the local government has implemented a skills development programme for ward committee members. Bendle (2008) notes that this programme provides an opportunity for ward committee members to empower themselves and perform their duties more effectively. A nationally recognised educational programme for ward committees has also been established to ensure that all ward committee members have the same level of education and skills (Smith & de Visser, 2009). Despite these efforts, skills development does not necessarily guarantee that the ward committee will be able to execute its duties and responsibilities effectively.

The training and lack of skills in community participation cannot be attributed solely to committees or community members, as even government officials may need to acquire certain skills when leading community participation. According to Kuye et al. (2002), the training programme for government officials in the public sector should be emphasised. Inefficiency in the South African public sector is relatively high, particularly in the provision of responsive services to public needs (Kuye et al., 2002). Among the most significant administrative issues were ineffective managerial and supervisory practices in the field, severe shortages of trained professionals, challenges in coordinating service delivery among national ministries and local governments, and deficiencies in planning and managerial capability at all levels of central government administration (Rondinelli, 2006). Enhancing community participation, improving service delivery, fostering accountability and transparency, developing governance capacity, ensuring inclusive decision-making, guaranteeing legal compliance, adapting to societal changes, and bolstering democratic governance all depend on

government officials receiving community participation training (Kuye et al., 2002). In addition, Modise (2017) contended that it is morally acceptable to note that advisory boards (including the ward committee) include individuals who possess specialised knowledge, as appropriate, in the sector they advise.

The credentials needed to perform a job must be determined by the work the individual does (Modise, 2017). This will assist the advisory bodies in selecting experts with special competence to assist the committee. Practical issues also arise, particularly in cases when government administration is inexperienced and underfunded (Fung & Wright, 2003). Inefficiency is, in part, caused by insufficient ethics education and training for effective, accountable, and efficient government (Kuye et al., 2002). For example, financial resources are needed to set up participatory decision-making processes, and operational, financial, and legal competence are required to carry out the decisions reached (Fung & Wright, 2003). The training and skilling of government officials and political office-bearers may lead to greater efficiency and effective community participation.

Government officials must undergo training in ethical principles. Equipping them with a strong ethical foundation helps ensure they make informed, responsible decisions that genuinely benefit the community. These ethical pillars of community participation include constitutional supremacy, public accountability, respect for society's values, efficiency and effectiveness, and transparency (Kuye et al., 2002). The foundation of participatory democracy is trust, which is fostered by ethical governance between the municipality and its citizens. Furthermore, moral behaviour enables local government representatives to provide responsive, honest services to the public. South Africa is a democratic state founded on values such as human dignity, equality, the advancement of human rights and freedoms, non-racialism and non-sexism, the supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law, universal adult suffrage, a national common voters' roll, regular elections, and a multiparty system to ensure

accountability (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Kuye et al. (2002) contend that training and education can boost morale and enthusiasm among officials and deter them from engaging in immoral activities, attitudes, or behaviour that could lead colleagues to dislike and ostracise them. This human development is essential for local, provincial, and national government institutions in South Africa to remain legitimate and functional. Community participation was covered in detail in this section. The theoretical framework of Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) is covered in the following section. EPG provides a useful lens for explaining how grassroots involvement and group decision-making processes can enhance democratic governance.

2.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: EMPOWERED PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE (EPG)

2.6.1. Foundational Ideas of the Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG).

Empowered participatory governance is grounded in participatory democracy, deliberative theory, and decentralised governance. According to Zittel and Fuchs (2007), participatory democracy is a philosophy of democracy that promotes direct community participation in decision-making processes rather than relying on voting machines. Direct participation, in contrast to representative democracy, is feasible only in small communities, such as ancient Greece and Switzerland, where political engagement is limited (Thielicke, 1966, cited in Modise, 2017). When radical democracy is realised, voters can be confident that their representatives will listen to their concerns, play more direct roles in public decisions, or engage more deeply with substantive political issues (Good Governance Learning Network, 2011).

Radical democrats also place a strong emphasis on discussion. Rosenberg (2007) defines deliberative theory as a democratic method that emphasises discussion, reasoning, and mutual justification during the decision-making process. The focus on decentralised governance as a form of public administration occurs when decision-making rights,

responsibilities, and resources are shifted from the central government to lower levels, such as municipalities, districts, and communities (Manor, 1999, cited in Ribot, 2002). Decentralisation has been employed as a crucial instrument to promote democratic participation and counteract centralised bureaucratic authority (Good Governance Learning Network, 2011). These approaches serve as the intellectual and practical underpinning for EPGs. It also encourages community participation, dialogue, local control, and collaborative problem-solving. All of these methods collectively serve as the EPG model's moral, institutional, and practical cornerstones. Common EPG methods include community participation beyond voting, a problem-solving orientation, deliberation and dialogue, accountability and transparency, and the inclusion of marginalised groups.

A contemporary theory of participatory democracy is Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG), created by Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright in the 21st century. However, its foundations are significantly shaped by earlier intellectual notions of direct democracy and political engagement, particularly those advanced by authors such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, and G.D.H. Cole in the 18th century. Parnell and Pieterse (2013) argue that the participatory discourse was divided into two major groups: those who regarded it as a beneficial procedure for legitimising official acts and enforcing compliance, and an alternative, more radical version that saw citizen empowerment and state democratisation as the fundamental functions of participation.

2.6.2 Understanding the Conceptualisation of Empowered Participatory Governance

This study adopts Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) as its theoretical framework. This framework provides a lens for examining diverse participatory decision-making mechanisms in local governance. The EPG's fundamental principles include participatory inclusiveness, deliberate problem-solving, and practical empowerment. Fung and Wright coined the term "empowered participatory governance" (EPG) (Fung & Wright, 2003).

The EPG model aimed to identify alternative government models that would empower ordinary citizens to solve complex, local challenges. This approach is grounded in real-world, empirical experience (Good Governance Learning Network, 2011). The EPG supports governmental systems that allow the general public to decide on matters where regular citizens have a view on policy. The focus is on real-world problems, not theoretical discussions that a government promotes, followed by thoughtful consideration of workable solutions.

The EPG encourages structured, ongoing involvement rather than one-off consultation; as a result, communities serve as a rubber stamp (Good Governance Learning Network, 2011). Modise (2017) asserted that there has never been a time when all authority resides with the people. The people's direct power is confined to electing representatives and delegating decision-making to bodies such as ward committees. Wright and Fung (2003) contend that citizens' active participation in EPG enables them to voice their issues at the local government level, where their opinions are not only heard but also taken into account.

The EPG approach is distinctive to the techno-bureaucratic state. A techno-bureaucratic state is a system that uses technical solutions, organisation, and managerialism to effect change (Good Governance Learning Network, 2011). However, technocratic regimes disregard the people's involvement in decision-making (Gaventa, 2006). Residents to participate successfully, community participation platforms and decision-making procedures for community initiatives and developments must be regulated and limited. Fung and Wright (2003) stated that local challenges may be more effectively addressed by local citizens who live and experience local conditions than by experts narrowly trained in technical issues. Technocratic regimes are systems that rely on expert rule and the power of reason and research to advance good governance (Good Governance Learning Network, 2011). Moreover, the technocratic state is an expert-led system that relies on reason and research to support good governance (Good Governance Learning Network, 2011).

According to Gaventa and Valderrama (1999), the significance of participation has been emphasised both as a means of holding people accountable and as a process of personal growth that begins with the expression of needs and priorities at the grassroots level and the creation of well-liked organisational structures. Muse and Narsiah (2015) point out that deliberative democracy prioritises effective and comprehensive deliberation in decision-making, combining majority rule with the characteristics of decision-making. In addition to representation and accountability, participation has encompassed knowledge and direct action. Narsiah (2020) asserts that creating robust and accountable local governance systems requires increasing community participation. According to the Good Governance Learning Networks (2011), decentralisation has been used to promote democratic participation and challenge concentrated bureaucratic authority. This view is supported by global evidence showing that decentralisation reforms have redistributed decision-making power to local levels and expanded opportunities for community participation.

2.6.3 Global Case Studies of EPG Implementation

The concept of EPG has been applied in a variety of contexts worldwide, providing tangible examples of how citizen-led decision-making transforms local governance. Global examples offer compelling evidence that the EPG ideas mentioned above, such as the bottom-up approach, deliberate involvement, and institutional accountability, have been translated into real-world governance practices (Fung & Wright, 2003). In contrast, the current global system, while claiming to promote democracy, actually consolidates power in the hands of corporate-friendly politicians and bureaucrats (Evanoff, 2006, cited in Modise, 2017). Furthermore, the bioregional model proposes replacing representational democracy with direct democracy that aligns with people's interests and preferences (Modise, 2017).

Cases in Brazil, India, and Bolivia offer pioneering models closely related to the EPG framework, such as participatory budgeting, village councils, and community-led development

(Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017; cited in Heller, 2007). Investigating these worldwide examples helps us better understand the conditions under which EPG thrives and fails, as well as how lessons from international experience might inform and strengthen participatory governance methods in countries such as South Africa (Wampler & Hartz-Karp, 2012).

2.6.3.1 Bolivia: The Law of Popular Participation of 1994

The EPG has been successfully implemented in various countries and has encouraged a bottom-up approach. According to Gaventa (2006), in Bolivia, the 1994 Law of Popular Participation (LPP) mandated broad-based participatory processes at the neighbourhood level as part of local government decentralisation. It also recognised the importance of existing social organisations, including indigenous communities and their practices and customs, as a foundation (Gaventa, 2004). Community-led democracy was incorporated into Bolivia's 1994 Law of Popular Participation, allowing local government to influence municipal decisions directly (Gaventa, 2006). The EPG may help address development issues in rural areas such as Umbumbulu by ensuring that development plans incorporate the community's needs and priorities. In response to major concerns such as poverty, economic revival, unemployment, environmental degradation, and criminality, the ability to act must extend beyond the conventional role of bureaucracies (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013).

The Law of Popular Participation approach was launched in 1994 to create peer-to-peer networks by sharing resources and power with municipal governments and community-based organisations (CBOs). This approach was developed around three principles: the first is the legal recognition of community-based organisations, which granted them authority and incorporated them into the municipal governance framework (Kohl, 2003). The second is the decentralisation of public funds; the law allocated 20% of national tax revenues directly to municipalities, allowing residents to fund development projects according to their priorities (Faguet, 2003). The third is citizen supervision and responsibility. Committees were formed to

review municipal expenditure and ensure it aligned with public objectives, thereby increasing transparency and reducing corruption (Kohl, 2003).

The Bolivian LPP strengthened local government autonomy, resulting in an accountable municipal government (Faguet, 2003). The LPP's impact was to empower indigenous communities, granting them official status and participation in local decision-making, encouraging diverse development (Kohl, 2003). A meaningful democracy must strengthen civic voices, demonstrate responsive governance systems, and promote the interests of all its citizens (Sain & Soni, 2025). The goal of the EPG strategy is to actively involve individuals in their government and promote good governance. The principles of openness and deliberation are significant; however, they lose their efficacy within a system that lacks the capacity for effective action, which is essential for successful local governance (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013).

2.6.3.2 Brazil's Porto Alegre Model of the Participatory Budget

Brazil's Porto Alegre Model of Participatory Budgeting highlights how to lead transparent and effective resource allocation and to organise community participation in budgeting (Novy & Leubolt, 2005). Participatory Budgeting (PB) was a democratic method in which residents were compelled to participate in a portion of the local government budget. This concept is based on three key principles: decentralisation of decision-making, which allows residents to voice their opinions and prioritise public expenditure projects within their local government; and transparency, which ensures that residents are aware of the decisions made by their local government. This approach ensured that local government spending prioritised community interests (Wampler, 2012). The inclusive and equitable nature of the PB process was made clear to community members, encouraging participation from less privileged communities. Furthermore, the number of active local associations has increased dramatically, particularly in marginalised communities (Baiocchi, 2001).

Transparency and public monitoring were applied to all community participation and budget allocations, increasing accountability and minimising corruption. By 1999, about 40,000 community members had participated in the PB process, demonstrating an increase in public trust (Souza, 2001). The PB process contributed to the advancement of infrastructure and services. Between 1989 and 1995, almost 50 schools were erected, clean water was provided, and the sewage system was expanded (Wainwright, 2003). The expanding global influence of Porto Alegre's PB procedures led to the adoption of a similar approach by more than 2,700 towns worldwide (Wampler, 2012).

It is essential to address specific challenges, such as the lack of technical skills among residents and government officials. According to Heller (2001), the city administration of Porto Alegre tackled the lack of technical skills and competence among council members by implementing intensive educational initiatives and assigning council members to oversee financial matters. These initiatives achieved significant success and demonstrated strong potential for further growth and improvement. Following initial discussions, participants in some Brazilian cities governed by the PT (Workers' Party) generated extensive lists of investment demands that exceeded available funds, thereby undermining the success of participatory budgeting (Fung & Wright, 2003). Osamani (2008) claimed that in Brazil, local-level participatory planning is often accompanied by participatory budgeting, as exemplified by the Porto Alegre case.

The Porto Alegre administration successfully established an alternative political alliance, rather than competing on traditional grounds where favour-trading and pork-barrel politics attract support. Using participatory decision-making in Porto Alegre as a political tool for the government, rather than as a "burden to be overcome", the city was spared this fate (Fung & Wright, 2003). Gaventa (2004) further noted that these innovations not only emphasised community participation with local governments in planning, but also empowered

citizen representatives to hold the government accountable for properly carrying out its functions. Fung and Wright (2003) asserted that considered solutions or decision-making occur when participants listen to one another's views and generate group preferences after long deliberations. When transparency is lacking, community participation becomes uninformed and struggles to make an impact. Engaging openly with the community is essential for effective collaboration and informed decision-making (Sain & Soni, 2025). The ward committee should use the local government tools to advance community participation and to hold the government accountable.

2.6.3.3 Kerala, India's Case of the People Plan Campaign (PPC) in 1996

Kerala, in Southern India, is well known for its successful demonstration of participatory democracy, which began in 1996 with the People Plan Campaign (PPC). The PPC aimed to decentralise governance by allocating approximately 35%-40% of the government's development budget to community structures, enabling community members to participate directly in planning and decision-making. Gramme Sabhas (village assemblies) provide spaces where regular community members can discuss local issues, prioritise community needs, and propose development projects. This approach significantly increases community participation (Isaac & Heller, 2003). Kerala's success with participatory democracy can be attributed to its historical context of strong movements, a high literacy rate, and a tradition of collective action, all of which created a climate conducive to democratic decentralisation (Heller, Harilal & Chaudhuri, 2007).

The Kerala example cited in the previous paragraph demonstrates how participatory democracy can deliver fair and inclusive development outcomes. The PCC produces results in programmes that prioritise social justice, such as improvements in health, education, and infrastructure for ordinary people (John & Chathukulum, 2002). Kerala's model shows that state-led projects, when combined with empowered community participation, can challenge

old bureaucratic bodies and promote openness and accountability in democratic governance (Williams, 2008). Furthermore, the participatory model in Kerala, which caters for decentralisation, might be built on the current political entities to increase both efficiency and social equality (John & Chathukulum, 2002). The Kerala case can serve as a global reference for participatory governance. It shows how decentralised government can be effectively combined with community-led mobilising to produce transformative development outcomes.

2.6.4 South Africa's Relevance to the EPG

The application of the EPG in this research in Umbumbulu, the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, is guided by the institutional design of the ward committee. The study investigates whether ward committee operations are an empowered space for participation or merely symbolic structures with a limited role to play, and whether barriers prevent citizens from participating in public affairs. The ward committee encourages deliberation and inclusivity on public forums. When employing the EPG in this research, it does not just consider the barriers to effective community participation when participatory government ideas are appropriately applied.

The EPG also contributes to a more comprehensive knowledge of how participatory applications might be strengthened to promote accountability, inclusivity, and development in rural areas. According to Gaventa and Valderrama (1999), scaling up participation necessarily leads those involved in development projects and programmes to engage with the state and broader issues of governance, representation, transparency, and accountability. Therefore, Narsiah (2019) emphasises that governance procedures risk perpetuating socioeconomic and spatial disparities rather than resolving them in the absence of authentic and empowered community participation. When participation in development projects expands beyond the local or community level, participation by state organs becomes inevitable. Additionally, when there is no representation, the goal of participatory development, which incorporates inclusion

and empowerment, can be undermined (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007). The EPG concept of empowerment states that participation should not be symbolic and must have the capacity to influence the distribution of resources. The EPG ideas concern ward committee structures and whether they serve the objective of promoting democratic governance.

Ward committees were established under the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 to promote participatory democracy and inclusivity, as mentioned earlier. According to Fung (2004), minority voices are often silenced by those who are more educated, more confident, or more favoured. The EPG ensures that all citizens have a voice in decision making, regardless of their background. Section 195(1)(e) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) states that the people's needs must be addressed, and that the public must be encouraged to participate in policymaking. The involvement of ordinary citizens and government officials, guided by the legislature, is necessary for ensuring effective outcomes. Heller (2001) noted that South Africa's constitution and government policy promote local democracy through community participation and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups. According to Parnell & Pieterse (2013), the simplicity with which people can participate at the local level adds value to local democracy. The South African government has established policies that promote participatory government. Gaventa (2004) argued that while the legislature is a critical element of participatory democracy, it is not sufficient on its own. The legal framework needs strong, well-capacitated structures to implement and guide citizens' democracy.

The legal framework requires strategic plans to be effective, and government officials and politicians must work to ensure they are. According to Sain and Soni (2025), a functional democracy needs an informed citizenry and empowered media, popular participation in policymaking, a responsive state, and governing processes that are open, transparent, and inclusive to all legitimate interests. According to Parnell and Pieterse (2013), openness should be one of the key values of municipal government. In this regard, the benefit of openness does

not necessitate or presuppose large-scale, continual direct engagement. This is crucial for evaluating the effectiveness of the ward committee in promoting democratic practices and improving governance outcomes at the local level. Community participation is the foundation of good governance and includes working together with structures such as government-established ward committees. Ward committees and local government are supposed to be at the foundation level of policy formulation, priorities, and strategies that local government advances. Section 72(3) of the Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998) stipulates that ward committees intensify participatory democracy in local municipalities. Furthermore, the entire citizenship must achieve political, civic, and social rights, which in turn may be gained through participatory processes and struggles (Gaventa, 2006). People will gain knowledge on how to use their rights, advance their views, and empower their communities.

The EPG theory aligns with efforts to empower disadvantaged groups, as evidenced by South Africa's focus on promoting local democracy and citizen participation. Parnell and Pieterse (2013) state that a democratic system does not demand universal involvement; rather, its defining quality is its openness to all. The EPG addresses the South African context in the Constitution of 1996, and the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 is the associated legislation that recognises the necessity for participatory democracy at the ward level, for example, in eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The ward committees were founded to encourage community participation and serve as real examples of how EPG ideas might be applied in rural administration. Moreover, the role of local government fosters grassroots democracy, empowering citizens, communities, and organisations, thereby enabling Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to participate equally in local governance and development (Popoola, 2008, cited in Muse & Narsiah, 2015).

Good governance is a fundamental principle that a government should follow to

achieve objectives, for example, maintaining South Africa, protecting its land, and developing its economy (JICA, 2008, cited in Zondo, 2022). Given the historical context of apartheid and the ongoing inequalities, the EPG provides a framework for addressing past injustices and empowering marginalised communities through ward committees. Narsiah (2011) advocates establishing alternative participatory spaces that allow communities to express their concerns outside formal state structures, especially when official participation mechanisms are ineffective or exclusionary.

Developing the country requires all stakeholders; the government must lead, and ward committee structures must be at the forefront at the ground level to facilitate the local government's strategic plans. Parnell and Pieterse (2013) point out that the most important aspect of excellent governance is that the system is open, has few barriers to the expression of criticism, and limits the disadvantages faced by those who are badly organised and resourced. The ward committee and local government must always strengthen the relationships between the government and the community through community participation. Active participation in planning and delivering services is crucial to unleashing the full potential of communities' social capital.

The strategy of community participation aims to empower ordinary citizens by providing them with a platform to voice their ideas. However, in certain municipalities, ward committees are perceived as extensions of the ruling party rather than independent entities (South African Cities Networks, 2022). It is crucial to emphasise that ward committee members are mandated to represent community interests, irrespective of their political affiliations (Western Cape Department of Provincial and Local Government, 2005). Collective organisations and pressure groups can significantly amplify people's influence compared to the conventional voting process, as witnessed in the civics movement in South Africa during the 1980s. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that ward committee members often align with the

political party of their ward councillors, underscoring the challenge of preventing political influence from interfering with their work.

The imbalance between leadership competence and opportunities for community participation is a critical consideration for effective local governance (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013). When ward committees fail to represent community interests, they lose effectiveness and accountability, undermining the principles of participatory democracy. According to Modise (2017), a major obstacle to participatory democracy in South Africa in the post-apartheid era is citizens' inadequate understanding of how politics operates, both domestically and globally. Participatory democracy remains a major challenge in democratic South Africa, as demonstrated by the marches and protests against service delivery (Modise, 2017).

Participating in local government is structured to uphold the values of good governance and human rights (South African Local Government Association National Conference, 2016). Improving relationships between citizens and their government requires simultaneous attention to state responsiveness and effectiveness, citizen empowerment, and the accountability of elected officials and council members (Sain & Soni, 2025). Enhancing monitoring and verification not only boosts participation but also supercharges efficiency (Osamani, 2008). However, the right to participate is not limited to the context of development (Sen, 1999, cited in Osamani, 2008) and can also equip participants with different skills, such as communication skills.

Poor community participation remains an ongoing challenge, as many community members are unaware of ward committee activities or feel excluded from decision-making processes. A study of the Mangaung and Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipalities found that ward committees were typically extensions of political parties rather than impartial platforms for citizen engagement (Buccus et al., 2007). This breeds distrust and undermines the participatory mechanisms the EPG envisioned. When properly supported, ward committees

can become laboratories of participatory democracy, improve service delivery, and encourage accountability. Ward committees contribute to the realisation of the goals of the South African Constitution and the White Paper on Local Government (1998), which promote developmental local government by empowering local members and encouraging inclusivity.

Ward committees can be transformed from symbols of participation into structures that promote democratic governance in South Africa when they implement the EPG values. Despite challenges, ward committees remain the mechanism for promoting people-centred governance in South Africa. Strengthening ward committees to align with EPG principles requires capacity building, greater transparency, and institutional reforms to ensure they have genuine decision-making power. Local governments should create space for government officials, experts, and citizens to exchange ideas, while emphasising the EPG's participatory spirit. The community perspective, as citizens become “representatives” in deliberations with local forms, attention should be paid to developing leadership capacities, such as knowledge of legal rights, procedures, roles, and responsibilities in the new environment (Gaventa, 2004). Organised civic activity can have a tangible impact on local government performance and the quality and responsiveness of public services by advocating responsiveness to social and economic needs (Sain & Soni, 2008).

The EPG theory offers practical guidance on implementing participatory governance structures, such as ward committees. Community participation is crucial to achieving common objectives that benefit society. Fung and Wright (2003) emphasise the importance of community participation, consideration, and authority, while acknowledging the limitations of knowledge and feasibility. Ensuring effective community participation, the South African Local Government Association National Conference (2016) suggested that participatory municipal governments should provide appropriate tools for individuals, interest groups, and community members. Local government strategic plans must be inclusive of all members of

the community. Accountability is crucial; without it, those in power can ignore the people's will (Sain & Soni, 2025). The principles of transparency, accountability, and citizen empowerment are fundamental to realising the goals of EPG and advancing good governance practices. Despite the potential challenges associated with establishing participatory decision-making procedures, such as political and practical costs, governments should prioritise investment in fostering community participation in development and service delivery. In this way, governments can leverage communities' social capital to promote more effective and representative local governance.

This approach may involve mechanisms such as town hall meetings, community surveys, and consultations to ensure that the diverse voices within a community are heard and considered in decision-making processes. These inclusive approaches can lead to better alignment between government policies and the needs of the communities they serve, ultimately contributing to more sustainable and equitable development outcomes. Global perspectives on EPG provide valuable insights for improving the effectiveness of South Africa's ward committees in leading community participation. For example, in places such as Porto Alegre, Brazil, committees led participatory budgeting, which proved successful. The case of Kerala, India, discussed earlier in this chapter, demonstrated how decentralised institutions successfully led residents in their decision-making, thus ensuring that community needs were prioritised through structured and inclusive forums.

2.6.5 Application of EPG to Umbumbulu

The EPG framework provides an essential lens for assessing the functionality, inclusivity, and effectiveness of the Umbumbulu ward committee in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Guided by this framework, it is possible to critically examine whether the ward committee in Umbumbulu serves as a democratic platform for community views, whether the community has limited power, and

whether it suffers as a result of political and bureaucratic inertia, which reduces it to an administrative instrument without real influence.

The principles of EPG include practical problem-solving, inclusive community participation, and deliberative accountability (Fung & Wright, 2003). These concepts align with the goal of the Umbumbulu ward committees, which were established to provide a platform for the community to prioritise their needs and collaborate on local government development concerns. Ward committees implement the EPG's vision of citizens as co-governors, rather than passive users of services, by incorporating community priorities into local government decision-making. In Umbumbulu, where poor service delivery reflects broader institutional inefficiencies, Woldemariam and Narsiah (2014) note that disparities in water availability are strongly associated with governance and infrastructure constraints.

Decentralisation is central to EPG, as it empowers individuals affected by policies to influence decision-making, foster greater accountability, and create a more inclusive governance system. The ward committees in Umbumbulu support the view that working with EPG aligns with a practical problem-solving strategy that prioritises citizen-led decision-making based on lived experience. However, implementing EPG in the Umbumbulu ward committee faces challenges. These challenges undermine EPG's values, including political interference and inadequate resources and training for committee members (Dube & Moyo, 2018). These obstacles stem from the ward committee's poor performance. According to Gaventa (2006), participatory tools only work when institutional authority supports them and when there is a mechanism for accountability and transparency. The lack of these participatory tools weakens rural areas in municipalities such as Umbumbulu.

2.6.6 Conclusion

This chapter's literature review and theoretical framework emphasise the value of community participation in promoting efficient local government, particularly through ward

committees. The Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) framework provides a strong theoretical basis for analysing how ward committees in rural areas such as Umbumbulu may support inclusive and democratic decision-making. By engaging regularly with the appropriate government officials, the ward committee can ensure that community voices are heard and that local development reflects the needs and goals of the people. However, obstacles such as a lack of technical expertise, political meddling, and resource constraints limit the ward committee's ability to reach its full potential. These obstacles must be removed, and the capacity of residents and government officials to work together to enhance local communities must be strengthened.

Systems of community participation, such as the Porto Alegre participatory budgeting model, can teach us much about improving inclusivity, accountability, and openness in local government. In summary, the ability of ward committees to promote community participation depends on the effective implementation of participatory government strategies. To achieve this, the community and the government must be committed to working together to overcome obstacles and create a local governance structure that is more accountable, democratic, and responsive. Strengthening ward committee institutions and empowering residents through EPG can lead to fair, just, and sustainable development outcomes, ultimately supporting local democracy in South Africa over the long term.

CHAPTER 3

STUDY AREA AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will clarify, explain, and provide insight into the role of the ward committee in promoting community participation in Umbumbulu in the eThekwini Metropolitan Area, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The research methodology provides guidelines for designing and conducting evidence-based studies using both qualitative and quantitative data (Battacharya & Acharyya, 2020). Research methodology is a systematic approach to solving a research problem and refers to the study of scientific research methods (Kothari, 2004). This study uses a qualitative approach that provides insight into epistemological issues and employs deliberate qualitative research methods (Battacharya & Acharyya, 2020). This section discusses the concepts, techniques, and tools at different stages of research. The section covers the different aspects of the qualitative research design, including the population, sampling and sampling methods, data collection methods, and the data analysis approach.

This chapter outlines the research approach employed in this study. It details the qualitative research design and the rationale for selecting the research methodology. This chapter describes the target population, sampling strategy, data collection tools, and methods used during data collection. It includes data analysis via thematic analysis. The chapter also addresses ethical issues that are transparent, credible, and replicable.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Umbumbulu, which is divided into two wards, 96 and 100, within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Umbumbulu is a deep rural area within eThekwini, which is primarily urban with a few rural

sections. The municipality comprises 111 wards, with Umbumbulu (wards 96 and 100) located in the south of eThekwini. Umbumbulu has a large population, making it challenging to communicate with everyone. According to the 2011 Census, Umbumbulu's population is 2,684. The population density is 113 per square kilometre (300 per square mile). The area is primarily rural, with dispersed homesteads, and the majority of the population is Black African (98.7%) (Stats SA, 2011).

The Umbumbulu is not isolated from other Black African communities in South Africa that confront issues such as poverty and unemployment. Umbumbulu experiences inadequate service delivery. The ward committees in both wards (96 and 100) were elected to serve the community, but they are struggling to do so. Most community members are unaware of their right to hold people in positions of power accountable to the community. Umbumbulu was chosen as the location for this research. Figure 1 shows the Umbumbulu rural area within the eThekwini Metropolitan. Figure 2: eThekwini Metropolitan in KwaZulu-Natal.

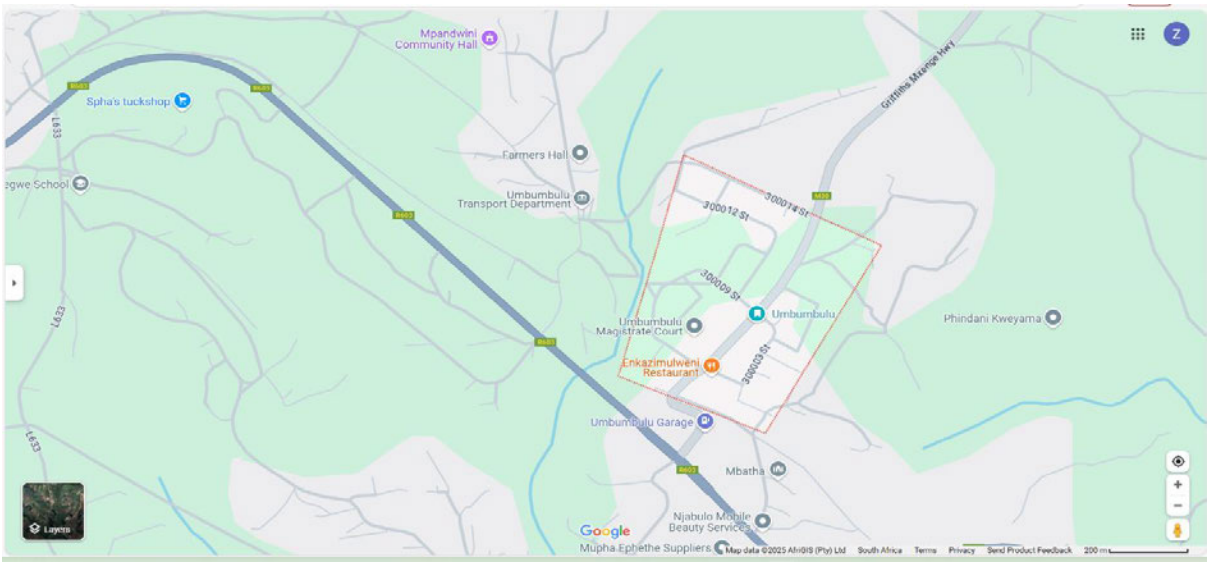


Figure 1. Umbumbulu (2025) Source: Google Map

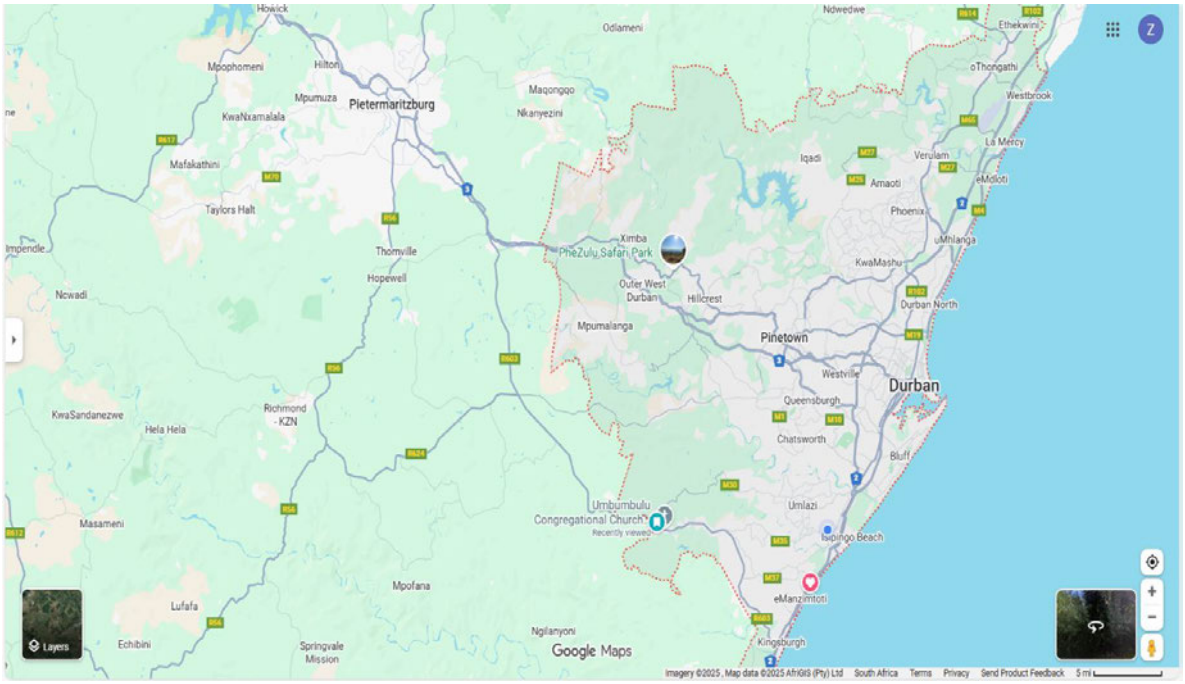


Figure 2. eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality (2025) Source: Google map

3.3 Research Methodology

According to Rajasekar, Pitcha, and Veerapadran (2006), research is the rational and systematic search for new and relevant information about a specific issue. It is the search for solutions to scientific and societal problems using objective and systematic methods (Goundar, 2012). Goundar also stated that it is a search for knowledge or the discovery of hidden facts. The purpose of this study was to collect information on the role of the ward committees in promoting community participation in Umbumbulu. To achieve this, a qualitative research design was used to collect data and answer the research questions.

3.4 Research Design

The significance of research design lies in its ability to help organise a study before data are collected. A research design is a comprehensive plan, structure, and strategy for conducting an inquiry to address research questions or problems (Kumar, 2011). For example, this study's primary concern is the role of the ward committee in advancing community participation in Umbumbulu. This study used a qualitative approach to data collection. According to du-Plooy-Cilliers, Davis, and Bezuidenhout (2014), qualitative research focuses on the dependent virtues of subjective information and the senses associated with factuality. Hammersley (2013) asserts that the goal of qualitative research is to improve self-understanding and gain insight into the human condition. According to Hammersley (2013), qualitative research focuses on improving knowledge of human behaviour and experience, with researchers attempting to understand and explain how individuals make sense of their lives. The benefit of adopting qualitative methods is that the study may collect a large amount of data from a large sample in a short period.

This research collected all relevant facts that supported the study's aim and objectives. This research methodology was chosen because it enabled the researcher to gain insight into the personal and subjective experiences of ward committee members in improving community

participation in Umbumbulu. The chosen approach is ideal for this study, as it allows the researcher to analyse and probe the complexity and procedures involved, and to explore the ward committee's activities in Umbumbulu through interviews. Furthermore, the study area included a wide range of stakeholders, from community members to the government. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to capture diverse viewpoints while recognising the underlying social and institutional factors that contributed to community participation. This research approach also promotes trust and involvement, which are essential for obtaining meaningful and authentic input in circumstances where community participation is sensitive or politicised. Finally, qualitative research provides the complexity and context needed to explain how participation works on the ground, making it best suited to the study's objectives.

3.5 Target Population

The group from which data are collected and conclusions drawn is known as the target population. According to Kremer (2016), a population is a collection of people who share one or more traits of interest to a researcher. In this case, the population comprises councillors, residents, community organisations, municipal official, and ward committee members from Umbumbulu (Wards 96 and 100). The residents and ward committee members, in the main, served as the study's sample from Umbumbulu.

3.6 Sampling Strategy

Sampling is the process of selecting a group of participants, objects, or items from a larger population for analysis or measurement (Kumar, 2013). The population of this study comprised residents and ward committee members of Umbumbulu. This study used non-probability sampling, a qualitative method employed when the entire population cannot be identified or when access to the rest of the population is difficult (Bhattacherjee, 2012). This technique was suitable for this study, given the difficulty of studying the entire population of Umbumbulu. Non-probability sampling was a useful and convenient method for selecting a

sample, given that it was appropriate and available (Showkat & Parveen, 2017).

3.6.1 Non-Probability Sampling

Non-probability sampling techniques were used in this project to examine community participation and governance in research settings, including the Umbumbulu ward committees. Non-probability sampling methods often prioritise the depth of information over statistical representativeness (Bhattacherjee, 2012). This study also focused on specific stakeholders (e.g., community leaders, ward committee members, and government officials) through purposive or judgemental sampling, yielding detailed, contextually rich data on community participation dynamics. Purposive sampling, which is used when a researcher cannot contact the entire population, was employed in this study.

The purposive sampling method is a technique for selecting a sample at the researcher's discretion, based on the nature of the study and the researcher's understanding of the target audience (du-Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Using this sampling technique, only those who met the final goal and research requirements were selected, while the others were excluded. The researcher successfully collected a variety of viewpoints and experiences regarding ward committees and community participation in Umbumbulu through purposive sampling. Members of the ward committee, Umbumbulu citizens, and government officials were among the categories that made up the targeted demographic group. The reason for using this sampling technique was that the researcher anticipated assessing the ward committee's contribution to community participation in Umbumbulu by observing interactions among the community, government officials, and ward committee members.

3.6.2 Sample Size

When conducting research, it is important to determine the sample size (Kumar, 2013). The sample size is the group of individuals selected from the public to represent the entire population, and information is collected from these segments of the populace (du-Plooy-

Cilliers, Davis, & Bezuidenhout, 2014). In this study, the researcher interviewed participants from four subgroups: three ward committee members from different wards, three municipal officials from the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality (including councillors), two members of community organisations, and two community members. The overall sample size is 10. Purposive sampling enables researchers to target specific persons, groups, or instances with distinctive features or experiences related to the research issue. This targeted approach ensures that the selected sample can provide useful insights into the phenomena under investigation.

3.7 Data Collection Methods

The data for this research were collected through semi-structured interviews. The researcher interviewed the identified sample from the community of Umbumbulu in both wards 96 and 100. The interviews were conducted between February and March 2025. The researcher obtained in-depth information from community members selected to participate in this research in Umbumbulu.

3.7.1 Interviews

In this study, we gathered valuable data using a well-designed interview schedule. An interview schedule is a set of structured questions that help the interviewer gather important information about a given topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The rationale for conducting interviews was to gain in-depth insights into participants' experiences, opinions, and attitudes. This strategy provided a more detailed understanding of the research issue than previous data collection methods. The questions were prepared in advance, allowing the researcher to steer the interview while remaining flexible.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews are exploratory and follow a roadmap that focuses on essential topics while allowing the interviewer to delve further (Magaldi and Berler, 2020, cited in Ruslin et al., 2022). This flexibility enabled the researcher to investigate participants' perspectives in

greater depth while ensuring that all major issues were covered. Showkat and Parveen (2017) also emphasised the importance of interviews for exploring the opinions, experiences, values, and other aspects of the population under study. During the semi-structured interviews, participants were encouraged to share detailed information about the topic under study, which helped the researcher obtain the necessary information for this research. According to Kabir (2016), the ultimate goal of data collection is to produce high-quality evidence that supports rich data analysis and enables the researcher to provide a convincing and credible answer to the research questions.

In this research, an interview guide (Appendices A & B) was used to collect information aligned with the research goal. The aim was to safeguard the respect and authenticity of the participants' voices; all interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recording device with the interviewees' consent. This approach enabled the researcher to ask questions and actively participate in conversations while recording the discussion for later transcription and analysis. Audio recording increased the study's trustworthiness by ensuring that the data were captured in their original form for full thematic analysis. The participants agreed with the researcher's explanation of the recordings' value. In the study, the researcher was able to direct the participants and restate the question during the interview. All participants in the research were interviewed at both councillors' offices in Umbumbulu, Wards 96 and 100, without interruption.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial process that transforms raw data into meaningful insights that can be interpreted qualitatively or quantitatively (Dibekulu, 2020). The researcher collected and analysed the data, ensuring that the analysis was suitable for the study (Dubey & Kothari, 2022).

3.8.1 Thematic Analysis

This researcher utilised thematic analysis to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to organising and categorising themes in a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This method is accessible, flexible, and ideal for new researchers, enabling them to translate data effectively (Caulfield, 2019). Additionally, thematic analysis is useful for identifying significant features in large datasets. It enables researchers to take a well-organised approach to managing the data, resulting in a well-defined final report (King, 2004, cited in Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The researcher interviewed the participants, recorded the interviews on a smartphone, and then transcribed them. The transcription took about a week. Interviews were conducted in isiZulu, and the researcher then translated them into English. The researcher followed the six steps of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2012). The first step was to read all transcripts and become familiar with the data. The second phase involved identifying key phrases and ideas and generating initial codes. The third phase involved grouping codes to identify potential themes. The fourth phase began with an evaluation of themes to ensure they were data-driven. The fifth phase, that is, establishing and naming themes, thoroughly explained and defined each theme while connecting them to the study question. The sixth phase was preparing the report, in which the researcher described each theme in detail and supported the findings with actual quotes from participants. This method enables researchers to identify, analyse systematically, and report trends in qualitative data.

3.8.1.1 Familiarisation

The researcher read and reread the transcripts to become familiar with the content. The researcher paid close attention to the interviewer's expressions, opinions, and experiences regarding community participation. The researcher then recorded the important information and marked key points. These steps were important for interpreting the overall data and

identifying the key areas the research focused on.

3.8.1.2 Coding Process

Coding is the analytical process of assigning codes to non-numeric data. Coding language data is a technique utilised in various research methods (Steinfeld & Lev-on, 2014). Codes serve as the essential foundation for any analysis, acting as the key components that unlock deeper insights and understanding. Braun and Clarke (2012) give an example of analysing a brick-built house with a tile roof. The themes are the walls and roof, while the codes are the individual bricks and tiles. Codes identify and label properties of the data that may be important to the research question. The researcher assigned codes to the text that conveyed particular meanings using the coding technique. The researcher utilised both deductive and inductive coding frameworks. When using deductive coding, the researcher began by creating codes aligned with the study's goals. The researcher found texts that addressed topics such as "understanding community participation", "methods to encourage participation", "challenges", and "suggestions", for example.

These helped the researcher respond to the questions. When using inductive coding, the researcher found codes that emerged naturally from the data itself, rather than being pre-categorised. Through participant stories, the researcher was able to extract subtle and unexpected insights, including codes such as "lack of trust", "ineffective communication", and "political influence". To ensure that all pertinent textual portions were captured, the researcher coded as much of the data as possible. A few sections were incorporated into several codes. Once the entire dataset had been labelled, meanings were assigned. The researcher then looked for links and patterns among the codes. Codes with similar meanings were grouped under the larger themes. The researcher then organised the themes to address the study questions. After reflecting on the coded data, the researcher reviewed the themes to ensure accurate, coherent, and unique. The researcher named each theme in a way that encapsulated its essence.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

According to Webster's Dictionary, ethics is the practice of conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group. The Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) established a code of conduct that emphasises the pursuit of knowledge with honesty and integrity, the use of safe and responsible methods, justice and equity for all participants, and the search for truth. In this study, the researcher ensured that participants' identities remained confidential and that all contributors received the necessary protection, including the use of pseudonyms to maintain anonymity and prevent self-discrimination. Participants signed an informed consent form after being briefed on the study's purpose and their rights before the interviews. The applicable review board, the UKZN Research Information Gateway, granted the researcher ethical approval. The local government and the Umbumbulu community can benefit from this study by gaining a clearer understanding of the actions needed to engage the community and support policy development.

3.9.1 Rigour and Trustworthiness

The use of qualitative research played a crucial role in enhancing the study's quality, enriching it with detailed insights and a deeper understanding. Various studies examined the quality of qualitative research and how it should be assessed and measured. Trustworthiness refers to the quality of the project, the rigour of the technique, and whether readers of the study's findings believe its trustworthiness (Aguinaldo, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Leavy, 2017). This study used a variety of strategies to establish its trustworthiness. It assessed credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

3.9.1.1 Credibility

The study used member checking to ensure the credibility of its findings. It used a single data collection method: interviews. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant.

3.9.1.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which a study's findings can be applied to another setting. The ability to apply research findings in other contexts is known as transferability. In other words, transferability is a technique that extends study findings beyond your own data by making them applicable in another context. It concerns the extent to which outcomes from a single context can be transferred across contexts. Therefore, the more thorough your investigation, achieved through well-informed descriptions, the more robust your study can be (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Leavy, 2017). This study investigated the contexts, cultures, meanings, and intentions that influenced participants' perceptions and experiences of community participation within the Umbumbulu ward committee.

3.9.1.3 Dependability

The study adopted a rigorous, systematic approach to ensure the reliability of the investigation. This included securing accurate information through the research method. For example, the thematic analysis procedure, which explained how themes and subthemes were derived from transcripts, was rigorously documented. Furthermore, the dependability of the research findings was enhanced by ongoing training and direction from an experienced researcher throughout the study.

3.9.1.4 Confirmability

The study implemented procedures to ensure confirmability and to prevent research bias from affecting the results. Member checking, sometimes referred to as feedback, was one of the strategies used. Following data analysis in April 2025, the researcher gave the participants a preliminary presentation of the study's findings. After presenting the study's preliminary findings to the participants, the researcher waited for their comments. This study followed a method in which participants approved the research findings and conclusions that addressed their everyday challenges. The comments then demonstrated that the study

accurately reflected the participants' experiences. To ensure the findings are grounded in fact, the study used verbatim quotes from the data gathered during the research.

3.10 Reflexivity and Positionality

In this qualitative research study, the researcher must reflect on two concepts: reflexivity and positionality. Reflexivity concerns a researcher's self-awareness (Wilson, Jane & William, 2022). The researcher continually reflected on their background, ideas, and assumptions. This study aimed to understand the ward committee's functions in promoting community participation in Umbumbulu. Given the researcher's background in community activism, reflexivity was used throughout the study. The researcher was aware that previous experiences may have influenced their views of participants' attitudes towards their participation. Positionality refers to social and political identity in terms of one's place in the community; it can also refer to colour, gender, class, and education, as well as how these factors connect participants to the study framework (Wilson, Jane & William, 2022). Given the researcher's position as a community activist, this may have influenced respondents' reactions, as they knew the researcher. To address this, the researcher kept reflective notes and used participant validation to confirm their interpretation.

3.11 Contributions to the methodological literature

This work contributes to the methodological literature by emphasising the value of flexible, community-sensitive techniques in a study of community participation in Umbumbulu, a rural area. It identifies the hurdles to recruiting participants outside official frameworks and demonstrates how building trust through informal networks can improve data quality. The study also emphasises the need to use multilingual and culturally appropriate instruments in qualitative data collection. The study guides future researchers working in a similar setting by capturing respondents' experiences.

3.12 Conclusion

This study aims to understand the role of ward committees in encouraging community participation in Umbumbulu, a rural area with two wards within the eThekwini Municipality. To achieve this aim, the study adopted a qualitative research approach, which was considered suitable for this investigation. This chapter outlines the methodological approaches used to conduct the study. It examines the qualitative research approach, sample strategies, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. It also justifies the procedures used. Overall, the chapter provides a well-informed explanation of the study's methodology.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the study carried out in the Umbumbulu wards 96 and 100 of the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. The participants were two council members, one municipal official, three ward committee members, two community members, and two representatives of community organisations who participated in face-to-face interviews conducted by the researcher. The research methodology used in this study is described in detail in Chapter 3. The study examines how ward committees in Umbumbulu, namely in Wards 96 and 100 under the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, contributed to community participation. The objectives of the study were, first, to examine and understand community participation on the part of the ward committees of Umbumbulu; second, to investigate the methods used to promote community participation in the ward committees of Umbumbulu; third, to identify prospects and challenges in promoting community participation in the ward committees of Umbumbulu; and fourth, to provide suggestions to promote effective community participation in the ward committees of Umbumbulu.

Understanding the ward committee's function in promoting community participation in Umbumbulu is vital. It is crucial to examine the functions of ward committees in deep rural areas and not compare them with those in urban areas. Moreover, one needs to gain a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges that rural ward committees face in providing services in their areas. There should be more robust strategies and policy implementation to address the challenges that ward committees face in deep rural areas. This chapter outlines the study's results and findings. It describes the data gathered during the research process and provides an in-depth analysis of the data in relation to the research objectives. This study

employed a qualitative research design, with themes emerging throughout data processing. These are discussed and presented in this chapter, with direct quotes from the participants, as appropriate. This chapter also connects the findings of this research in Umbumbulu to the literature and the theoretical framework discussed earlier in this study. The goal is to interpret the data without providing a definitive conclusion, which will be presented in Chapter 5. This chapter discusses, inter alia, the participants' demographic features, the themes generated during the research, and the results. This chapter also discusses the research findings.

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Details of the study's participants, all interviewed in the Umbumbulu Wards 96 and 100 in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Umbumbulu in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality - Demographic Details of Participants in Ward Committees' Research (2025)

Participants	Code names	Gender	Ward	Age	Qualifications
1	Municipal Official	Male	100	53	Matriculation and Diploma
2	Councillor 1	Male	96	41	Matriculation and Diploma
3	Councillor 2	Male	100	45	Matriculation
4	Ward committee 1	Female	100	43	Grade 10
5	Ward Committee 2	Female	100	54	Grade 11
6	Ward Committee 3	Male	96	38	Grade 10
7	Community member 1	Female	96	58	Grade 9
8	Community member 2	Male	100	33	Matriculation
9	Community organisation representative 1	Female	100	58	Matriculation and Diploma
10	Community organisation representative 2	Female	96	48	Matriculation and Community Development worker certificate

4.3 Presentation of Results

Table 2 (below) presents the themes and subthemes that emerged from interviews with 10 respondents in March and April 2025 in the Umbumbulu wards 96 and 100 of the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality. This thematic analysis identifies the themes and subthemes that shaped the study's conclusions in relation to its goals.

Table 2. Data Generated Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Understanding Community Participation in the context of Umbumbulu	• Active involvement and contribution by the Umbumbulu community • Community influence in decision making through community participation
Challenges to Effective Participation in Umbumbulu	• Lack of responsiveness and action by the local government • Ward committees' erosion of trust by the community • Community Exclusion and disillusionment in decision making
Communication and Mobilisation Strategy in Umbumbulu	• Traditional and modern methods of communication and mobilisation • Communication challenges in the reach and effectiveness of the community
Challenges Affecting Effectiveness of Community Participation	• Perception of service delivery deficiencies • Issues of representation and bias by the ward committees in Umbumbulu. • Limitation in addressing community needs
Prospects and Opportunities for Strengthening Participation	• Potential of ward committees to be effective • Frameworks for improved coordination for the community and local government. • Capacity building and training of ward committees
Enhancing Communication and Engagement	• Regular and transparent communication amongst ward committees, local government, and the community • Inclusive planning for development and decision making
Improving Service Delivery	• Prompt and effective action in development activities • Strengthen community participation to focus on service delivery in Umbumbulu
Strengthening the Role and Functioning of Ward Committees in Umbumbulu	• Ensuring neutrality and accountability for the ward committee. • Capacity building and support for ward committees

4.4 Discussion of Results

Community participation should play a significant role in Umbumbulu, as involving the community in all processes can enhance transparency and expedite service delivery. The results indicated that participants held different views on community participation. Community participation requires that everyone, particularly the impoverished, take action to improve their daily lives. Residents can use community participation to strengthen collective agency. However, these engagements do not elevate the voices of marginalised people in decision-making, but they do provide opportunities for shared resources, skill development, and advocacy.

This section presents the outcomes in relation to the study's objectives. The first objective was to examine the Umbumbulu ward committee's understanding of community participation.

4.4.1 Understanding Community Participation in the context of Umbumbulu

The study examined how the Umbumbulu community understood their role in community participation. In many cases, the community did not understand participatory democracy; they maintained that those in authority should represent them appropriately. However, community members wanted those in positions of authority to address their concerns. It became difficult when the community's expectations were not met. According to Nyalunga (2021), participatory democracy requires a high level of community participation in the political process through multiple institutional channels. Community participation requires different role-players to be active. This means that the government, community members, community organisations, the councillors, and ward committees must work together using different forms of participation.

4.4.1.1 Active involvement and contribution by the community of Umbumbulu

Active engagement and contribution entail residents' significant and ongoing

participation in local government processes, rather than merely attending community meetings. The ward committee's mission is to foster active participation from community members in setting the community's priorities, influencing decision-making, and ensuring accountability. The participants' interview responses to this element of the research are highlighted below.

Community member 1:

> "Community participation means that the community actively leads and engages with government programmes designed to support their development. For example, if there is a hall construction project, the community should take responsibility for safeguarding and maintaining it, ensuring it remains in good condition" (Community member 1, personal communication, February 18, 2025)

Councillor 2 stated as follows:

> "Community participation is crucial; before the beginning of any initiative, one must understand the community's needs. Prioritising current problems and engaging with the community is essential to ensuring initiatives are effectively tailored to meet their needs. Even if service delivery occasionally takes longer than anticipated, it's crucial to let the community know about any issues that have occurred. I oversee a very large ward. Convening regular meetings and izimbizos makes one's job very simple. Meetings allow for the identification of community needs. Being truthful and transparent is also crucial; while the community always wants positive news, unpleasant news must be shared as well. The budget may not address numerous community concerns. One of the duties of a ward councillor is to explain the budgetary allocation and process. Members of the community will insult you as a councillor if the development fails to meet their expectations, which breeds mistrust." (Personal communication, March 10, 2025.)

The responses above indicate that both the councillor and the community member have a fundamental understanding of community participation. According to Arnstein (1969), citizen capacity empowers disadvantaged groups who are not part of political and economic processes to participate actively. The contribution of community members to decision-making is vital. The responses of the two participants above demonstrate that the community has an essential role to play. In fact, the community is the foundation of community participation. Councillor 2 suggested that the community's lack of participation in the processes for identifying their priorities, making decisions, and holding those responsible for decisions accountable could lead to isolation and distrust. The EPG model emphasises inclusion as a

guiding concept. Involving all stakeholders in decision-making can lead to more successful projects.

4.4.1.2 Community Influence in decision making through community participation

Community opinions and submissions influence decisions at the local government level. These include the IDP, budget allocations, and service delivery plans. The ward committees are designed to serve as advisory bodies with direct influence on municipal decision-making, as mentioned above. In addition, ward committees are expected to influence local government goals based on firsthand knowledge of community needs. The municipal community official (one of the respondents in this study) explained the process of community participation during the interview. Parnell & Pieterse (2013) contended that a particularly promising aspect of the IDP model is its aim to promote a future-oriented, problem-solving approach within local government and the citizenry.

Below are the responses of two participants who were interviewed.

> "Community participation is a procedure that guarantees that residents have a way to influence municipal policies and service delivery. The local government operates based on community participation. The legislature guides it through the Municipal Systems Act and Municipal Structures Act. Further, this legislation ensures that all decisions align with community needs. The process begins at the grassroots level, with regular public meetings that provide a forum for municipalities, councillors, and the community. In addition, there is the Community-Based Planning (CBP) process in which communities identify their needs and develop ideas that feed into the municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP). Working with mechanisms such as ward committees, which serve as a bridge between the municipality and the community, helps overcome the backbone of rapidly growing difficulties. Then there's the District Development Model (DDM), which is a strategy that integrates service delivery across all spheres of government, ensuring a coordinated response to community priorities" (Ward committee 1, personal communication, March.10. 2025)

In their response, Councillor 2 addressed this aspect of the interview as follows.

> "Community-Based Planning brings the community together, with about 3 weeks' advance notice, for a workshop where they discuss their issues and concerns, prioritise them, and then record them. The community's perspective is then included in the Metropolitan Municipality's five-year IDP, which is divided into phases that can be gazetted and implemented" (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The responses above provide clear evidence that defined, legislated methods for community participation must guide ward committees' decision-making when planning workshops. These workshops are designed to promote diversity and responsiveness. This procedure is not representative, but it does offer methodical avenues for influencing important municipal documents and service policies. Furthermore, focusing on the Community-Based Plan (CBP) as the foundation of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) promotes bottom-up governance, a better understanding of people's viewpoints, and support for policymaking. The interviews confirmed that all stakeholders, including community members, councillors, and municipal officials, were involved in the process that led to the formulation of the IDP.

4.4.2 Challenges to Effective Participation in Umbumbulu

Effective participation is the foundation of meaningful community participation, particularly for ward committees across local government, which face recurring issues that hinder communication between the community and local government. Some of the major challenges identified in this Umbumbulu study included the following aspects.

4.4.2.1 Lack of responsiveness and action by local government

The lack of responsiveness and action refers to the local government's inability to respond to a community's expressed sentiments. The councillors do not provide any feedback on local government plans. This undermines the goal of participatory governance, which is supposed to be influential rather than representative.

Two participants' responses are provided below.

> "I have been part of this community for over a decade and have always cared deeply about its development. However, it often feels as though our efforts are in vain because those responsible for supporting us are not doing enough" (Community member 2, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

Community member 1 stated:

> "There are many challenges, and people have lost trust in the local government. It takes a lot for us to believe in any new projects because of poor communication and a lack of follow-up. Even if a project could benefit us, there's hesitation because past experiences

have left us doubtful" (personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The information provided by the two participants in the quotations above shows that government leaders do not contact or update residents on the current progress of development in their areas or on new projects. There was a gap between government programmes and community expectations. Community participation was weakened, and the practices at the time of the interviews served to symbolically erase the objective of actual inclusion (Fung & Wright, 2003). Based on previous experiences of being ignored, the community views the eThekwini Municipality as untrustworthy and unaccountable. This kind of local leadership contradicts the EPG approach, which advocates allowing ordinary citizens to take part in government decision-making, a crucial step towards achieving good governance.

4.4.2.2 Ward committee erosion of trust by the community

The community lost hope and trust in the ward committee and the councillors' ability to address their concerns. This occurs when individuals believe their contributions are not respected. Their voices are neglected by the people they elected to authority and to serve them. Parnell and Pieterse (2013) stated that the simplicity with which people can participate at the local level adds value to local government.

Two participants' responses are given below to highlight this problem.

> "The ward committees claimed they would report our concerns and issues, but nothing is ever resolved. I doubt the ward committees even bother to report anything. It seems they pretend to listen to us. Many people here have lost hope in the local government and its advisory bodies. They have promised change, but there is little to show for it. Even when projects are introduced, there is no proper communication, and most fail due to poor planning or a lack of commitment. Trust is hard to rebuild after so many broken promises" (Community member 2, personal communication, March 10, 2025).

On the other hand, the Community Organisation Representative 2 stated:

> "One of the major challenges we face is the slow response from the government. This delay often frustrates community members, who feel their needs are not being addressed promptly. The consultation process that the ward committees facilitated, such as the IDP, is merely procedural; it's a symbolic participation. The local government official has already made the decision." (personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The information presented above revealed that residents believed their representatives were not fulfilling their responsibilities and were not campaigning for what they expected. The spirit of citizenship was breached, and the constitutional protections were essentially hollowed out (Good Governance Learning Network, 2011). The respondents believed their voices were ignored, which led to their alienation. There were no effective follow-up arrangements, and the lack of proper communication resulted in a narrative of unrealistic expectations (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013). Openness should be one of the key values of local government, as its benefits do not require large-scale, continual, direct participation. Transparency allows governance to give feedback; citizens receive information promptly. Moreover, there is no hidden agenda, and transparency minimises corruption.

4.4.2.3 Community exclusion and disillusionment in decision making

The community believed that the local government and ward committees intentionally excluded them. Sidelining the community meant there was no accountability, and their participation in local government did not favour their interests in decision-making processes. The local government system discouraged the community, which had lost faith in the efficacy and fairness of participatory mechanisms such as ward committees.

Two participants responded as follows:

> "I attended the meetings, but they only happen once a year. We cannot plan for a year and only meet once; there is no community participation. We have so many challenges, and it is hard to believe they even bother to address them. It feels like a waste of time." (Community member 2, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The Community Organisation Representative 1 contended:

> "The ward committees are supposed to be actively involved in the community at all times. However, this is not the case; they are often visible only when a project is in progress. As an organisation, we actively seek them out and request their intervention when necessary. Unfortunately, they are not consistently present to address everyday challenges affecting the community. (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The information above shows that the community regarded their deliberate marginalisation as intentional exclusion. These immoral actions caused representatives to lose sight of the people on the ground, and participatory democracy vanished (Modise, 2017). The local government and ward committees in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality operated without transparency and accountability. Moreover, the annual meetings were considered cosmetic rather than substantive. These meetings failed to provide adequate opportunities for ongoing debate and engagement. The ward committee, which is supposed to bridge the gap between the community and the government, was failing, contributing to the Umbumbulu community's alienation.

In this next section, the research focuses on the methods used to promote community participation in the Umbumbulu ward committee.

4.4.3 Communication and Mobilisation Strategy in Umbumbulu

Community participation requires a mobilisation plan that enables participatory governance to be active and invites every member of the community to meetings, izimbizo, and the election of community structures. These initiatives are intended to foster awareness, engagement, and proactive community members in municipal processes by ensuring clear communication and effective mobilisation strategies. Ward committees have a responsibility to ensure that the community and the council communicate more effectively (Van Rooyen & Mokoena, cited in Sekgala, 2016).

4.4.3.1 Traditional and modern methods of communication and mobilisation

The technique for mobilising community participation varies by area. In urban areas, the population is dense, and communication is easy, making it straightforward to reach many people. However, in rural areas, people are scattered, and wards are vast, so communication takes longer to reach everyone. Traditional methods of communication are also appropriate in

rural areas, given the nature of the target audience. Given that not everyone in rural areas has access to current technologies, traditional techniques provide information to people of all generations. Umbumbulu's community can use both traditional and modern strategies to mobilise community gatherings. Modern technology is further utilised to mobilise the community, especially young people, through social media and digital tools, and to reach large populations quickly. Although this technology is employed in metropolitan areas, it complements traditional approaches and improves communication.

The participants' interview responses were as follows:

> "The ward committees use various methods to ensure people attend community meetings. They use social media, including WhatsApp community groups, to facilitate information flow. Community members report their challenges, enabling ward committees to address them and communicate with the community. Ward committees also pass messages through schools, using children to communicate with their parents. Organising people in a large, rural area like ours is difficult, and information doesn't always reach everyone as intended. The municipality also uses loudhailers to spread messages." (Community member 1, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

Another interviewee, namely, Ward Committee 3, responded as follows:

> "We use a range of techniques, including traditional methods such as loud-hailing and door-to-door communication. We also use social media across different platforms, and the message can reach everyone. We know that it is hard to mobilise people in our ward, since it is vast. We have to use different strategies to achieve successful community participation." (personal communication, February. 18. 2025).

The responses from the community member and the ward committee member above demonstrate that both wards employ two distinct mobilisation strategies: traditional and modern. The ward committee distributed messages through schools, a traditional method of communicating with the community. Most importantly, communication takes various forms, each with its own strengths and limitations (Swargiary, 2024). Social media reaches a large number of community members quickly; however, both traditional and modern strategies complement one another, particularly in rural communities. However, these tactics did not improve community participation in Umbumbulu. In short, it is beneficial for the eThekwini

Metropolitan Municipality to enhance communication, support ward committees and council members with training, provide administrative assistance, and engage with residents in public consultation about the IDP, budget, by-laws, and service agreements (Piper, 2009). Effective communication will enhance meaningful participation. Poor communication perpetuates exclusion, deliberately silencing the voices of the masses.

4.4.3.2 Communication challenges in reach and effectiveness

Despite the use of both traditional and modern communication and mobilisation tactics, the dilemma of ineffective local government persists, given its challenges in reaching all citizens. The Umbumbulu ward is large, and some parts were not covered, resulting in inefficient community participation.

Two participants responded to the challenges in reach and effectiveness as follows:

> "The methods used to communicate with the community are ineffective. Ward committees rely on social media, yet many people lack access to data. The ward committee tries to use schools, but this is unreliable because messages do not always reach everyone. Loud-hailing sometimes works, but it is inconsistent. In a large, rural area like ours, many people remain uninformed and excluded." (Community member, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The second respondent, Ward Committee 2, reported as follows:

> "Our methods cannot reach all the people in the community because of the vast size of our ward. However, community mobilisation strategies need to be intensified, and we need to find new ways to assist this. We do not have enough resources to cater for our ward. The only technique we rely on is loud-hailing, which is done together with the municipality." (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The information provided by the two respondents above provided a clear understanding of the challenges associated with the community's reach and the efficacy of its mobilisation techniques. The community member and the ward committee member accepted the methodologies utilised but highlighted their limitations, given that the vast majority of the ward is rural. The ward committee member also agreed with the community member and suggested strengthening the mobilisation techniques. This indicates that the target population was not being reached, as expected. Amin (2022) emphasised that, since several facets of

society are involved in the growth process, communication is essential. Most importantly, communication takes various forms, each with its own strengths and limitations (Swargiary, 2024).

Effective communication requires a strategic plan to support the development process. In this regard, understanding mass media is important for selecting an appropriate medium to convey a message. Also, given that this study is in rural areas where the ward is vast, it is very important to choose communication strategies that suit the ward's characteristics. The next section focuses on identifying the prospects and challenges for promoting community participation in Umbumbulu's ward committees.

4.4.4 Challenges Affecting Effective Participation in Umbumbulu

Challenges to community participation include political, social, and economic factors. The ward committees' aim of eliminating the gap between communities and local government is significant, given the obstacles to effective community participation. These challenges influence the quality, depth, and diversity of community participation in governance processes.

4.4.4.1 Perception of service delivery deficiencies

Service delivery is a sensitive issue in selected South African communities, and the inadequacy of service delivery in Umbumbulu is attributed to the lack of effective community participation. Moreover, the ward committees do not serve the entire community. Residents felt neglected in service delivery matters and that their concerns regarding development were not taken into consideration. A factor in this regard was the lack of feedback from the local government, and even the councillors had no response to their concerns.

The participants' responses were best captured in the following statements.

> "It is crucial that the (local) government provide regular feedback to the community on their concerns. Empty promises should be avoided, and service delivery should remain the central focus to maintain trust and strengthen community development. We lack proper infrastructure. Our ward is vast, and we travel long distances to access services. We have been reporting this for years, with no response. We understand that the provincial government provides certain services and that the councillor is a member of

> the municipality. However, these spheres of government should find ways to work together and assist us as the community." (Community Representative 1, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The second respondent, Community Representative 2, stated the following:

> "The planning process must be fair and transparent, and the community's views must be taken seriously. Community participation should not be a mere formality on paper; it must be actively implemented in decision-making. Citizens are tired of unrendered services, such as gravel roads, poor service at clinics, and non-working street lights. Yes, we are in rural areas, and the houses are far apart. If we travel at night, we are in danger because of the darkness. Maybe we need to mobilise ourselves and protest for services." (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The information provided above demonstrates that the ward committees ignored and excluded community members in service delivery. The lack of participation affected service delivery and resulted in wasted expenditure. According to Modise (2017), the rise in service-delivery protests and marches indicates that participatory democracy poses a significant challenge in democratic South Africa. The need to improve transparency and inclusiveness requires clear communication and thoughtful planning.

The community perspective must be heard and taken seriously. According to Fung and Wright (2003), citizens' active participation in EPG enables them to voice their concerns at the local government level, where their opinions are not only heard but also taken into account. Valderrama and Gaventa (1999) contend that scaling up participation necessarily leads those involved in development projects and programmes to engage with the state and with broader issues of governance, representation, transparency, and accountability. Applying EPG values in service delivery allows citizens to influence planning and prioritisation.

4.4.4.2 Issues of representation and bias by ward committees in Umbumbulu

There are concerns among community members that ward committees serve the interests of those close to, or politically aligned with, the governing parties in their wards, thereby hindering service delivery. There are also concerns that even political parties influence ward committee elections. Councillors have considerable influence over the election of ward

committees. In this regard, two interviewees reported as follows:

> "Political bias undermines the functioning of the ward committees. Instead of working for the community's benefit, some members favour their political party's interests. This damages the ward committee's role, leading to biased decision-making rather than fair and inclusive governance. The councillor was at the forefront during the ward committee elections, lobbying community members to vote for his party's candidates. These ward committee members focused on the issues of their fellow party members." (Community Organisation Representative 2, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The second respondent, Community member 2, stated the following:

> "Ward committee members are supposed to be independent and serve all of us, not just their political allies. However, there are times when it seems to prioritise those who support the ruling party. This favouritism undermines the very purpose of having community representatives. The ward committees are biased; party volunteers are the first to receive services. We need to put an end to this! We have the power, but we are not united as a community." (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The information provided demonstrates that political parties and local councillors influenced the election of ward committees, calling into question their validity as committees intended to represent the community rather than political parties. This effectively undermined democratic accountability and inclusive governance. According to Thabanchu (2007), there is evidence that ward committee members frequently support the same political party as their ward councillor, and it is difficult to prevent party politics from interfering with the ward committee's work. The ward committees then serve their parties and ensure that the party's interests take precedence over those of the community. Political favouritism inhibits participation among non-members of the party to which the ward committee is linked. The principles of EPG include practical problem-solving, inclusive community participation, and deliberative accountability (Fung & Wright, 2003). The platform will thereby be exclusive rather than inclusive, contradicting the principles of participatory governance.

4.4.4.3 Limitation in addressing community needs

There were limitations in addressing community participation in Umbumbulu. The ward committees had limited resources and could not cover the entire ward due to its

demographic distribution and vast extent, hindering effective communication with the community. The ward committees lacked the skills needed to address technical issues, such as municipal budgeting. The ward committees had no strategy to address these limitations. Fung and Wright (2003) emphasised that participatory bodies cannot be effective without adequate institutional support and capacity-building measures.

Two participants who responded to this aspect stated the following:

> "Ward committee members are working hard to resolve their ward's challenges. A key challenge is holding meetings that do not include everyone, given our ward's vast size. We are urging the municipality to improve service delivery timeframes, as this is a major concern. There is also a crime challenge; the stock of projects is stolen, which affects growth. We have limited resources to cover our ward, and while every area is represented on the ward committees, we are straining to work across the ward with minimal resources." (Ward committee 2, personal communication, March 10, 2025)

Councillor 2 reported as follows:

> *"*One of the biggest challenges in local governance is clarifying the boundaries between different spheres of government. Many residents believe that the councillor has authority over all government services, but that is not the case. Some issues, such as police stations and clinics, fall under the provincial or national government. In our area, for example, several roads are owned by the provincial government. This means we must escalate these issues and wait for a response. The same applies to policing and healthcare; while we advocate for better services, the final decisions on these matters are made at higher levels. Our role as councillors is to facilitate communication and ensure that the community's concerns reach the relevant authorities. (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The Umbumbulu study suggested that a lack of resources was a significant hindrance to meeting the community's expectations. The ward committees are often poorly resourced and may therefore not meet residents' expectations (Silima & Auriacombe, 2013). Although the ward committees promote community participation, they lack the means or skills to meet the community's expectations, thereby undermining their functions. The results showed that the councillor did nothing to help overcome the impediments faced by the ward committees. The councillor did nothing to educate the people about the spheres of government or to invite government officials to do so. In fact, the councillor did not assist the ward committees in overcoming their limitations. The challenge facing the ward committee was that it had no

significant influence on the council's decisions (Smith, cited in Silima & Auriacombe, 2013).

4.4.5 Prospects and Opportunities for Strengthening Participation

The prospects for strengthening participation in the eThekwini Metropolitan area are for Umbumbulu community members working together with ward committees, councillors, and the local government. These stakeholders need to create opportunities that enhance and strengthen community participation in Umbumbulu. According to Modise (2017), addressing challenges and strengthening community participation requires an integrated strategy that includes capacity building and institutional strengthening of ward committees. This improves decision-making centred on enhanced community participation. There were opportunities to educate and provide training to assist the community with the issues that affected them most.

4.4.5.1 Potential of ward committees to be effective

Ward committees have significant potential to bridge the gap between communities and local government. Ward committees are mainly representative organisations that monitor functions, and their overall aims are to enhance the economic empowerment of communities; improve infrastructure and services in the community; enhance local democracy and accountability; and enhance social cohesion, nation-building, and integration of communities across class, race, culture, and religion (Silima & Auriacombe, 2013). Empowering residents to engage in decisions that impact their lives, ward committees, supported by organised assistance, function as effective mechanisms for fostering community participation, promoting participatory development, and ensuring transparent governance.

Two of the participants responded as follows to this aspect of the research:

The first of them stated that the:

> "Ward committees have invested a lot of effort into enforcing community participation by mobilising the community to attend Community-Based Planning, which aims to prioritise residents' issues, and this is the backbone of building the Integrated Development Plan" (Ward committee 3, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

On the other hand, Councillor 1 stated that.

> "There are izimbizos, and CBP is the foundation of the IDP. The community leads this process, and it starts here before anything else. The IDP is guided by the information the community has prioritised, and it will also be based on the budget." (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The information from these two interviews emphasises the importance of ward committees in connecting local government with its residents. According to Fung and Wright (2003), ward committees support participatory governance mechanisms in which community members are co-creators of solutions, rather than passive recipients of information. Ward committees can strengthen the community's voice by utilising strategies such as CBP and izimbizos. Moreover, they shape the IDP by documenting community priorities and contributing to municipal planning processes. When ward committees are engaged and supported, they can demonstrate transparency, accessibility, and responsiveness, increasing public trust in local government. The Report of the Department of Provincial and Local Government (2005) states that without ward committee structures, the system of democratic government and developmental local government cannot be said to be based on the people. However, ward committees do not fully represent the community's interests, as they tend to be politically affiliated. The EPG provides a framework for addressing past injustices and empowering marginalised communities through ward committees.

4.4.5.2 Frameworks for improved coordination for local government, ward committees, and the community

Successful participatory democracy through ward committees requires a well-structured coordination system that harnesses the enthusiasm of citizens, ward councillors, and municipal departments. These structures help to improve communication, clarify duties, and ensure that participation is not only representative but also beneficial and ongoing.

The responses of two participants on this aspect of the research are provided below.

> "There are izimbizos, and CBP is the foundation of the IDP, which is community-led and where it starts before everything else. The IDP is guided by the information the community has prioritised, and the budget will also constrain it. The District Development Model (DDM) is where all spheres of government integrate. Moreover,

> the community should be trained to understand which sphere of government they must channel their concerns to. The DDM aims to enhance service delivery and socio-economic development by working together with national, provincial, and local government, as well as state-owned enterprises initiated by the government." (Councillor 2, personal communication, February 18, 2025):

On the other hand, a municipality official, who was interviewed, reported as follows:

> "The District Development Model (DDM) is a comprehensive approach to service delivery that brings together all levels of government, local, provincial, and national, under a single plan and budget. The DDM promotes collaboration across government departments to avoid duplication of projects. The national and provincial governments provide direct support to municipalities. Community participation is also prioritised in development planning. Moreover, service delivery backlogs are addressed collectively, rather than by individual departments." (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The information above highlights the importance of organised coordination mechanisms and CBP that produce an IDP. It also demonstrates that the DDM strives to promote participatory democracy and service delivery by addressing poverty, unemployment, and inequality. This approach emphasises community members' active participation in the development process. Fung and Wright (2003) assert that considered solutions or decision-making arise when participants listen to one another's views and generate group preferences after prolonged deliberation. The goal is to ensure that ward committees are not alienated and instead act within a larger integrated governance framework. The DDM introduces a model to improve coherence across the local, provincial, and national government spheres. This model, therefore, restricts fragmentation and enhances efficiency in service delivery. Ward committees serve as the system's primary interface with members of the community. The IDP generates momentum for constructing new shared values and visions to inform how best to negotiate the tensions between restitution, redistribution, and the maintenance of standards that are normative for certain privileged groups (Parnell & Pieterse, 2013). However, their effectiveness depends on clear roles and responsibilities and on communication with all levels of government.

4.4.5.3 Capacity building and training for ward committees

Ward committees must be strengthened through ongoing training and capacity building.

In most situations, ward committee members are volunteers with diverse backgrounds who are eager and motivated. However, the ward committee may lack the necessary abilities, expertise, and confidence to carry out its responsibilities effectively. Investing in the development of ward committees helps empower the community and improve local government.

The perspectives of two participants who were interviewed are recorded below.

First, the respondent stated that:

> "Ward committees need to improve their effectiveness, and additional training should be provided to address specific rural challenges. Moreover, municipal bureaucracy needs to be limited, as it seems to hinder service delivery. In addition, the ward committees must be monitored to ensure they are active and accountable." (Ward committee 2, personal communication, March 10, 2025).

Community member 2, on the other hand, stated the following:

> "Ward committee members need to attend every capacity-building event organised by the municipality. This will help them understand government structures and processes, for example, by developing skills in conflict resolution to handle community disputes. Also, understanding how to facilitate community meetings is important" (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The perspectives above emphasise the importance of ongoing training and development for ward committee members. Practical issues also arise, particularly when government administration is inexperienced and underfunded (Fung & Wright, 2003). These constraints impede active participation in governance and the ability to meet community expectations. Ward committees rely on the councillor for advice, without training. Over time, this inhibits the decentralisation of power and undermines the full potential of participatory governance. According to Modise (2017), for a ward committee to perform its work effectively and efficiently, its members need specific qualifications. Ward committees typically lack the

technical skills, policy knowledge, and soft skills (such as meeting facilitation and dispute resolution) required to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Sadly, the appointment of ward committees is often based on politicised criteria, including political loyalty and patronage.

The next major component of this research examined suggestions to promote effective community participation in Umbumbulu's ward committees. This element is dealt with in the next subsection.

4.4.6 Enhancing Communication and Engagement

Active communication and participation are the foundations of effective community participation in local governance. Ward committees aspire to fulfil their role as a bridge between communities and governments. Consequently, communication must be prompt, clear, inclusive, and two-way. Participation, in turn, must be active, persistent, and meaningful, enabling communities not only to receive information but also to shape decisions and hold leaders accountable. This involves strengthening deliberative practice and ensuring that ward committees operate independently of political influence. Ward committees, as structures, need to be evaluated to ensure they fulfil their aim of serving as a vehicle for community participation, as stipulated in the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 and the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000.

4.4.6.1 Regular and transparent communication amongst ward committees, local government, and the community

Regular, open communication is essential to fostering trust, increasing involvement, and ensuring residents are informed and engaged in local government. The ward committees and municipalities must consistently provide accurate, clear, and timely information. Regular, transparent communication helps eliminate disinformation, reduce suspicions, and foster a culture of transparency and accountability. The perspectives of two respondents on this aspect of the research are important to record. The first of these respondents reported as follows:

> "In some areas, community members complain after meetings that they were informed at the last minute. This shows that we are not effectively reaching everyone. We need to strengthen our resources, adopt digital tools, and change our strategy. We can even use local radio stations to inform the community at large about meetings and other events." (Ward Committee member 2, personal communication, March 10, 2025).

On the other hand, a municipal official, who was interviewed, stated that:

> "We need to improve our communication strategy; we only rely on councillors to work with their communities via loud-hailing. We should develop a better, more planned flow of information, such as calendar updates and consistent feedback sessions, to keep the community updated" (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The responses from these two respondents indicate that communication with the local community is inconsistent and reactive. The two participants (a ward committee member and a municipal official) expressed concern about a lack of resources to reach everyone in the ward, given its size and Umbumbulu's rurality. Ward committee members emphasised the lack of communication and suggested using local radio stations to keep citizens informed about ward meetings and developments. According to Adedokun, Adeyemo, and Olorunsola (2010), good rural communication aims to provide rural people with the information they need to make informed decisions and the skills they need to improve their livelihoods. Community radio has the potential to reach a large number of people in the ward, as many in rural areas listen to the radio. Communication with rural citizens should be ongoing, not only about current issues but also to strengthen relationships among the community, local government, ward committees, and the councillor.

4.4.6.2 Inclusive planning for development and decision making

Inclusive planning and decision-making ensure that all citizens, regardless of age, gender, background, or status, have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in shaping local development priorities. It is not about merely attending meetings, but about being actively involved in the process to promote equity, trust, and ownership of decisions made at the community level and beyond.

The perspectives of two interviewees on this matter are recorded below.

> "Inclusivity is not only about attending meetings. Residents should see that their opinions are reflected in the results. If their views are ignored, they will also withdraw their participation." (Ward Committee Member 3, personnel communication, February 18, 2025).

For their part, Community Member 2 responded as follows:

> "It feels like the same people are the key decision-makers. However, our community is multifaceted. There must be a strategy to involve different groups, such as single parents, unemployed youth, and older people who are unable to travel or attend public gatherings. There must be a way to invite these people to community meetings, as they are the most affected by the poor development in our areas. Educating them about their rights and the importance of community participation can be a start. Unfortunately, municipal officials and councillors use the IDP to lie to them about what they intend to do for them." (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The evidence above indicates that participation is perceived as shallow. The community member whose response is recorded above believed that when they were invited to meetings, decisions had already been made. There are also hurdles to involvement in the ward committees, including time constraints. For example, one community member remarked that time is insufficient to accommodate all residents, as some work. Fung and Wright (2003) state that the EPG theory calls for trustworthy leadership and the inclusion of the local community. Community participation further involves a two-way dialogue and involvement with the ultimate objective of making better decisions that the general population supports (Creighton, 2005). Residents who attended the ward meetings have limited power, as their input had no bearing on the outcome. Fung and Wright (2003) emphasised the importance of community participation, consideration, and authority while acknowledging the limitations of knowledge and feasibility. Ward committees are responsible for ensuring that community input informs and shapes development priorities. The Umbumbulu residents lost trust due to dishonest administrative and political leadership.

4.4.7 Improving Service Delivery in Umbumbulu

Service delivery is one of a municipality's most visible and important functions, and it is the primary area where the impact of ward committees and community participation is felt

firsthand. Encouraging service delivery entails providing basic requirements, including water, electricity, sanitation, waste removal, roads, and housing, in an effective, fair, and timely manner. Ward committees play an important role by serving the community, ensuring high-quality service delivery, and assisting local governments in promptly identifying difficulties and gaps.

4.4.7.1 Prompt and effective action in development activities

Prompt and effective action refers to the ability of ward committees, councillors, and local government to respond quickly and efficiently to community needs, issues, and service delivery challenges. It ensures that consultation does not mark the end of engagement but rather leads to visible, timely results. Residents become frustrated, dissatisfied, and disconnected if they do not receive timely responses, even when they have actively participated. It is critical to act quickly and decisively to maintain community confidence and promote improved service outcomes.

The responses of two participants to this aspect of the questionnaire are given below. The first is from a municipal official, while the second is from a councillor in the Umbumbulu area. The interview response was as follows:

> "There is a significant gap between the time the issue is reported and when it is resolved. Ward committees could help the municipality achieve effective community participation if they have the resources to report issues. They could use the service tracker to monitor services. (Municipal official, personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The Councillor 1 stated the following:

> "The municipality should close the feedback loop. Residents want to be heard and to see that their opinions matter. Maybe they can even understand the delays in providing feedback if there is an explanation." (personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The responses from these two members of the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality confirmed that there is no feedback from the municipality to the Umbumbulu residents. The municipal official (interviewed) recommended a follow-up mechanism to enable ward

committees to track service delivery and close the communication gap. Makanyeza, Kwandayi, and Ikobe (2013) stated that improving service delivery focuses on increasing its efficacy and efficiency. The ward committees need to be empowered to escalate and monitor service delivery issues and to receive feedback from the municipality and its officials.

4.4.7.2 Strengthen community participation to focus on service delivery in Umbumbulu

Ward committees play a crucial role in ensuring that service delivery remains a priority in their work. The Umbumbulu community was concerned about the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality's actions (or lack thereof) and the manner in which essential services were delivered. The ward committee's role was to report community issues and follow up until they were addressed. Two respondents in this research shared their perspectives on service delivery.

The first respondent reported as follows:

> "The community wants services and rates the municipality's performance based on the services rendered. So, the ward committees must focus on the services they provide. Community gatherings should start with service delivery updates to make us all accountable." (Councillor 2, personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The second respondent stated the following:

> "Service delivery should be ongoing, not just during elections. The time we see action is during elections. The ward committees should continue to do their jobs and serve the residents. (Community Member 2, personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The responses above demonstrated that community members desired service delivery, which should be the primary agenda for the ward committees. Although local governments are the frontline organisations closest to the people, the extent and quality of service delivery are the most essential factors that have substantially affected their credibility and institutional image (Aminuzzaman, 2008, cited in Makanyeza, Kwandayi & Ikobe, 2013). Service delivery has become integral to election campaigns. This frustrates the community, as they receive little attention afterwards. Service delivery should be prioritised in ward meetings.

4.4.8 Strengthening the Role and Functioning of Ward Committees

Ward committees were established to serve as a vital conduit between the community and the local government. The ward committees' duties include facilitating community participation, identifying neighbourhood problems, and ensuring that their municipalities are informed of and take action on them. Local municipalities can strengthen the roles and functionality of ward committees by providing them with the authority, resources, and capabilities needed to play a significant role in the municipality.

4.4.8.1 Ensuring neutrality and accountability for ward committees

Ward committees are intended to represent all residents, regardless of party affiliation, background, or personal interests. Ward committees play an important role in ensuring neutrality and accountability, which encourages justice, objectivity, and accountability to the members of the community they represent. Ward committees are frequently perceived as politically biased or self-serving, eroding community trust and reducing participation. Therefore, it is critical to maintain honesty, transparency, and community-focused leadership at all times.

Two participants' perspectives on this aspect, as they relate to this study, are presented below. The first of these participants responded as follows:

> "It is very important for the ward committees to remain neutral. Once the community feels that the ward committees are biased, attendance at public gatherings declines. The ward committee members need training in ethical leadership and community-based decision-making." (Community Organisation Representative 2, personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The second respondent, Community Member 1, on this aspect of the study in Umbumbulu, stated the following:

> "Members of the community should understand how decisions are made, who is responsible, and how to challenge unfair practices, as this fosters trust in the system." (personal communication, February 18, 2025).

The research in the Umbumbulu wards suggested that politics influenced the ward

committee's operations. Fung and Wright (2003) argued that in participatory experiments, most governments are unable to bear the political and practical costs of establishing participatory decision-making procedures, even when they possess the necessary "political will." Political bias and favouritism impede the ward committee's operations and foster community distrust. There is a need for transparency and accountability to community members; without it, members will not attend community gatherings. The ward committee needs a code of conduct and training to understand the ramifications of political prejudice and to provide community-focused leadership.

4.4.8.2 Capacity building and support for the ward committee.

Capacity building and support are integral to the ongoing process of equipping ward committees with the tools, skills, and expertise needed to serve the community. Ward committees that do not receive sufficient training experience low participation and poor service delivery, as they do not understand what is expected of them in terms of roles and responsibilities. It is critical to invest in human capital to ensure effective participation and faster service delivery, and to develop leaders who can provide valuable input in the running of their areas. The views of two respondents in Umbumbulu on this element of the study are recorded below.

The first respondent reported as follows:

> "We need to invest in building the capacity of the ward committees. The ward committees need to be equipped with specific skills to foster community participation. There must be more workshops; mentorship and digital literacy are crucial to capacitating the ward committees. A skilled ward committee strengthens the municipality by ensuring effective and efficient service delivery. (Municipal Official, personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The second respondent was Councillor 2, who stated the following:

> "The support from the municipality for the ward committees should include logistics, such as the provision of data and transport, or access to printing facilities. The ward committee needs to operate efficiently with basic support." (personal communication, March 10, 2025).

The information shared by these two respondents with the researcher indicates a lack

of training, which has affected the efficiency of ward committees. The councillor emphasised the importance of logistics and digital support, including transport, data provision, and material provision, for a well-resourced ward committee to be effective and efficient in its duties. Inefficiency is, in part, caused by insufficient ethics education and training for effective, accountable, and efficient government (Kuye et al., 2002). Capacity-building activities play a vital role in improving performance and community participation. Investing in human and operational resources is critical to a well-functioning ward committee.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter presents detailed findings from rich qualitative research on the efficiency of ward committees in Umbumbulu wards 96 and 100 within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, with particular emphasis on their role in fostering community participation. The discussion is structured around the study's core objectives, progressing logically through a series of evolving themes and subthemes derived from the data. This chapter begins by introducing participants to the concept of community participation, recognising its importance and empowering people to make decisions. Despite statutory frameworks such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and Community-Based Planning (CBD), participants recognise a significant gap between theory and practice.

Obstacles to meaningful participation have been thoroughly examined, and the results are well-founded and organised. Key challenges included a prolonged lack of attention and action by the local government, leading to significant erosion of trust among residents. Furthermore, the community attributes feelings of isolation and disillusionment to structures such as ward committees, which are primarily symbolic rather than genuine routes for interaction. This chapter then examines the routes used to bridge this gap, focusing on communication and mobilisation strategies. While a combination of traditional and modern approaches (loud-hailing, WhatsApp groups, schools) is used, the study highlighted significant

accessibility and efficacy challenges due to the large, rural character of the wards and limited data access.

This chapter concludes with an analysis of the broader structural issues that hinder major participation, termed issues affecting effective community participation. The most notable findings here centred on typical service delivery deficiencies, as well as crucial issues of representation and bias, in which political alignment and self-interest were perceived to undermine the ward committees' impartiality and accountability to the larger community.

Finally, the information collected in wards 96 and 100 demonstrates that, despite the local government’s implementation of participatory methods, a deeply entrenched disconnect remains. This chapter supports the argument that community participation in Umbumbulu is crucial but is hampered by communication failures, a lack of political neutrality, and persistent failures in responsive service delivery, all of which contribute to public disillusionment and the erosion of local confidence. These findings will serve as the required foundation for the conclusion presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This study was undertaken to understand the role of the ward committee in advancing community participation in Umbumbulu, eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This chapter is divided into five sections; the first section focuses on the study objectives. The second section presents the study contribution to the existing knowledge. The third section addresses limitations and potential biases. The fourth section is the real-world application of findings or recommendations. The fifth section is the study general conclusion. This chapter also provides a summary of the study. The results of the study are evaluated against the aim and research objectives presented in Chapter 4. This chapter also discusses how the results contributed to current knowledge of the role of ward committees in rural settings within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality and considers the implications of the findings.

The previous chapter presented data that were collected through semi-structured interviews. This study addresses the following objectives:

- Examine the understanding of community participation by the ward committee of Umbumbulu.
- The methods that were used to promote community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu.
- Identifying the prospects and challenges in promoting community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu.
- Providing suggestions to promote effective community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu.

5.2 Analysis of the Objectives

Understanding community participation by the ward committee of Umbumbulu

The findings demonstrate that, despite ward committee members and community leaders having basic knowledge of community participation, a largely top-down approach to decision-making continues to constrain the use of participatory processes in Umbumbulu. Although ward committees and other participatory structures are established by the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 to encourage community participation in local governance, the study shows that these mechanisms do not always work as intended in practice. Participation frequently takes the form of consultation with little control over final decisions, rather than facilitating cooperative decision-making. These dynamics limit the transformative potential of participatory government and make it more difficult for communities to have a significant impact on the municipality's development priorities.

Several factors, including inadequate municipal responsiveness, political bias, declining community trust, and the exclusion of specific stakeholders from decision-making processes, also constrained effective participation. These challenges undermine the validity of participatory platforms such as ward committees and compromise transparency. This finding aligns with sluggish bureaucratic reforms and local institutions' incomplete adherence to established policy frameworks, which often undermine participatory governance (Booysen, 2007). The survey also found that ward councillors in Umbumbulu did not actively participate in resolving the difficulties faced by ward committees. The capacity of these structures to remove obstacles to participation is further limited by the absence of institutional backing and leadership, thereby compromising their effectiveness in advancing inclusive and responsible local governance.

Methods that are used to promote community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu

The findings indicate that community participation in Umbumbulu is severely limited by poor communication. Interviews show that the ward committee structures' use of both traditional and modern communication techniques was insufficient to reach the wider community. Participants emphasised that further obstacles to effective communication stemmed from the ward's predominantly rural, geographically isolated terrain and a lack of resources. Consequently, many community members remained unaware of meetings, development projects, and opportunities to participate in decision-making. This communication gap undermines the intended purpose of ward committees as participatory platforms and excludes some community members from government processes.

The findings also indicate that communication challenges are not merely logistical but also strategic. There appears to be no clear plan to diversify or integrate communication platforms to reach diverse community groups effectively. This observation supports Amin and Sahar's claim that ward committee structures should use effective digital media to enable efficient and inclusive interactions (Sahar & Amin, 2022). However, the findings of this study suggest that the present communication strategies are insufficient to reach all people on the ward. As a result, the study recommends that local governments develop context-specific communication techniques adapted to rural regions. Integrating traditional methods, such as community meetings and announcements, with readily available digital platforms can improve information dissemination, promote engagement, and ultimately increase community participation in local government operations.

Prospects and challenges in promoting community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu

The findings demonstrate that ongoing service delivery issues severely constrain meaningful community participation in Umbumbulu. The data reveal a persistent gap between community expectations and the local government's responsiveness to those needs and aspirations. Community members frequently raise concerns about basic services. Community members are discouraged from continuing to participate in forums such as ward committee meetings due to perceived delays and inefficiencies in government responses. This situation highlights broader governance issues, suggesting that when communities do not see visible outcomes from their participation, participatory systems are weakened.

The findings also highlight the absence of three fundamental tenets of Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG), as defined by Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright: decentralised governance, active citizen engagement, and group decision-making among stakeholders. Ward committees and other participatory procedures are less effective in Umbumbul due to inadequate implementation of these principles. Although deliberative democracy places strong emphasis on inclusive discourse and group decision-making in governance processes (Muse and Narsiah, 2015), the results indicate that ward committee participation remains low and does not fully enable communities, especially marginalised groups, to influence decisions that affect service delivery. Therefore, strengthening EPG principles may increase community participation and encourage more cooperative local governance.

Suggestions that can be made to promote effective community participation in the ward committee of Umbumbulu

The findings demonstrate that ward committees can help bridge governance gaps between communities and local governments; however, this potential is constrained by

structural and capacity limitations. Ward committees' effectiveness is largely determined by their members' qualifications, duties, and responsibilities. According to Modise (2017), ward committee members must meet specified standards regarding their status, tasks, and authority for these institutions to function properly. In the Umbumbulu context, the study found that insufficient leadership skills and weak accountability mechanisms impede ward committees' ability to foster meaningful community participation. This challenge is exacerbated by inadequate training and limited understanding of local government processes among both ward committee members and community participants, supporting that insufficient training limits the effectiveness of ward committees in promoting participatory governance (Nyalunga, 2006).

The findings also highlight how political dynamics and institutional constraints affect ward committee operations. Political party interference in the election of ward committee members can jeopardise the independence of these bodies and hinder their ability to represent community interests. This reflects broader issues in participatory governance, where governments often struggle to sustain participatory decision-making processes because of political and practical constraints (Fung and Erik, 2003). The study indicates that strengthening ward committee structures through mandatory training, improved accountability, and reforms to local government systems, such as communication strategies and the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process, could enhance their effectiveness and promote more meaningful community participation in Umbumbulu's local governance.

5.3 Contribution to Existing Knowledge

This study contributes to the literature on participatory governance and ward committee operations in South Africa's local government system by providing empirical observations from the rural community of Umbumbulu in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal. While previous studies have focused on the institutional architecture and legislative mandate of ward committees under the Municipal Structures Act

117 of 1998, this study goes beyond that to investigate how these participatory structures operate in practice. Existing research by Piper and Deacon (2009) and Smith and de Visser (2009) has highlighted the institutional objectives of ward committees as instruments for increasing local democratic involvement. However, the findings of this study demonstrate that participatory institutions do not always lead to meaningful community participation. Instead, institutional and political constraints, such as inadequate communication infrastructure, insufficient responsiveness by local government, and diminishing community trust, continue to undermine the effectiveness of ward committees in promoting inclusive community participation.

The study also contributes to theory by adapting Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright's Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) concept to the context of rural governance. While the institutional design of ward committees reflects elements of decentralised decision-making and community participation promoted by the EPG framework, the findings show that practical implementation remains constrained by political interference, limited training for ward committee members, and resource scarcity, thereby limiting these structures' ability to function as truly empowered participatory platforms. These findings support earlier critiques that ward committees frequently operate with inadequate authority and institutional backing (Piper & Deacon, 2009; Silima & Auriacombe, 2013). The study highlights additional constraints in rural areas, such as geographic isolation, inadequate digital access, and poor communication infrastructure, which contribute to the gap between participatory government policies and their on-the-ground implementation. This underscores the premise that effective participatory governance requires strong institutional support, capacity development, and accountability mechanisms to transform participatory frameworks into meaningful community participation (Fung & Wright, 2003).

5.4 Limitations and Potential Biases

While the study of ward committees in Umbumbulu offers important insights, it is constrained by several limitations. It was conducted in a narrow geographic area, specifically wards 96 and 100 of the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, which may limit the generalisability of the findings to other wards or municipalities, given differing local political dynamics and socioeconomic conditions. Additionally, the qualitative component involved only 10 semi-structured interviews, which may have limited the diversity of perspectives. Future research could benefit from larger sample sizes or mixed-methods approaches that integrate qualitative and quantitative methods to more comprehensively explore trends in community participation.

Third, face-to-face interviews may have introduced social desirability bias, particularly on sensitive issues such as political influence and government dissatisfaction, potentially leading participants to alter their responses. Despite measures to ensure privacy and adherence to ethical research guidelines, this limitation could hinder candid discourse. Additionally, the study primarily captured views from ward committees and community members, suggesting a lack of insights from lawmakers and municipal officials, which could have enriched the understanding of institutional challenges in participatory governance. Future research could benefit from a multi-level governance approach to improve research quality.

5.5 Real-World Applications of Findings

The study demonstrates that formal participation mechanisms do not necessarily operate efficiently in rural contexts such as Umbumbulu within the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The findings contribute practically to the literature on participatory government. The Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (Section 78) requires municipalities to create ward committees and to guarantee their efficient operation. The study finds a substantial discrepancy between the intent of the legislation and its actual

application. Meaningful participation is particularly undermined by inefficient and uneven communication tactics, influenced by geographic dispersion, restricted digital access, and uneven outreach. This result supports the claim that communication is essential to inclusive development processes involving diverse stakeholders (Amin, 2022). Therefore, the study adds to the literature by demonstrating that, to overcome structural barriers to engagement, participatory government in rural settings requires context-specific communication techniques that integrate both traditional and accessible digital platforms.

The study further contributes by emphasising that institutional responsiveness, accountability, and capacity-building are interrelated in enhancing participatory government. According to Nyalunga (2006), the results highlight the need for organised and ongoing capacity-building programmes, as they demonstrate that ward committee members' and communities' poor understanding of governance procedures and lack of training hinder their ability to participate effectively. As noted by Parnell and Pieterse (2013), socio-political and economic limitations frequently restrict community participation. At the same time, political interference and perceived bias erode public trust and undermine accountability. Furthermore, inadequate municipal responsiveness, particularly the failure to incorporate community feedback into processes such as the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), undermines the legitimacy of collaborative approaches. In highlighting these dynamics, the study contributes to the literature by arguing that, to convert formal participation into meaningful citizen influence, participatory governance in rural areas needs to be bolstered by improved institutional feedback systems, transparent procedures, and locally tailored governance models.

5.6 Conclusion

This study critically analyses the functioning of ward committees in Umbumbulu, a rural area of the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, through the lens of the Empowered Participatory Governance (EPG) framework developed by

Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright. It contributes to the body of knowledge on participatory governance. Despite progressive legislative frameworks, including the Republic of South Africa's Constitution, the White Paper on Local Government, the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998, and the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, which were introduced to institutionalise participatory governance during the democratic transition, the results reveal a persistent gap between these normative frameworks and their implementation. Although ward committees are intended to foster inclusion, decentralised decision-making, and citizen empowerment, the study shows that limited institutional support, limited deliberative engagement, and structural inefficiencies continue to hinder community participation in practice.

The study contributes to the literature by situating its findings within global and local debates on participatory democracy. According to Gaventa and Valderrama (1999), participation serves not only as an accountability tool but also as an empowering process for identifying community needs. However, the Umbumbulu case highlights a gap between these aspirations and everyday reality, where inadequate communication, political meddling, and restricted response undermine meaningful engagement. This reinforces concerns that participatory institutions are often symbolic rather than transformative. While international examples, such as participatory budgeting in Brazil and community-led governance models in India and Bolivia (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017; cited in Heller, 2007), demonstrate the potential of empowered participation, this study shows that such outcomes require strong institutional commitment, adequate resources, and genuine political will. These conditions are not always present in the local context.

Finally, the study makes both theoretical and practical contributions by emphasising the underutilised potential of ward committees as participatory mechanisms of government in rural South Africa. Empirically, it shows that, despite historical exclusion during apartheid and ongoing governance challenges, community members remain committed to participation and

propose practical solutions, including improved communication strategies, depoliticisation of ward committees, and increased training. Theoretically, applying the EPG framework to a rural municipal context increases its relevance by demonstrating how its core principles of participatory inclusivity, deliberative problem-solving, and empowerment are constrained in practice. In practice, the study emphasises the importance of context-specific reforms that promote capacity-building, institutional accountability, and responsive governance structures. This underscores the idea that participatory governance can move beyond symbolic compliance only if local government institutions actively invest in empowering individuals to act as co-decision-makers rather than passive consumers of policy initiatives.

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Interview Schedule

Introduction

I would like to express my gratitude for this opportunity to meet with you today. I am Zanele Pinky Sangweni, and I would like to discuss the crucial role that ward committees play in advancing community participation. Specifically, my focus will be on Umbumbulu and understanding how ward committees can facilitate community involvement.

The interview is scheduled to take approximately 30 minutes. To ensure that we capture all the information accurately, our conversation will be recorded. While I will be taking notes during the interview, I may not be able to capture everything that you say. Therefore, please feel free to speak up during the interview so that we can ensure that we don't miss any important information. Please note that your responses will be kept confidential, and any information included in our report will not identify you as the respondent. You have the right to decline to answer any questions that you do not wish to respond to, and you may terminate the interview at any time.

Are there any questions about what I have just clarified?

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

Interview Questions

1. How does Umbumbulu's ward committee represent and view community participation?
2. What are the different roles and responsibilities that ward committee members have in terms of encouraging community involvement?
3. What is the value of community involvement in decision-making processes from the perspective of ward committee members?
4. What techniques does the ward committee use to promote participation in the community?
5. How does the ward committee interact with the community and convey information to get people involved?
6. What obstacles did these techniques provide, and how were they overcome?

7. What are the chances or opportunities to improve community involvement in the ward committee's activities?
8. What are the obstacles or difficulties the ward committee has when promoting community involvement?
9. What is the ward committee's opinion on the connection between effective governance and community engagement?
10. What suggestions or recommendations do ward committee members have to enhance community involvement?
11. What are the suggestions from the community members to increase their participation in ward committee initiatives?
12. How can the obstacles that have been highlighted be addressed and the opportunities for community engagement be maximized?

We appreciate your input and suggestions on this matter.

Thank you.

Igxoxo ehleliwe

Isingeniso

Mina ngithanda ukunibonga ngesikhathi senu, nokuvuma ukuzoba inxenye yalo mhlangano namhlanje. Igama ngiwu Zanele Pinky Sangweni ngifisa ukukhuluma nani ngendlela eniyibuka ngayo indima yekomidi le ward committee ekuqinisekiseni ukuthi umpahakathi wase Umbumbulu ubamba iqhaza kwintuthuko elethwa uhulumeni..

Le ngxoxo izothatha imizuzu engamashumi amathathu. Le gxoxo izogqoshwa ukuze ngingeke ngedlulwe ozokusho. Noma ke, ngizobe ngigqopha, ngizobhala nasebhukwini, ngyazai angikwazi ukusheshisa ukuthatha konke ozobe ukusho. Ngoba igxoxo yethu iyaqhoshwa bengicela ukhulumele phezulu asifisi ukudlulwa ngisho okuncane kozosipha kona. Izimpendulo zizobekwa ngokugcophelela, kwinkulumo yethu ngiyaqinisekisa ukuthi ngeke livele igama lakho uma sekuphuma umbhalo. Ukhumbule uvumelekile ukungaphenduli umbuzo uma ungakuphathi kahle futhi angayimisa noma inini igxoxo.

Ikhona imibuzo ngalokhu esengikuchazile?

Uzimisele ukuba yingxenye yale ngxoxo?

Imibuzo yengxoxo ehleliwe.

1. Yiphi indlela I ward committee yaseMbumbulu emela ngayo nebuka ngayo inhlangayela yomphakathi?
2. Ungakwazi ukungisiza ukuthola ukuthi yini umehloko kwindima kanye nomthwalo wmfanelo kuma ward committee ukugqugquzela inhlanganyela yomphakathi?
3. Ukuphi ukubaluleka kwinhlanganyela yomphakathikwindlela ekwinziwa ngayo ekuthatheni izinqumo ngokwamalunga eward committee?
4. Yimaphi amasu iward committee ewasebenzisayo ukugqugquzela inhlanganyela yomphakathi?
5. Iyiphi indlela esetshenziswa yi ward committee ukuxhumana nomphakathi ukuze badlulise umyalezo ukuze abantu babe inxenye?
6. Yiziphi izinqinamba ezifike namasu abekiwe, nokuthi izgqotshwe kanjani?
7. Yiziphi izindlela noma amathuba okwenzagcono inhlanganyela yomphakathi ngwemisebenzi ye ward committee?

8. Yiziphi izithiyo nobunzima i ward committee ebhekana nazo ekugqugquzela inhlanganyela yomphakathi?
9. Yimiphi imibono I ward committee enayo ngokuxhumana Phakathi kwenhlanganyela yomphakathi nempumelelo kahulumeni?
10. Yimiphi imibono nokucebisa okusuka kumalunga ward committee mayelana okugqugquzela inhlanhganyela yomphakathi?
11. Yimiphi imibono amalunga omphakathi enayo ukuthi kwande ukubamba iqhaza kwemisebenzi yeward committee?
12. Lezithiyo isezibaliwe zingalungiseka kanjani futhi yiziphi izindlela inhlangayela yomphakathi engakhuliswa ngayo?

Siythanda ukubonga ngethuba osinikelona nangengalelo lakho nemibono yakho kulolundaba.

Siyabonga kakhulu.

Appendices

Informed Consent Document

Dear Participant,

My name is Zanele Pinky Sangweni, student number 216076047. I am a Masters candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College. Understanding the Role of ward committees in advancing community participation in Umbumbulu. The aim of the study is to understand the relationship of the community and ward committee members in dealing with issues that affect the community through public participation. To find out about the role government played in assisting women waste pickers. I am interested in interviewing you to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
- The interview will take about (*how long?*).
- The record as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed by shredding and burning.
- If you agree to participate please sign the declaration attached to this statement (a separate sheet will be provided for signatures)

I can be contacted at: School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus, Durban. Email: 216076047@stu.ukzn.ac.za; Cell: [redacted]

My supervisor is Professor Sagie Narsiah, who is located at the School of Social Sciences, Howard College Campus, Durban of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Contact details: email Narsiahi@ukzn.ac.za. Phone number: [redacted]

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee contact details are as follows: Ms Phumelele Ximba, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Research Office, Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za,Phone number +27312603587.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (provide contact details) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details are as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za Additional consent, where applicable

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I, Bcard Mtombeni ..... *(full names of participant)* hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

I consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded (if applicable)

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT [redacted] DATE

10/3/25

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

16 October 2024

Zanele Pinky Sangweni (216076047)
School of Social Sciences
Howard College Campus

Dear ZP Sangweni,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00007627/2024
Project title: Understanding the role of ward committees in advancing community participation in Umbumbulu
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 02 September 2024 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 16 October 2025.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)
/nng

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