

An Assessment of the Community Participation in the Budgeting Process of Amathole District Municipality in the Eastern Cape of South Africa

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ABSTRACT This paper assessed the the community participation in the budgeting process of Amathole District Municipality (ADM) in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The objective of the paper was to examine if the community are being involved in the budgeting process of ADM. The study used a review of documents for data collection in order to debates, critics, reflects and discusses various barriers affecting the community members from participating in the budgeting process in South Africa. The findings show that municipalities are not developing the effective capacity that would encourage the community to participate fully in their Integrated Development Plan (IDP) processes. Municipalities are not characterizing by a high standard of professional ethics. Undoubtedly, the finding of this paper would be useful to the members of the public, various Local Governments in South Africa and other African countries in order to achieve a successful community participation in the budgetary process. The paper finally suggested that the municipality should develop a strong capacity in community participation in the IDP process. Municipalities should be characterised by a high standard of professional ethics, efficiency and transparency.

INTRODUCTION

Focusing on community participation, especially on budgeting process, and “infrastructure development, the competitive advantages of both economies can be extrapolated to ensure meaningful growth and positive livelihood change” (Van Donk 2008). The core of community participation “is to involve local people and institutions in the development of their local economies by focusing on opportunities for economic growth, employment creation, through empowerment as well as social and economic transformation”. Hence, community participation is about community people of Amathole and its municipality “working together to achieve sustainable economic growth that brings economic benefits and quality of life improvements for all in the community”. “Its main purpose is to build up the economic capacity of a local area to improve its economic future and the quality of life for all” (Van Donk 2008: 276).

Amathole means calves, the name of the mountain range and forest, which forms the northern of the district. The Amathole District Municipal-

ity “was established after the first transformed local government elections in December 2000. The district lies at the heart of the Eastern Cape Province and is presently home to about 1.7 million people. The economy of the district is dominated by Buffalo City, which comprises the coastal city of East London, King William’s Town, and the provincial administrative capital of Bhisho (Van donk 2008: 275). “The Amathole District is also challenge to improve water and sanitation services. Even in the urban areas, the bulk water capacity needs upgrading. Increasing urbanization and coastal development highlight the lack of access to raw water and unreliable ground water”. Furthermore, the region has struggled to attract viable businesses to the area and create a meaningful number of employment opportunities for local inhabitants”.

Problem Statement

There have been several controversies or debates on the fact that the community participation should be strictly adhere to as a cornerstone or essential ingredients in order to ensure effec-

tive and a successful budgetary decision-making process for the community. There have been several instances whereby many communities have been neglected by the Local Government (LG) from participating or to expressing their opinions in the budget speech of the municipality. In fact, they are often rejected, and not recognised to participation in the budgetary decision-making process. In addition, ignorance, poor access to information and lack of important awareness of the benefits or purpose of the need for people involvement in the budgetary decision-making procedure have been observed as the major gaps in this paper.

Objectives of the Research

- ♦ To assess the extent of community participation in the budgeting process of Amathole District Municipality (ADM) in the Eastern Cape

Research Question

To what extent has the ADM in the Eastern Cape participate in the budgeting process?

METHODOLOGY

This paper used a review of literature from journals, books, dissertations and internet sources. Also, the researchers used their experiences and knowledge in Public Administration discourses on issues pertaining to the value of community participation in the budgetary process in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Community Participation on Budget Process

Community participation on budget process is a generally new occurrence on South African soil (Mfenguza 2007). The past government made race-based regions to encourage and direct the concealment of involvement by African, Indian and Coloured Communities. Under politically sanctioned racial segregation, the majority of power dwelled at the centre with the third sphere government being the most reduced level inside a strict various levelled structure. Thus, there was just negligible space for important public involvement in basic leadership process. The third sphere

government framework was organised to improve the programme of racial isolation and prohibition. Regarding people group support and involvement, South African history reflects almost no open door for group cooperation basically in light of the fact that the third sphere government in South Africa had until the mid-1990's no sacred protect, as it was seen as an auxiliary augmentation of the state and a component of regional government (Nkantini 2005). However, since the downfall of the famous politically sanctioned racial segregation government, pioneers of the new South Africa were constrained to make space for community involvement. In an attempt to expatiate in details on public involvement, the new government focused on a procedure of decaying political and managerial authority and exchanged it to autonomous local level statutory office, for instance, to regions or ward committees. The new government views group support as a foundation of popular government, which is the reason the regions are urge to include community on basic leadership process, for instance, the community involvement and appeal to structure in Amathole District Municipality was received in July 2008 (Nkantini 2005: 26).

Community Participation

In the local administration forms, the contribution of natives and involvement is imperative and it advances the civil improvement (Mfenguza 2007). The United Nations is best and well known with the stress on community involvement in development. It defines participation as "the creation of opportunities to enable all members of a community and the larger society to actively contribute to, and influence the development process and to share equitably in the fruits of development" (Midgley et al. 1986: 24). Community participation has links with the interest in democracy in community organization and in self – help and political incorporation in the community development tradition. According to Section 59 of the Constitution 1996 of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996), the communities are encouraged to participate in the committee structures. Community participation in local government uses ward committees (South Africa Constitution 1996). The "Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998) provides for ward committees to be set up in municipalities" (South Africa Municipal Structure Act 1998).

The “primary function of a ward committee is to be a formal communication channel between the community and the municipal council. Participation also occurs at the ward level, which includes the identification of development needs. The ward committees are the structures that are constitutionally established for community participation. These elected representatives are expected to report back regularly to their voters, the community, in order to obtain ratification of their decisions on behalf of the community”. Importantly, the 1996 Constitution of South Africa also importantly emphasized that communities must participate in the local government activities that would be of benefit to them (South Africa Constitution 1996). “Out of the abovementioned conditions, the New Government designed some programmes that are in place to try to reduce poverty, like, IDP, service delivery, Local Economic Development (LED) and Democratization. These programmes in the municipalities are not implemented in the way they supposed to be. Instead, they create some problems within the municipalities and the communities they supposed to serve. Thus, the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) programme comes in (Meyer 2014)”.

Levels of Participation

“Ababio (2004) differentiates among five levels of participation: Firstly, inform, that is to provide the community with balanced and objective information to enable people to understand the problem, alternatives and solutions. Secondly, consult, that involves obtaining feedback on analysis, alternatives and decisions. It also involves acknowledging concerns and providing feedback on how public input has influenced the decision. Thirdly, involve, the ultimate aim is to work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that community issues and concerns are understood and considered at an early stage. Fourthly, collaborate, the objective being to involve the community as equal partners on each aspect of decision-making, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solutions. Fifthly, empower, the aim being to place the final decision in the hands of the community”. This will ensure that the decisions taken by the municipal council are easily accepted by the community. Bekker (1996) explains “community participation as merely re-

ceiving information by the community from authorities about proposed actions and the sharing of power to shape the final decisions. Thus, community participation essentially means allowing as many people as possible to be involved in the decision-making process since the community as customers of local government, are naturally more responsive to the public needs than are government officials (Du Toit et al. 1998). It is worthy to note that there are different types of participation”.

Structures, Mechanisms and Processes used for Public Participation

Masango (2002) suggests a number of ways to promote what he calls “effective public participation” in the policy process. The ward committee system and the sub-council system are the two main structures for community participation.

Ward Committees

Ward committees have been established as a tool to encourage community participation for municipalities that have opted to have them (South Africa Municipal Structure Act 1998). They are a creation of legislation, the Municipal Structures Act, 2000 giving effect to the Constitution. These structures are committees of not more than 10 members of a ward and a ward councillor is the chair (South Africa Municipal Structure Act 1998). Its role is to facilitate participatory democracy; disseminate information; help rebuild partnership for better service and development delivery; and assist with problems experienced by people at the ward level (South Africa Municipal Structure Act 1998).

It is important that citizens’ participation not be limited to formal structures as shown by international experience. Citizens may also be invited to participate on certain council committees such as citizens’ advisory budget committee. Some council have also created sub-council organisations to facilitate public consultation and involvement in decision-making at a more local level. As observed from other country such as United Kingdom, Councils have created a forum for all partners in the community to come together for planning and coordination.

Sub-council Participatory System

Sub-chambers are set-up by passing a by-law and are the system through which the gather-

ing may counsel people in general on their necessities and to educate them as regard the essential needs for improvements (Yusuf 2004). The essential point of the sub-board participatory framework is to decentralize basic leadership with the goal that communities in a substantial metropolitan range can take an interest in basic leadership. The sub-committee comprises of councilors speaking to each ward around there and in addition different councilors designated by the board to guarantee that each political party is spoken to as indicated by the extent of votes the party got on the relative portrayal records in the sub-committee range.

Period of Citizen Participation

Whereas the costs and benefits of having engaged citizenry have been widely discussed in the literature, few have paid attention to the question of timing, or at which stage of the budget process the public should be brought in, or how the timing of public involvement affects the performance of public agencies. Prior research points out that the public should be involved in the early stages (Beckett and King 2002). "Timing is important because input that is received late in the process is less likely to have an effect on outcomes" (Ebdon and Franklin 2006). Callanhan (2002) "solicitation of citizen input early in the budget development is the most important indicator of the process effectiveness of citizen participation." Berner (2003) surveys North Carolina's city and county managers and finds that they all value the early timing of public participation and recommend that citizens get involved in the beginning of the process:

Resident information should come at a moment that a prescribed spending plan is adequately created to give data that can help nationals in giving info, however before the Board has settled on choices or framed conclusions (Guo and Neshkova 2012). When engaged early in the process of budget development, citizens become knowledgeable about fiscal situations, which in turn allows them to make informed decision when casting votes on fiscal matters (Beckett and King 2002; Ebdon and Franklin 2006). Drawing on the example of citizen initiatives aiming to limit the taxing power of the government, Beckett and King (2002) demonstrate that uninformed citizens tend to consider short-term private gain instead of long-term public benefit. Furthermore, they ar-

gue that engaging the public in a deliberative way during the budget process contributes to more meaningful public participation. Similarly, Ebdon (2002) suggests that one way to help citizens develop a more macro level view of budget trade-offs is to combine education and participation early in the process, at the budget development stage".

Challenges in Community Participation

Political connection – there is dependably of this contention in the community that the chose authorities particularly the ward delegates that once somebody doesn't have a place with the political party that is in the regions there will be no effective delivery of services for them (Mfenguza 2007). Mfenguza further stressed that, for anybody to be recognised as a party member within a political party, he must be a registered member of a certain political party. This action is restraining or is excluding the involvement of some kind of individuals in the community and it becomes selected participation (Qwabe and Mdaka 2011).

CONCLUSION

The study recognized that it is very imperative for every municipality to have a proper communication structure and effective communication channels within its communities. This would assist them to effectively and efficiently disseminate information across to the various people easily. In fact, effective and substantial information could sufficiently reach a huge number of people within several communities either through newsletter for those who have the ability to read and write, hold regular meetings either every month, twice in a month, quarterly or twice in a year. In order to effectively ensure successive participatory democracy, all the principles of democracy must be strictly adhered to, these include: inclusivity, diversity, transparency, flexibility, accessibility, accountability, trust, committed and respect and building of the community capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ♦ The municipality should build up their own strong capacity of the community in order to ensure successful, effective and efficient

participation in the IDP processes. Municipalities should avoid all bad or negative behaviours that could detrimental to their duties or tarnished their image. They should be seen with a high standard of professional ethics, impartiality, effectiveness and transparency. Service delivery should become a priority as municipalities optimize access to all communities.

- ♦ The municipal officers should work together with ward committees in order to ensure that the communities are completely engaged in the development programmes in the villages.
- ♦ It is very important to also emphasise that the coordination of the Council, the organising meetings and committees' matters with regard to budget, which includes assigning revenue and capital resources to various services, programmes and projects should be firmly handled by capable and competent Local Government employees.

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