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## Community Engagement And Political Decision On Issues Of Service Delivery In South Africa

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### Abstract

The study assesses the strategies adopted for community engagement; it examines the effect of community engagement on service delivery and analyses the challenges of community engagement in the provision of services. Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, policy documents, research reports, and journal articles are the secondary data adopted for the study. The study revealed that voting initiatives, izimbizos (sizable community assemblies), Integrated Development Planning (IDP), advisory committees, and electronic public participation are common strategies for community engagement in South Africa. Collective decision-making, building consensus and collaboration, and upholding the legitimacy and credibility of the government are the effects of community engagement in South African municipalities. In contrast, inadequate information about community needs, unsuitable community coordination, inappropriate participants, and deficient feedback reports were the challenges of community engagement in the study area. The study concludes that the effect of community engagement has not been felt as expected due to poor planning and lack of genuine institutional structures.

**Keywords:** Community Participation, Politics, Government, Programmes Implementation, Municipality, Community Development

### Introduction

Before the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, community engagement on socioeconomic and political issues was not acknowledged, as political decisions were the duty and responsibility of political functionaries. This necessitates the assertion made by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (2006) that in all the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), community engagement has begun to be recognized as a common alternative for routine decision-making and conflict resolution mechanisms in public life. The advent of the 1996 constitution recognised the significance of public participation in political decisions and made provisions for the participation of populaces in governmental activities at all levels (Davids, Prince, Makiva, and Fagbadebo, 2021). Specifically, section 195(e) states that people's desires must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to engage in the policy-making process. This provision implies that community participation in political decisions is essential for efficient service delivery because community involvement in the decision-making process through self-initiated projects leads to the effective implementation of government programmes.

The integrated development plan (IDP), among other policy frameworks, was adopted by South Africa's post-apartheid administration as the cornerstone to encourage and enhance community involvement in various aspects of local government, such as policy formation and decision-making (Mathebula, 2016). Various legal frameworks are in support of active participation and engagement of the community in South Africa, these include; Growth Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), the government's macroeconomic agenda, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the White Paper on Local Government (1998), the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998), and the Local Government: Municipal System Act (32 of 2000), which requires municipalities to actively engage communities in municipal affairs, particularly policy formulation and decision-making for effective and efficient service delivery (Petunia and Selepe, 2020).

In reference to this, Section 152 (1e) of the 1996 constitution of South Africa emphatically encourages the government at the local level to allow for the participation of community and community organisations in the activities of local government for the betterment of all. Consequently, The Executive Committees of the Municipalities are given the authority to "annually report on the communities and community organisations participation in the affairs of the municipality: and to make sure that

priority is given to public opinions and report on the effect of consultation on the decisions of the council" (Section 44 (3 d & h) 2 of the Municipal Structures Act 1998). Community engagement is a collaborative effort of sharing a vision on issues of collective concern among the community, the government and organisations, where its outcome will improve the standard of living for all residents and unleash the potential of each individual. Hence, lack of community involvement in the service delivery process and planning goes against the fundamental principles of democracy in South Africa. Most significant is public involvement in influencing services to be provided to communities.

Community engagement is a key component of democracy, serving as a crucial tool for efficient governance that leads to effective service delivery to the populace in today's democratically governed states. Interventions have been undertaken in South Africa since the democratization era in 1994, an effort to guarantee people's engagement across various communities (Madumo, 2014). In this view, provisions were made by the local government legislation for the establishment of ward committees within municipalities, with the primary aim of creating a conducive environment for participatory democracy (Section 72 of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998). Therefore, the ward committees are organisations within the community that work to encourage citizen participation in political decisions. This clarification is based on the notion that the services provided by the government should be in line with the aspirations of the population.

Despite the legal recognition and the significance of community engagement as a political decision for service delivery in the post-apartheid era in South Africa, local government-community relations are becoming incredibly tense and difficult to manage. Because community voices are not heard and projects and programmes do not reflect their ambitions and desires, this disconnect between local government and communities has also led to poor planning processes. Communities disregard or vandalize projects as a result, and this makes the connection even more challenging. Officials and communities frequently view consultation as a check-the-box activity rather than as a process that will result in a more comprehensive, valuable strategy, plan, or program. Many communities are weary of being consulted; they frequently complain that they are treated like a research lab yet never see their suggestions materialized in projects (Urban Safety Reference Group, nd).

Most community dwellers choose not to participate in community engagement due to lack of trust in government, inability of government to implement community projects/programmes, people's perception about government and its agents, and the notion that their engagement will have no tangible impact on the life of a common man. As a result, Tshoose (2015), cited in Mpabanga (2022) considered a number of tasks for interaction with community in respect to the idea of community engagement and its reciprocal relationship with democratic governance. Firstly, how considerably community engagement affects, nurtures, and strengthens transparent, participatory, and accountable democratic governance. Secondly, it's important to examine how public engagement is always changing under the contemporary democratic system and lastly, it is vital to look into the principles that underpin community engagement as well as the constraints associated with it in government.

It was evidence that the majority of communities in the Republic of South Africa are out of touch with the community's agitations due to a lack of meaningful engagement with the community on matters that affect them, despite constitutional and legislative provisions for community engagement in socio-economic and political decision-making. This has prompted several protest actions intended to call the attention of policymakers to their plight. It was clear from this that the decision-makers were out of touch with local realities. Therefore, it is based on these circumstances that the study aims to investigate the strategies put in place for community engagement; assess its benefits on service delivery and analyse the challenges with community engagement as a political decision on service delivery in South African municipalities. By and large, the terms "community engagement," "community participation," "public participation," and "community involvement" are all used interchangeably in this research study.

### **Methodology**

The paper used secondary data by interacting with extant literature to elicit facts and information on strategies, benefits and challenges of community engagement as political decisions on policy formulation and implementation for effective and efficient service delivery. Data were sourced from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, relevant legislation, policy documents and statutes, formal and informal gazettes, research reports and speeches, relevant literature on the subject matter, published/unpublished dissertations, as well as journal articles. The data were investigated and discussed using content analysis techniques.

### **Theoretical Consideration**

As posited by Obuoforibo (2002), it has become a tradition in the Social Sciences to adopt existing paradigms or theories to enable us to articulate our analysis. Without any guidance of a theory, the study will bring misleading in the understanding of the case under study (Yin, 2003). However, Yin means that, with the help of a relevant theory, a researcher is guided in designing possible solutions to the problem under investigation. Therefore, the study considers participation development theory as propounded by Waishbord (2001) and participatory democracy theory by Rousseau (1970). Many development experts have started to define a notion known as participatory, or "people-centred development" (Roodt, 2001; Pendirs, 1996; Rahman, 1993; Chambers, 1992; Conyers & Hills, 1990; Dodds, 1986). The focus of current discussions on community development initiatives is "bottom-up" planning, "people-centred development," and the idea that regular citizens may steer their community toward progress. This theory will be applied to the development initiatives that are now taking place in third-world nations and encourage the participation of all stakeholders in the development process (Burkey, 1993; Rahman, 1993; Oakley, 1991; Bryant & White, 1982).

Development needs consideration of cultural diversity as well as other particulars that modernisation theorists disregarded, according to participative thinkers and practitioners. Many programs had issues and failed because of this lack of sensitivity (Coetzee, 2001). According to Slocum, Wichhart, Rocheleau, and Thomas-Slyter (1995), the core idea of participatory development theory is that people should actively participate in decisions regarding the execution of processes, programs, and

projects that have an impact on them. According to participatory development techniques, "participation" refers to people using their power to think, act, and govern their behaviour within a cooperative framework. The majority of the populace should be included in development programmes, with specific attention paid to groups that were ab initio excluded, such as youth, women, community-based organisations, and uneducated citizenries (Dodds, 1986; Roodt, 2001).

According to Rousseau (1970), the foundation of participatory democracy theory is the private engagement of every person in governmental decision-making and policy-making. According to participatory democracy theory, participation has a psychological impact on the participants in addition to serving as a protective adjunct to a set of institutional arrangements. This ensures that there is a constant interrelationship between the functioning of institutions and the psychological traits and attitudes of people who interact within them. The distinguishing contribution of the theorists of participatory democracy to democratic theory as a whole is their emphasis on this characteristic of engagement and its presence at the centre of their ideas. The fundamental assumptions regarding the role of participation in a democratic polity may be found in Rousseau's theory, even though he wrote before the contemporary institutions of democracy were formed and that his ideal society is a non-industrial city-state.

These theories perceive democracy and development as a process centred on community involvement in their advancement, achieved by collective consent by leveraging existing resources and steering their community's future progress. Individual preferences never take precedence over those of a group. This theory places importance on ideas, such as people empowerment, capacity building, sustainability, and self-reliance. As a result, both the participatory development theory and participatory democracy theory hold that the community itself, rather than the bureaucracy and its centrally mandated development initiatives and programmes, holds the key to effective third-world development.

The goal of participatory democracy theory and participatory development theory is to give everyone in society the chance to meaningfully engage in the formulation of decisions and policies (Dryzek, 2007) and mutually contribute to community development. Because of this, the study adopts the participatory democracy theory, which puts people at the centre of policy and decision-making processes.

### **Significance of Community Engagement**

The significance of community engagement is numerous, but the study will focus on the substantial one as affirmed by Urban Safety Reference Group (nd). These are;

#### **Communal Peace, Harmony and Stability**

Community engagement strengthens peaceful co-existence among community dwellers as people will experience greater stability, reduced vulnerability, and improved safety in the absence of low trust and protests where people are actively involved, connections with local government improve, and planning is also strengthened. As a result, communities will be better equipped to develop and transform as they become environments that are productive, pro-social, and enable citizens to thrive. Communities will not need to resort to illegal and violent protests if community engagement produces a space where they may feel like their opinions are heard.

#### **Enhancement of Planning**

A community that creates avenues for active engagement of the populace, community development associations and local organisations, their opinion will be valuable and insightful to integrated development plans and strengthen various community planning procedures and development for overall national development.

#### **Enhances Collaboration between Government and Populaces**

People will feel more reliance and less resentment, less isolated, and exclusion in any society where they feel heard, recognised and can see their own vision being implemented in the integrated development plans.

#### **Building Relationships among Community Dwellers**

Community engagement of all sundry enhances relationships where heads are put together for a common goal of collective advantage. Consequently, it is prudent for the community engagement professional to involve residents in the decision-making process and actively listen to foster relationships.

#### **Inclusiveness**

In some traditional arrangements, women's voices are often silenced but one important aspect of community engagement is that women have the opportunity to participate, tell their stories, and offer advice on how to make their communities safer. Also, the youth are frequently viewed as opportunities rather than problems. They are inventive and energetic, and it is possible to tap this energy both for practical engagement procedures and for engagement in the implementation of socio-economic development-oriented programmes. Additionally, the aged have influence and contribute to community issues because their expertise and experience are crucial to establishing inclusive environments in communities where all residents can thrive.

#### **Knowledge Building**

Community people have authorities in their lives who are familiar with their neighbourhoods and know what works for the community and why. For local governments that try to prepare initiatives that would foster sustainable development in their areas, their insights are priceless and crucial.

### **Community Engagement and Service Delivery**

In the Republic of South Africa, community participation and government engagement with the black population were non-existent during the apartheid era (Daudu and Fagbadebo 2019). The apartheid regime did not value the viewpoints or socioeconomic requirements of the black majority. Black South Africans' voices were unheard, disregarded, and excluded from government decision-making processes. A democratically elected government committed to a people-centred developmental approach was installed in 1994 after the first democratic election (The White Paper on Local Government, 1998). According to the Constitution of South Africa, which was adopted in 1996, the local government was entrusted with this responsibility and required to establish official venues for community engagement. The local government also made provisions for the participation of citizens in all levels of government operations. Being the branch of government that is closest to the people, local government was seen as the state's delivery system and given the constitutional mandate to involve the community in socio-economic and political decision-making process.

After the apartheid era, local governments underwent reorganisation through the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in order to carry out the constitution's directive to establish platforms and structures that would encourage community engagement in decision-making (Municipal Structures Act of 1998). Participatory approach was the aim of RDP's in which development must be driven by people and not merely about providing goods to a passive populace (Khosa, 2001). The formulation and execution of RDP development projects should be an all-encompassing endeavor that involves development forums that bring together all significant players.

A new local government system and municipalities were created as a result of the restructuring process, and these municipalities were further divided into smaller administrative and political regions known as Wards. The idea behind the newly reorganised municipalities was to make it easier for the community to participate in decision-making, which will enhance the credibility of local decision-making and result in the delivery of effective, efficient, and reasonable services that will raise the standard of living for residents.

Therefore, it is imperative to reassess local government to identify strategies for improving public participation in decision-making, guaranteeing that policies and programs are jointly owned by communities and their towns. The relationship between locally elected officials and communities in the public participation process is effectively illustrated in the South African Constitution. Several studies conclude that ward committees, for example, are either viewed as representatives of municipal councils or that gathering of opinions through wards only constitutes symbolic participation (Mbhele 2017:35); ward structures serve as fictitious representations of political parties (Mbelengwa 2016:59); the most municipalities do not grant ward committees and communities any authority or responsibility (Mtshali 2016:55); and the absence of both capacity building assistance and information. These fit in with Arnstein's ladder of participation's lower rungs. Therefore, a far bigger role from municipal officials is needed to encourage citizen engagement.

Community engagement in decision-making on the issue of service delivery has been explicitly stated and stressed in policy documents in South Africa, but there hasn't been its applicability. Community engagement could be useful in ensuring that the public participates in a prioritisation process that is evidence-based, moral, acceptable, and efficient (Tugendhaft *et al.*, 2022). The South African Constitution and several laws have added mechanisms for community involvement to the power of elected officials. Although the majority of the state's authority is concentrated in the national realm, some authority is also given to the provinces and local governments (Buccus, 2008).

Since local government is the most accessible to the public, it has the potential to strengthen participatory democracy. Given that democracy is sometimes referred to as "government by the people" or "by the people elected representatives," participatory democracy is essential to bring development to underdeveloped communities. To emphasise the requirement that local councils involve communities in essential municipal processes, the Municipal Structures Act of 1998 created Ward Committees (Municipal Structures Act, 1998), that are meant to serve as the primary channel of communication between the council and the local communities.

Community participation entails the engagement of members of the public in decision-making, mostly in cases where they are the recipients of service delivery. The engagement of beneficiaries of social services is essential in public policy-making and implementation. Communal decisions carry more weight than individuals on a particular local issue. However, to maintain democracy and advance effective local governance and administration, community participation in the formulation and implementation of policies is essential. In a nutshell, all community stakeholders (community-based organizations, civil society groups, artisans, religious leaders, students, market women, road transport workers etc.) must be involved from the beginning of the decision to the final stage to input about the service required for the benefit of the community.

### **Community Engagement Strategies on Service Delivery**

Depending on the circumstances of needs projects and the peculiarity of South African municipalities, there are various strategies to be adopted for community engagement in political decisions. In general, community participation depends on the willingness of infected individuals/groups or communities who are prepared to express their aspirations in public hearings and lay the framework with local officials. As stated by Williams (2016), in South Africa, community involvement in local government issues is the core of participatory democracy, where municipalities use various strategies to engage the community in decision and policy-making process. Consequently, public hearings, in which government representatives present a proposed project or programme and invite the public to offer suggestions and commendations, such as municipal bylaws, bills, or any other official decision, are the most typical strategies for community engagement in political decision-making. Voting initiatives, izimbizos (sizable community assemblies), Integrated Development Planning IDP, advisory committees, electronic public participation (radio/television programs), publications, public gatherings, open houses, workshops, target groups, toll-free phone lines, surveys, interviews, public policy dialogue, and public inquiries are specific examples of common strategies used in the Republic of South Africa for community engagement on socio-economic and political issues (Democracy and

Public Participation, 2008:176). Hence, the most frequent and generally adopted strategies as affirmed by Mziba (2020), Petunia and Selepe, (2020), Mpabanga (2022) are discussed as follow;

### **1. Integrated Development Planning (IDP) Strategy**

The IDP is one of the prominent strategies adopted in South Africa for engaging the community in the planning and decision-making process at the community level. It was created to encourage neighbourhood involvement and linkages to local governments. IDP is a program where municipalities collaborate with their constituencies, various stakeholders, and interested parties, such as traditional authorities, citizens, or the general public, to create a municipality's budget and strategic plan. In addition, community-based planning encourages a bottom-up method of planning as opposed to the conventional top-down method. It also fosters a sense of ownership among the community in terms of the provision of service and social development. The significance of this strategy led to the assertion of Cloete (2012) and Williams (2016) that community-based planning guarantees the participation of all members of the community in local governance.

### **2. Izimbizo Strategy**

Izimbizo is a large public gathering held by the municipality or government at the provincial or national level where questions are addressed, community issues are acknowledged, and suggestions are made on public programmes and services that may influence the community. It is a strategy where communities and the government engage in direct communication to determine the community's needs, attitudes toward the government, and recommendations for major reforms through the generality opinion.

### **3. Advisory Committee Strategy**

Ward committee members gather in advisory committee meetings, which are presided over by the ward councillor, to talk about topics related to the delivery of services and community development. Community members and the public engage in ward meetings, organised by the ward councillor, to deliberate on issues including water, energy, housing, health, and social development.

### **4. Publications Strategy**

Governments at both the national, provincial and municipal levels use publications to ask the public to submit written comments on development and service delivery policies that affect them.

### **5. Target Groups Consultation Strategy**

One of the strategies for engaging the community in the formulation of decisions and policies is target group consultation. It is essential for the municipality to engage with community organisations and representatives prior to making decisions regarding service provision and the implementation of development programmes.

### **Benefit of Community Engagement on Service Delivery**

Public engagement has a variety of effects on service delivery since it empowers the community by allowing them to control development projects. More significantly, upholding the democratic value of public engagement fosters diversity by creating an enabling environment for inclusivity (Mziba, 2020). Participating in community projects enables locals to own the facilities that are provided to them and to keep them safe from destruction. It advocates for democratic values like "political equality, majority rule, popular sovereignty, and public consultation" (Mziba, 2020).

#### **a. Increases citizen participation and Guarantee Collective Decision Making**

Community engagement results in increased citizen involvement, transparency and efficiency in public spending, and increased legitimacy and acceptability of governmental decisions.

#### **b. Contributing Factor to Good Governance at the Province and National Level**

The needs of society are central to good governance. Not only is community participation essential for good governance, but it is also crucial that future beneficiaries participate in the problem-solving process (Williams 2006). As a result of community participation, the desired outcomes are produced, social satisfaction is raised, and trust in the government is improved.

#### **c. Enhances the Quality and Acceptability of Decisions**

By giving the community members a voice in the decision-making process, participation can be made more effective. As a result, the judgments of the process will be of higher quality and any confusion regarding the required services will be eliminated. Public and local authorities will work together effectively to create a synergy that would maximise the delivery of high-quality public services. Through active engagement of communities in policy and decision-making, the less popular decisions would automatically have support from the community (Madumo, 2014). This might be justified by the notion that community members would be held accountable for such decisions.

#### **d. Building Consensus and Collaboration**

Community harmony is promoted through community participation. It is a mechanism encourages a sense of ownership among the general public and the municipality. Even if policies turn out to be unanticipated once they are put into practice, community members would take on the obligation to improve them rather than reject them. Communities and municipalities

will be able to express their expectations and obligations mutually. Given this, Creighton (2005) contends that community members are more likely to accept a policy or piece of law to which they have made a sizable contribution.

**e. Improved ease in policy implementation**

The process of implementing a decision is typically easier once it is reached through a consultative approach with community involvement. The relationship between the government and its population may be impacted, as noted by Dalton (2004) if residents develop a greater mistrust of politicians and the political system.

**f. Upholding Legitimacy and Credibility of Government**

The level of confidence that the public will have in public institutions depends on how society perceives those institutions. As a result, the involvement of regular citizens in problems of public interest instils faith in governmental institutions. This is especially significant since it helps these institutions appear more credible and legitimate, which supports democratic values and principles (Madumo, 2014).

**g. Empowerment Facilitation**

A key component of gaining citizen power is public involvement. The improvement of wellness and development of those who are excluded from the political and economic activities that serve as the basis for decision-making is achieved through the public participation processes that provide empowerment. Due to the placement of its process in municipalities, public involvement remains at the centre of democratic and developmental processes in South Africa (Madumo, 2014). To ensure that a competent local government meets the needs of all people, particularly those from underprivileged and vulnerable groups, the encouragement of public engagement increases local development (Koma 2012).

**Challenges of Community Engagement in Service Delivery**

It is important at this point to analyse the challenges that hinder community participation as a democratic process in decision-making for the delivery of service in South African municipalities. The challenges confronting public participation in South African municipalities are two-fold (Madumo, 2014). According to him, the first are systematic challenges, the challenges that are directly related to public participation are the systemic challenges such as; legislative enactment, political setting and quality of community members. These are generated by the political environment in which participation is intended to take place. The structural challenges are the second fold. These include the challenges posed by the potential use of strategies to encourage public engagement in municipal governance. Systematic challenges are stimulated by systemic challenges (Madumo, 2014). For instance, under various regimes, different groups may have different perceptions of public participation. Public engagement is more likely to follow legislative directives and attempt to address real community issues in democratically governed states like South Africa than it would in an undemocratic political environment.

The core challenges encountered in South Africa through community engagement and service delivery, especially at the municipality level as identified by Masango (2001); Madumo (2014); Mudzanani (2016); and Johnson (2020) are described below.

**Inadequate Information about Community Needs**

Lack of knowledge of how local government operates can make it more difficult for the community to participate. Most South Africans are so unaware of the operations and even the existence of public institutions that they are unable to use the mechanisms to contact such institutions effectively. Community members in a given municipality may not be able to communicate their needs, issues, and goals to their ward councillors because they lack knowledge and understanding of public institutions and their roles. Therefore, the public should be informed or educated on how they will be engaged when the necessity for public participation emerges. Public participation may be ineffective if the general public is not informed about the operations, processes, and even technical issues of local government.

**Poor Participation Skills**

The availability and successful utilisation of talents is a predictor of community participation. Competencies such as public discourse, community organisation, collaboration, leadership, effective mobilisation, and the capacity to participate in interviews through radio and television talk programs, as well as public hearings. People who lack the necessary skills in public speaking and community coordination may feel intimidated by the atmosphere of involvement and as a result, withhold their participation.

**Unsuitable Community Coordinate**

The success of participation is critically dependent on community organisation. Communities that are well-organised are more likely to be successful in the participation process than those that are not. This can be linked to the ability of their members to effectively coordinate their efforts and focus on solving their shared concerns. As a result, poorly organized communities may have a detrimental impact on involvement.

**Divers Population**

A diverse population leads to language diversity, and as such communities' sociocultural and language diversity may make it difficult for people to participate effectively in a particular decision. As a result of population diversity in local government, community engagement may suffer. Most people in the local community of South Africa do not speak English as their first

language. Nonetheless, it serves as the principal language of communication during meetings and public interactions with municipal officials, which may adversely affect the efficacy of community involvement in the political decision-making process.

### **Community Disposition to Participation**

How people react to community programs may depend on how public leaders and members of the public feel about public engagement. When such attitudes are negative, issues may arise. People's preconceived notions of community participation may be the cause of negative sentiments toward it.

### **Inappropriate Participants**

In some cases, the participant in community engagement both at the local authority and at the community is not representative of all citizens. As a result, what is best for them might not always be best for everyone else in the local authority. For example, someone's preference may not be the same as that of another person.

### **Deficient Feedback Report**

Another significant challenge is the lack of a plan for providing feedback to the community. The general public should be informed with progress reports on the issues raised during policy formulation at every service delivery or public involvement event. Members of the public need to be sure that their inputs are acknowledged and utilized. Information or feedback should be promptly passed to relevant stakeholders on the implementation of policy to be evaluated by the community.

### **Discussion**

This section discussed the key findings from the reviewed literatures. These key findings focus on strategies adopted for community engagement as political decisions on issues of service delivery in South Africa, benefits of community engagement in service delivery and those challenges inhibiting community engagement in service delivery.

As revealed from the reviewed literature on the strategies adopted for community engagement in service delivery, Mpabanga (2022) in his study, public participation, service delivery and development corroborate that, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma Local Municipality adopted five primary methods for community participation. According to him, in addition to regular meetings, there are municipal public meetings in the form of an IDP and budget outreach program, ward committee meetings, izimbizo, and war chambers. However, these strategies and other peculiar ones were revealed as the key strategies, but the study also criticised that, these community engagement strategies did not adequately reflect the disenfranchised and under-represented people who lacked access to the resources needed to participate on such platforms and where gatherings of people were restricted, for example, during the era COVID-19 pandemic when community development discussions must continue, public participation was affected because there were no virtual community gatherings using electronic media (Davids, *et al.*, 2021). As a result, Davids and Theron (2014) established that community participation strategies in South Africa's could be regarded as haphazard, unstructured, unbalanced, and disorganized. Citing the e-toll saga in Gauteng and the N2 Gate Way Housing Project in Cape Town, as a typical fact that community engagement is merely a window dressing.

The study also revealed that, participation by traditional leaders in a sine qua non to community development. This result was invalidated by Section 5 of The Traditional Leadership and Government Framework (TLGF, 2003). The framework promotes cooperation between traditional councils and municipalities based on the idea of collaborative governance (Republic of South Africa, 1996). The partnership between traditional leaders and municipalities will help to identify community needs and facilitate community engagement in the implementation of municipal development programmes and integrated development planning process.

Petunia (2020) revealed from study carried out that Mbombela Local Municipality could not account for even one single effect of community engagement on service delivery that took place in their municipality. Another study conducted by Mosotho (2013) at ward committees in the Aganang and Blouberg local municipalities revealed that community participation programmes have no significant effect on service delivery in the Capricorn district of Limpopo, due to the absence of provision of feedback on community service delivery by the local authorities. As a result of no genuine institutional structures to coordinate evaluate and monitor community participation in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of Integrated Development Planning IDP, the effect of community participation may not be felt. This increases the likelihood of institutional conflict in community engagement. The entire community engagement process has suffered from negative multiplier effects as a result of a lack of planning. The majority of the planning involved finding a location and telling the neighbourhood of the upcoming meeting. Other measures to ensure positive outcomes of community participation was not taken into account.

### **Conclusion**

For a better understanding of the issues in the sustainability of the condition of local government in South Africa, research on community engagement requires thorough investigation, as a result, the study aimed to investigate the role of community engagement as political decisions on issues of service delivery in the South African municipalities. Specifically, it looked at the strategies, methods, mechanisms or approaches adopted for community engagement on service delivery, the effect of the engagement among community members and the challenges of community engagement. There is no clear definition of roles for the community in the formulation of policy or programme execution and implementation process of service delivery. Thus, unclear definition leads to haphazard participation. Historically, the post-apartheid period in South Africa marked the paradigm shift and was constitutionally recognised for community engagement, the experience during the apartheid period was the marginalisation of some sections of society. The main objective of a democratically governed state is to provide and adequately deliver service of development agenda to restore the undemocratic legacy of the apartheid government. There is a need for

the local authorities to maintain, sustain, and strengthen the key strategies, and set out additional modalities for the effectiveness and efficient community engagement while all the identified challenges are addressed.

### Recommendations

With respect to the reviewed literature, the following recommendations were made;

- To track the results of community participation programmes, monitoring measures should be implemented.
- Emphasis should be placed on a better understanding of local diversity, such as power relations and social inequality. These are prerequisites for effective community engagements.
- To succeed in community engagement efforts, diverse interest groups within the community must be well managed, when planning community participation.
- The managers of the community engagement process need to have the essential skills and abilities. This will allow them to recognize and manage the different actors and their differing opinions.
- The use and improvement of ICT in promoting community participation should be encouraged at the municipal level.
- There should be an adequate monitoring device to monitor the impact of community participation programmes.

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Authors declare no conflict of interest what so ever

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