EXPLORING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ISSUES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

The article explores public participation, which has been gaining momentum over time to the extent that it has become ubiquitous. South Africa is one of the countries, which readily adopted public participation, but it still lax in praxis even in twenty years of democracy. A qualitative study was employed to explore public participation at local sphere of government. The article argues that municipalities are more likely to crumble if they do not engage in public participation collectively in a more action result driven orientation. It is for this reason that if the public renge on their rights to participate in municipal affairs, local government must double their effort to encourage their community to buy into the system through addressing issues that are of interest to them.

Keywords: Public participation, empowerment, democracy, policy, South Africa.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa has one of the progressive constitutions in the world (Buccus et.al, 2007). It includes the municipal legislative framework that provides for community participation in decision-making at municipal level. However, findings suggest in contrary that citizens have not enjoyed the fruits of this constitution satisfactorily, partly due to severe poverty but mainly due to failure by the state to provide basic services.

A case in point is South Africa’s housing process is characterised by the previously disadvantaged being deprived of housing and property rights hence community protests which are challenging the legitimacy of the government of the time (Khan & Ambert, 2003: 4). The current housing policy is rooted in the pre- 1994 era as the policy was framed “in the course of National Housing Forum negotiations to address what (some influential) stakeholders saw as the
threat of ‘uncontrolled’ urbanisation and the ‘perilous politicization’ of housing question’ (Khan & Ambert, 2003:4). The emphasis on housing delivery is compounded by the fact that the country’s housing shortage, according to the National Housing Department, was at 2, 2 million in 1997. Due to an ever-increasing population, this figure is estimated to increase by 204000 every year (NHC, 2000b).

The provision of housing is a developmental practice and development cannot prevail without public participation (Roodt, 2001:466). As echoed in the Manila Declaration on People’s Participation and Sustainable Development, which took place in 1989 as such “Public participation is an essential part of human growth that is the development of self-confidence, pride, initiative, responsibility, cooperation, without such development within the people themselves, all efforts to alleviate their poverty are immensely more difficult, if not impossible”.

To this end, it needs to be realised that each development initiative takes place in a different context and for this reason the right combination of public participation strategies need to be used. As each situation is different, “effective, efficient and equitable stakeholder engagement depends largely on selecting the right combination of approaches and techniques for a particular process. There is, however, no single recipe for making this selection – particularly when operating in the context of a multi-cultural, developing country” (DEAT, 2002:14). Against this backdrop, the article is structured in broad sections, in de novo, beginning with the background and then, exploration of critical issues of public participation.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

In clearly understanding the concept of public participation, it is important to cite several definitions that relates to this discussion. As defined by Greyling & Manyaka (1999: 1) public participation is a “process leading to a joint effort by stakeholders, technical specialists, the authorities and the proponent who work together to produce better decisions than if they had acted independently” (in DEAT, 2002: 6). From this definition it can be realized that participation is seen as a decision-making process and aims to include the views of stakeholders at all levels of the process, (Hoosen, undated: 2). However, according to Beinier public participation is engaging openly and respectfully in “give and take” discussions with citizens and stakeholders about an impending decision or action, (Bernier, 2005: 2), well as COPR on the other hand defines public participation as the process by which an organisation consults with interested or affected individuals, organisations, and government entities before making a decision. Public participation is two-way communication and collaborative problem solving with the goal of achieving better and more acceptable decisions (COPR, 2008: 1). The primary objective of public participation is to demonstrate to the public that the right decisions are being made on balance of scale for the right reasons. This is because the role of public participation in South Africa cannot be undermined or overrides economic, personal, technological aspirations in the public sector as its past compels the government to correct injustices (Oakley, 1991: 6).

It is important to differentiate public participation from consultation. Looking first at consultation, it involves actively seeking the opinions of interested and affected groups. It is a two-way flow of information, which may occur at any stage of regulatory development, from
problem identification to evaluation of existing regulation. It may be a one-stage process or, as it is increasingly the case, a continuing dialogue. On one hand, consultation is increasingly concerned with the objective of gathering information to facilitate the drafting of higher quality regulation. On the other hand, participation is the active involvement of interest groups in the formulation of regulatory texts. Participation is usually meant to facilitate implementation and improve compliance, consensus, and political support. However, there are instances where participation and consultation merge. For instance public participation usually involves notification (to publicise the matter to be consulted on), consultation (a two-way flow of information and opinion exchange) as well as participation (involving interest groups in the drafting of policy or legislation).

The point of departure is to define participatory democracy in respect to the South African political landscape. In South Africa the concept of participatory democracy is framed on the premise of a political shift from the apartheid epoch that was characterised by a system which was repressive and non-consultative, to the one that is underpinned by democratic values and public participation. Ismail et al (1997:28) view participatory democracy as a political system that tends to emphasise people’s direct involvement in the decision making process. According to section 152 (1a) of the Republic of South Africa Constitution, 1996, local government must provide a democratic and accountable government for local communities. Local democracy as enshrined in the constitution means that the communities must fully take part in the affairs of their local government. The political paradigm came in with a form of democracy that is participatory so that the citizenship must be involved in dealing with issues affecting them. The concept of participation and democracy are interrelated. Nsingo and Kuye (2005:749) reiterate that there can be no reference to democracy without reference to participation and further states that the two terms are intertwined. A true democracy cannot be applicable without participation (Van Craneneburgh, 2011: 444). According to Van Craneneburgh, (2011:443) democracy is good governance, accountability, participation, and human rights. The values form the pillars of true democracy in any democratic state, especially in South Africa.

The theory underpinning this study according to Freire and Castells (1972:7) is participation as political empowerment originating from economic development theory and theories of development. The empowerment approach to community participation is located within the radical paradigm of alternative development and manifests itself in the mobilisation of popular political power. With intellectual origins in neo-Marxist, this approach locates participation within a wider political struggle that links the condition of under-development with access to political power. South Africa, (Bond, 2001:4) is the most prominent articulator of ideas within the empowerment tradition. Originally participation within this tradition found expression in popular resistance movements within South America, Asia and South Africa. At the local government and community interface, participation within this approach manifested itself in dialogical forums where stakeholder groups with a political empowerment agenda engages the local state in participation on a wide range of development issues. The existence of dialogical forums is no longer as prevalent and dominant as they were prior to 1994, but still forms the dominant mode of participation in the preparation of IDPs and provides the backdrop for some types of community based organisations.
In developing countries, such as South Africa, democracy is influenced by public participation. It is desired that the people of South Africa should be directly involved in decision making processes. Apart from the election process, people must be involved in issues of government; therefore, in this context public participation and democracy are inseparable. Democracy means empowering people, especially women, workers, youth, and rural people in the decision making processes that directly affect their daily lives (ANC, 2009:3). The government cannot work alone and suddenly present development projects that would not address the needs of the people. People must take ownership and be involved in all projects that directly affect their lives.

The concept of participatory democracy means that people must own the government, as stated in the Freedom Charter “the people shall govern”. Therefore those that are in government must participate in community affairs in such a way that they mobilise and capacitate people on the ground to participate effectively and meaningfully in government processes. This is supported by the election strategy of the African National Congress (2009) that say, “Together we shall do more”. Indeed much can be done if the ANC government could practice participatory democracy in the form of doing things together, and not just as a mere consultation and campaigning tactic. Presumably, if the government in power can take cognizance of the people then all the developmental objectives, such as fighting poverty through decent work, better education, health, housing and rural development, would be more easily achieved. Barber (2003:151) reiterates this when referring to self-government by citizens rather than representative government in the name of citizens. In South Africa this is appears to be perfect political system to address the atrocities of the past but only when it is well implemented.

The National Framework on Public Participation (DPLG, 2005:2) coins public participation as an open and accountable process through which individuals and groups within selected communities can exchange views and influence decision-making. In simple terms, public participation is when people involve themselves, to a greater or lesser degree, in organisations directly or indirectly concerned with the decision making about and implementation of development (Coetzee and Graaf, 1996:312).

In South Africa public participation should not focus on acculturating the African people into the Western culture, as opposed to the colonial period when the colonialists came in with a modernisation agenda. African people were discouraged to do things in their own way but were required to follow the western style, and even forced to change their way of life to accomplish that (Swanepoel and De Beer, 1997: xiii). When people participate in this process the agenda should not be that of the elites and monopolies deciding what needs to be done for the poor. Public participation should be characterised by a two-way interactive process that is equal in input from both the government and the people. It should not be one-way communication initiated by those in power or a situation where the government plans programmes, which the people must simply receive. People of a community or a village know what they have and what they need. Developmental agencies and government should thus consult with the people on all developmental issues, as they (the people) know their needs. The nature of development that will take place within a city will differ to the nature of the development that takes place in the rural areas; therefore, the people concerned must be consulted because they exactly know what type of aid they would want to receive.
Participation that is in the form of political patronage is not appropriate. In South Africa the agenda of public participation is motivated by the objectives of development, which is the agenda that is espoused in the Freedom Charter (1955). The aim of participation in the democratic processes is to fight poverty and make the communities self-reliant, freeing them from being dependent on NGOs for provisions. This is supported by Swanepoel and De Beer (1997: xiii), when stating that development is not about placing facilities among the poor or creating infrastructure; development is about relieving the community from the poverty trap so that they can take responsibility of their own destiny. As the local government is in the midst of the public; public participation is unavoidable if good governance is the desired outcome.

This means that local government cannot shun public participation; it must simply embrace it. Further, though the distance is greater between the communities and provincial and the national government that do not exonerate their obligation to public participation. In other words, all the levels of government are obliged by the Republic of South Africa Constitution, 1996 to engender public participation in their governing processes. If a government department wants to excel in its executive duties the point of departure is to engage the ordinary people in all avenues of participation.

When a local government does not ensure the participation of their community then their people might vent their frustration through strike action, which in itself is a form of poor governance. Such action has resulted in municipal property being vandalized and people losing their properties and/or lives. The underlying reason for this is that community members are not consulted on projects that affect them and are clueless as to what is happening within their municipality or neighbourhood. Another possible cause for such action is that they become uncomfortable about the councillors they have elected. These happenings can be averted only through real public participation (Carrim, 2010:1).

It is also important to point that good public participation can only be established through public participants with good intentions. In most cases criticism about public participation is levelled against the government representatives and officials, especially at the level of local government while those who must constitute the public arena, which are the communities, remain most often forgotten. The government cannot participate meaningfully if the people are not committed. The government has to capacitate and educate people on the importance of public participation and create avenues. In The Municipal Systems Act (2000, Section 16(1) of Chapter 4) it is stated that the municipality must develop a culture of municipal governance that complements the formal representative government with a system of participatory governance, and must for this purpose encourage and create conditions for the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality. Community participation deepens democracy by giving local citizens a direct say in a range of decisions and processes which affect them (Municipal Systems Act of 2000, Section 17(2) of Chapter 4).

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLATFORMS AND CHALLENGES

In showing that sustainable development cannot do without public participation, there have been several efforts on the part of the South African government and the civil society to create
platforms, which can enhance public participation at grassroots. The most common civil society organisations are South African NGO Coalition (SANGOCO), South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the People’s Budget Coalition (PBC). Deepening progressive civil society participation, within a new democratic state, meant that many of the common economic and social policy positions held by coalition partners could be channelled through one voice (Thompson, 2009:1).

Against this backdrop, the Peoples Budget Coalition PBC was formed to enhance public participation and monitoring of the national budgetary process, to widen the parameters of debate on economic and social policy in South Africa, and to use the People’s Budget as a tool for mass mobilisation and action. To do this, the PBC aims to increase the effective use of the budget as an instrument for reconstruction and development, and specifically to ensure that the budget is planned and allocated in such a way that it meets the basic needs of the poor. This is done so that it leads to the creation of decent jobs as well as ensuring the majority of people are assisted to get access to basic services and skills, and that it supports democratic and participatory governance.

While the PBC is a high-level civil society initiative, it boasts of being rooted among active members of its respective organizations, who are in turn elected at grassroots level, thereby ensuring effective public participation. A challenge for the PBC is to ensure that its policy views reflect those of the many ordinary community members, workers, church parishes, and community-based organisations that it represents. The school of thought proposed by scholars like Robert Chambers (1994:4) that development projects and programmes cannot be overly successful without the public participation of the intended beneficiaries, can be found in the examples of development projects that have not been very successful in a local context.

An example of the PBC situation is that of the Duncan Village in East London, where the Buffalo City Municipality is currently involved in a planning initiative aimed at housing the residents of Duncan Village. Much debate exists over the appropriate methods to use in redeveloping this densely populated shack town. Planners are striving to meet the challenges associated with this kind of community redevelopment, such as, adequate housing, limited land availability, appropriate urban forms, and government requirements for housing subsidies. However, despite the thoughtfulness of development policies and an increased awareness of local circumstances in Duncan Village, the Buffalo City Municipality has still not been able to implement an effective system of participatory planning (Kay, 2006: 512). As a result, housing and development strategies are still not effectively reaching community based organizations, families and individuals and local residents are still not empowered to effect substantial change in the community. This is largely due to a strong desire by the local government to maintain a coherent master plan, a culture of civil resistance within Duncan Village, and an untested local political system.

In response to the challenges planners have encountered, when trying to implement redevelopment plans for the shanty towns of South Africa, anthropologist Stevens Robins cautions that “although there are no clear and obvious answers to these questions, it is only through further fine-grained ethnographic research in specific sites that planners will get closer to understanding the micro-politics and improvisational strategies” of those who live in these
shanty towns (Robins, 2002:1). As the forced removals of Duncan Village were planned at the same time as the construction of the Mdantsane Township, the government was unable to remove the entire population of Duncan Village at once, because sufficient housing had not been constructed in the new township. In the meantime, African resistance to forced removals grew in intensity throughout the 1960s and 70s and eventually disrupted the government’s attempt to relocate residents to Mdantsane (Kay: 2006:511).

The same problem with implementing projects without proper and extensive public participation can be found in the Coega IDZ project, in Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality where at first glance, quite comprehensive and detailed public participation processes seem to have been conducted (Bond, 1999:1). However, this is doubtful if one considers the history of the project, which is vexed in controversy and public dispute that is threatening to all, but stall it (Burger & Bradshaw, 2002:2). The proposed Coega development is popularly presented as of great importance but at the same time may have far-reaching implications for the region, environment and community surrounding it. Since the idea was first raised, the proposed project evoked much conflict and controversy, because of the absence of consultation with communities, who would be, in any way, obviously affected by the project (Bond, 1999:3). It is not only the validity of the public participation processes, conducted in connection with the project, which was questioned. Other processes questioned include the project’s economic viability, its socio-environmental impact and the public accountability of the concerned development agency (the Coega Development Corporation). All this controversy and public disputes have cast serious doubts upon the public participation processes conducted in connection with this project (Burger & Bradshaw, 2002:4).

Looking at ecological and conservation issues public participation is a legal requirement of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, allowing interested and affected parties the opportunity to provide their viewpoints as well as influence the process and decision making (Republic of South Africa, 2006). This has come at a time in South Africa so as to address apartheid policies that have prevented any form of participation in decision-making processes; especially by black people that led to marginalization and grave injustices (Wiseman & Rossouw, 2004:3). Hence, there is a need for including “invisible” stakeholders and marginalized communities to enhance democracy and improve environmental outcomes (Scott & Oelofse, 2005:2).

Another public participation case in point is that of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), being the active environmental public participation platform within the region for the past twelve years. SDCEA is currently active in various environmental issues that affect the community and South Durban region where the community want “one consultation on one vision for one development” for South Durban residents and allies now campaigning against the port expansion and associated projects are dismayed and outraged at the manner in which stakeholder engagement for the Dug-out Port, the Back of Port Local Area plan and related projects has commenced (Wiseman, K. & Rossouw, N. 2004:6).

The people who have been affected by this R250 billion project have repeatedly demanded that planning must be interrogated as one holistic public participation process, to create a
development vision and plan for an all the people of South Durban. Up until now, the fragmented strategy of government and Transnet has prevented a full perspective on the scope of the project. The result is an extremely high level of alienation by affected residents and a sense that the consultation process is being manipulated.

To date no clarity from government about how the one promised consultative process will work. Communities still have to deal with multiple processes Nevertheless, the impression was created both that these groups attendance was organised at the last moment and that, as South African NGO Coalition SANGOCO members, they were assumed to support the ruling party and the port expansion. However it backfired on government the audience made it plain that this is a charade and not a public consultation. From all sides, whether from SANGOCO or South Durban, they questioned whether these mega-projects will deliver the promised jobs and development (Wiseman, K. & Rossouw. 2004:7).

The Centre for Governance in Africa (CGA) is an International Development Agency South Africa programme promoting good governance practices in South Africa and its regional neighbours. It receives funding from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) to implement a program to strengthen the capacity of NGOs and other civil society organizations in the Eastern Cape Province. The program also is trying to improve civil society’s understanding of institutional structures and the quality of their participation in legislative governance, specifically with the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature. The method used by the CGA is described as an inclusive, non-antagonistic approach. Rather than advocating directly to the civil society or the provincial legislature, the CGA looks first and foremost to link the two as a means of facilitating public participation. It works within the provisions of the Constitution by encouraging this interaction between civil society and government informal, existing structures.

The geographic focus of the African Growth Fund is based in eastern and southern Africa, including the program in South Africa. The AusAID program comprises three separate components: Support for Democratisation; Support for Trade Liberalization and Support for Emerging Issues. Idasa applied for and received funding from AusAID under a program in Component 1: Support for Democratisation. The purpose of this component is to strengthen democratic processes that are transparent and accountable. It focuses on strengthening electoral processes, parliamentary committee structures and anticorruption measures. Specifically the CGA programme received its funding to establish public participation forums and local government centres. In South Africa the CGA has focused its efforts in the Eastern Cape and Gauteng provinces (AusAID, 2005:23).

In 2005 the CGA was involved in running two programmes in South Africa: one was in the Eastern Cape and the other in Gauteng, so the CGA had to begin work at the provincial level rather than just at the national level. The Eastern Cape was identified through discussions with local partners regarding considerable disjoints between civil society and government, Chiwandimira.L, 2005:34).

Gauteng by contrast had a sophisticated network of NGOs, but these NGOS did not interact with the Gauteng legislature on a regular basis. Because they were so well organized they chose to
address the national assembly in Cape Town instead. The CGA was tasked with working with existing institutions of governance at the local and provincial levels. It was mandated to assist with the establishment of public participation forums and local government centres. The desired outcomes of the regional programme consisted of: enhanced participation of citizens in policy making processes at local, provincial and national levels; improved interface between citizens and policy making processes to bridge the gap between citizens and governance processes; existence of a coordinated voice for civil society in policy making processes at local, provincial and national levels; increased knowledge amongst citizens and civil society organizations on how to analyse policies vis a vis service delivery; increased knowledge amongst policy makers (legislators at local and provincial levels) on how to interact with citizens; established public participation frameworks and forums in the selected countries; strengthened capacity of civil society organisations, staff of public participation units on effective interaction with democratic legislatures at local and provincial levels,(Idasa.CGA,2005:4). AusAID assumed the oversight role in the process. They provide funding and quality control and the CGA programme manager produces quarterly report of findings and analysis for them.

In late November 2005, CGA staffers travelled to the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature’s offices in Bisho to facilitate public hearings between provincial legislators and members of the community (Makaula, 2005:7). The public hearings addressed government initiatives to create health centres and standardize the ukwalukwa circumcision rite of passage for young men going on to be initiated into Xhosa society. During the course of this initiation participates are often left without food or water for days at a time. This poses serious health risks to some participants. Health administrators have taken into consideration numerous deaths in recent years due to these conditions. Provincial legislators drafted and passed the Health Standards of Traditional Circumcision Act in 2001, which provides for certain health standards in the traditional circumcision process. Health administrators have further created health centres (voluntary) for these participants to assess their health prior to their initiation. Further it requires that any circumcision in the province may not be conducted without the permission of a medical officer or that the initiate may participate without written permission from the medical officer(Zuzile.M,2005:8).This programme has caused considerable division between those supporting government actions to prevent deaths and those who reject government intervention into traditional practices.

The controversy revolves around a lack of knowledge from the public about the government initiative and creation of these centres. The CGA’s role was the facilitation of a Question and Answer session. Working together with the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature and the Buffalo City Municipality office, the CGA worked to mobilize communities to take an active part in the issue of health centres. Public hearings were held in four locations: Mooiplaas, Cecilia Makiwana, Tsholominqa and Butterworth during the week of 28 November - 22 December 2005. The hearings facilitated in part by the CGA lasted five hours from 10am – 2pm in each location. The Q&A session began with a background presentation by provincial MPs on the motivation for the government initiative. The MPs outlined the details of the Health Standards of Traditional Circumcision Act, No. 6 of 2001 of the Eastern Cape Provincial Legislature(ECPl,No.6 of 2001).Members of the public were then invited to ask questions of the MPs and give suggestions and opinions regarding the legislation making process.
It was observed by a CGA staff member that those not in favour of the health clinics and who advocated a traditional approach with less government intervention, generally stayed away from the public hearings. Further the members of public that did come to participate in the formal process were more often those that had supported the government initiative to construct health centres.

CGA staff members also reported that there was an increased call for more women’s participation in the process. It must be noted that the common view is that circumcision is considered a masculine matter. Despite having stakes in the possible outcomes of the ukwaluka, women face cultural stigmas discouraging their participation. These outcomes are of great consequence to women, many of who are mothers in single-parent households and provide primary care for these initiates. The death of these initiates has real consequences, often because they become income winners of the extended family. A proposal was heard at the public hearing that came from a woman who suggested the creation of a workshop for soon-to-be initiates that clearly explained the initiation process and prepared the initiates for the process (Makaula, 2005:5). CGA staff members deemed that there was a good level of general understanding from the public about the process of public hearings. The CGA’s role in this case example was the facilitation of these hearings and the notification of the relevant NGOs to come and contribute. The CGA database of Eastern Cape NGOs was used to identify relevant organizations and notify them about the ongoing hearings. However, the issues that face the CGA in these hearings remain numerous. The CGA and local partners are looking to find solutions to the problem of these traditionalist groups not attending to voice dissent to the legislation.

The Niall Mellon Foundation (NMF) is non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in housing projects in Cape Town (South Africa) involved in Mfuleni housing settlement project; a township located about 40km outside Cape Town. This settlement was developed by the local authority as a site-and-services initiative about 5 years ago in order to relocate squatters who had illegally occupied open land in the area. The residents were then given individual plots that included service connections and a portable pre-fab toilet. The residents built informal houses on the plots and opened home-based economic activities like shops, stores, garages, etc. The NMF replaced the informal shacks by 42m2 concrete block detached houses. According to the NMF, the objective of the project was to ‘build 209 houses by the end of 2006, taking the same number of families out of shacks and into decent brick homes’ (Niall Mellon Foundation, 2006). Due to the location of the detached houses in the middle of the plot the future construction of backyard shacks were deliberately discouraged. Residents were required to give away their shacks after they are given what the NMF calls ‘a decent home’. This was a controversial measure that certainly required further analysis. Opponents of informal shacks, such as officers of the NMF, argued that those informal constructions are not appropriate for living and therefore need to be discouraged and ‘eradicated’ once ‘proper’ housing is built to replace them (Niall Mellon Foundation, 2006). This naive attitude underestimated four important realities. Firstly; the rental space in backyard shacks provided an additional source of income to poor families. Accommodation in an informal shack in the Cape Town area can range (in 2000) from R75 to R200 for a single room (Boaden & Karam, 2000). Various studies have found that this is an important source of income for low-income families (DAG, 2004). secondly; a shack was a way of accumulating capital for the poorest families. As was the study conducted by Shisaka in
various cities of South Africa allows us to understand the real value of that capital. According to this study, residents of informal housing perceived (in 2004) that their units had a value of R4000 (Shisaka, 2004). This value is further confirmed by most recent analyses of the pre-fab industry in the Cape flats, in which ‘new’ shacks of 5.513m were sold for an average price of R4000.

Thirdly, Backyard shacks were an important rental housing solution in the Cape Town market, providing a housing solution for the bottom poor families that cannot have access to property or governmental subsidies. Fourthly, Shacks were environmental friendly. Professionals have used to traditional standards of formal construction tended to consider shacks as unpleasant anomalies in the urban landscape. However, a careful look of the townships demonstrates that this is a prejudice that ignores various advantages of this informally driven solution. Shacks take full advantage of space, their construction relies on local know how and skills, they utilize locally available materials, minimize transportation costs and are an example of reuse and recycling of materials. Despite all this, the community (represented by the committee) accepted the help of the NMF and was enthusiastic about the promises of a ‘decent’ detached house. To this end, one could realise that what the community need is not only a compliance based participation process but a genuine one which at the end of the day, it is developmental and should impact on peoples’ lives as observed in the case study above.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) regulates and directs the operations and existence of local sphere of government. Section 152 of the constitution specifies that a municipality must strive to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities and encourage the involvement and empowerment of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government by putting in place functional systems and processes which has a fairly homogenous political structure. The offices of the mayors must strongly be committed to the process that drives the IDP from her/his office in conjunction with the IDP managers. He/ She have attended all the workshops and assist the IDP managers wherever possible. The councillors have to be very visible in the processes to date. The lesson here is that a strong political champion is necessary to ensure participation. The role of the IDP managers is also critical.

- The Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulations published in terms of the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) in August 2001, set out the following additional requirements for the legal enforcement of the IDP process which is seen that it has created an opportunity for many to participate in local government decision-making processes. An example here is the fact that it has been legislated that an IDP Representative Forum has to be established. It seems that a lesson is that aspects of participation need to be legally binding in order for officials to take it seriously on issues such as climate change, cultural circumcision; gender and domestic violence need to have strong forums.
The Municipal finance Management Act (Act 56 of 2003) sought to ensure closer alignment between the Municipality’s annual budget and its IDP. In order to put it in place a wide range of measures include among others the alignment in the processes of budget and IDP preparation and introduce links between the IDP, the budget and the performance management contracts of senior officials in order to support the provincial growth and development strategy, the national development plan (vision 2030) and also targeting of specific groups within a participation process is necessary to ensure that the poor and marginalised such as traditional leaders, chiefs, farm workers and women’s groups are given a voice. The participation processes for different groups are different and a system or process that acknowledges this is important in designing a municipal public participation process.

The NSDP National Spatial Development Perspective (2006) argues that the spatial configuration of our country is not only the product of investment and growth, but also of apartheid spatial planning. The resulting spatial marginalisation from economic opportunities by large segments of the country’s population is still a significant feature of our space economy. This needs to be addressed to reduce poverty and inequality, and ensure shared growth and use the case studies as development methodology to show the importance of using appropriate mechanisms to facilitate public participation. This refers to the facilitation methodology at the workshop level as well as to the establishment of appropriate structures. The strong emphasis at the workshop level on local knowledge and non-interference from outsiders will give participants a lot of confidence to raise their needs and own to their decisions in order to come up with sustainable programmes and projects which is lacking presently. The establishment of the IDP Representative Forums as a legal structure will ensure that there is ongoing participation in the IDP processes other than the ideal situation of hiring consultants who know nothing about the pressing needs of the society in question.

The National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP) seeks to guide the three spheres of government to plan and allocate resources to achieve the country’s developmental objectives. To this effect in any participation process logistical issues are central and must be budgeted and planned for. For example, if the municipality does not provide transport it would exclude the poor and marginalised from attending participatory events. A budget for ongoing participation is required, not just a once off budget as has been the case in the past.

Future challenges

- It will be a challenge to maintain the momentum and sustainability of the participatory processes. The IDP Representative Forum members need to be supported to go back to their constituencies to ensure that there is a flow of information to communities and that community can keep influencing decisions that affect them.
- Logistical support for attendance of meetings and events will have to be maintained if there is to be continued attendance at participatory events. A budget for ongoing
participation is required. Language must be considered in that most people prefer communication in Afrikaans.

- The IDP manager has the responsibility for a huge process with very little institutional support from the municipality. The challenge is thus for the Municipality to recognise the central importance of an IDP manager and to place him/her within the organisational structure to give him/her the necessary authority and also to give him/her a team and resources to work with. Internal communication arrangements will have to be improved to ensure that sectoral managers and the IDP manager can communicate effectively on an ongoing basis.
- Creative ways are required to inform people of processes. The legal requirement of advertising on the municipal boards, in libraries and in the main newspapers does not reach a large number of people. The challenge is thus for municipalities to recognise that they have to find creative ways to communicate with their constituencies.
- The community structures and area forums will have to become organised to ensure maximum participation. It will be important for them to receive ongoing information on municipal planning efforts and outcomes. It will also be important for groups and communities to build relationships across the barriers of interest and race. It is often difficult for municipalities to resolve the community conflicts within the municipal processes to the extent that they do not take action if there are community conflicts surrounding certain developments. It is therefore preferable for communities to work through their conflicts to arrive at consensus positions that the municipality would feel comfortable to deliver on.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be said that the struggle for liberation from domination and for participation in decision-making processes is far from over. The Integrated Development Planning Process of South Africa however presents some opportunities that further the aims of good local governance. The emphasis now is not so much on activism but more on rights and responsibilities of various players and on accountability in democracy.

Facilitating public participation in the South African political landscape is no easy task. With a recent history of disempowerment and disenfranchisement, South African citizens are only recently learning to embrace and exercise their rights. Currently socioeconomic factors prove to be a significant obstacle for South Africans. In South Africa the provision of essential services is not merely a favour to the community but is a constitutional matter. Those who are in public service are not doing any favour to the community in doing their work. Essential services cannot be provided as an exchange for money or anything that has a monetary value attached to it; it is the legislative obligation of those who are in government that they must fulfil. In fact, failure in this act is tantamount to weakening participatory democracy especially in the disadvantaged communities.
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