

Effective Public Participation in Municipal Service Delivery

The Case of Nyanga Township

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ABSTRACT

Prior research on South African municipalities reveals that there is a continuing decline in public participation at the local level often resulting in poor service delivery, tension between decision-makers and communities as well as a rise in violent service delivery protests (Fuo 2015:174; Umraw 2017: Online; McGowan 2017: Online). The purpose of this research was to explore innovative ways of improving water and electricity service delivery. The study was conducted in Nyanga, a township in Cape Town. The study employed a qualitative research methodology that consisted of 12 focus groups with community leaders and municipal service officials in the water and related departments. In addition, an in-depth review of relevant literature was conducted. The participants for the focus groups were selected to comprehend the potential contribution of increased public participation towards promoting joint decision-making to improve service delivery. An extensive literature review complemented the findings from the focus group discussions. This article concludes that citizen-focused service delivery can be enhanced by promoting citizen public participation which focuses on increasing collaboration between communities and municipal officials at the policy implementation stage. However, this should be done without neglecting participation in other phases of the policy cycle. The findings from this article make a valuable

contribution towards understanding public participation strategies at the municipal level which can promote joint decision-making to provide effective and efficient service delivery. Consequently, recommendations are proposed to enhance access to water through effective community and city official engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Although public participation in municipalities is stipulated in South Africa's Constitution (Chapter 7), including many other pieces of legislation, existing literature reveals that a dysfunctional public participation system has emerged as a key concern that contributes towards current protest cycles in South African municipalities (Mofolo 2016:236; Lodge and Mottiar 2016:819). There has been a consistent decline in terms of the interface between municipal officials and communities (Fuo 2015:174). Both the Citizen Report Card study (CRC) and the Local Government Barometer project (LGB) at the Institute for Democracy in South Africa revealed that 57% of the respondents posited that public participation did not have much impact on decision-making processes as ward councillors did not recognise public inputs hence these were not conveyed to the councils (Qwabe and Mdaka 2011). A study by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) (2015:48) revealed that 51% of the respondents held that municipal governments needed to improve public participation protocols and systems for meaningful engagement.

A survey of public participation models carried out by the Creative Commons (2012:Online), documented 36 public participation models developed between 1969 and 2012. A key feature of these models is that they are a variation of Arnstein's (1969) seminal work on the Ladder of Citizen Participation. It is in this context that this article's theoretical framework is drawn from Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation. Arnstein (1969) developed a useful model to analyse the level of public participation at municipal level which explains the difference between actual optimal participation and something that might appear to be public participation but is no more than a masquerade. According to Arnstein's ladder of participation, the bottom steps show the least amount of participation while the top steps show more and more public involvement.

It is in this regard that, this article argues that if municipalities do not establish service delivery systems in which recipient citizens have a more active role to play, citizen participation becomes reactive and often culminates in protests against the decisions taken by the municipalities. On the other hand,

public participation encourages citizen-focused service delivery and improves municipal credibility among the citizenry (Department of Public Service and Administration 2014).

This research also contends that weak public participation has been a result of limited or lack of collaboration between communities and municipal officials at the implementation level. Existing studies reveal that municipal officials “tend to act as gate-keepers and controllers rather than as facilitative bodies that enable communities to have a greater voice and control over resources and resource allocation” (Tshoose 2015:13). Municipal officials are accused of being either unwilling or unable to share decision-making power with communities and even ignore input from elected representatives (Qwabe and Mdaka 2011:67). Molaba (2016:6) argues that “municipal officials do not meet the community expectations and the real community needs”. This behaviour by municipal officials can be attributed to the belief that they have the education, knowledge and technical know-how to deliver services, without recognising that they need to consult in order to understand citizen preferences.

To manage this problem and ensure that public participation contributes towards improved service delivery, there is need to promote collaboration between municipal officials and the community. This study utilised focus groups which comprised of community leaders in Nyanga Township, Cape Town, including municipal service officials in the water and related departments; to comprehend the potential influence of increased collaboration between communities and municipal officials towards improved service delivery. An extensive literature review on citizen participation and service delivery was also conducted.

This article proffers suggestions that can contribute towards improving access to water in Nyanga, Cape Town from both the community and city officials’ perspectives. It also complements existing studies on public participation at local levels.

This article is structured according to four sections. First, the introduction focuses on the basis of the research in detail. Second, a conceptual framework of the study highlights the ladder of public participation as espoused by Arnstein (1969). The third section explains the methodology adopted. The next section discusses the results from the focus groups. Finally a conclusion and recommendations are provided.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There is a vast body of literature on public participation at the local sphere in developing countries such as South Africa. Public participation implies that individuals should be accorded an opportunity to influence municipal decisions. It is a component of the democratic decision-making process, which argues that the

citizens determine their needs and the role of their representatives and bureaucratic staff is to provide accordingly (Osborne and Strokosch 2013).

Public participation has been conceptualised as a process that facilitates service delivery (Association for Public Service Excellence 2013). Public participation encourages citizen- focused service delivery and improves municipal credibility among the citizenry (Cederberg Municipality 2015:3). The Department of Public Service and Administration (2014:ii, v) concurs that public participation improves the quality and legitimacy of decisions made by municipal authorities regarding policy, programmes and projects as well as eliminates or at least drastically reduces polarisation between municipalities and citizens, thereby inhibiting conflict that occasionally results in violent protests.

Pandeya (2015:93) notes that public participation is a process that enables the poor to exercise their voice through consultation and/or mobilisation designed to inform and to influence larger institutions and policies. Tufte (2017:143) also argues that public participation not only has a positive impact on service delivery but also increases accountability and inhibits corruption and mismanagement. It does this by facilitating information dissemination and increased public awareness of the actions of municipal governments. Furthermore, it enhances allocative efficiency by providing the means for “demand revelation thus matching of allocations to user preferences” (Azfar *et al.* 1999:15). In this context, municipalities are expected to afford citizens or communities as clients and stakeholders the opportunity to actively participate in municipal policy processes, that is, express their views before, during and after the policy development process to ensure that policy implementation reflects community preferences as far as possible.

Arnstein (1969), proposes a level of public participation that is close to the ideal through her model, the ‘ladder’ of participation model, which can be utilised as a guide to observe who has power when important decisions are made in municipal service delivery.

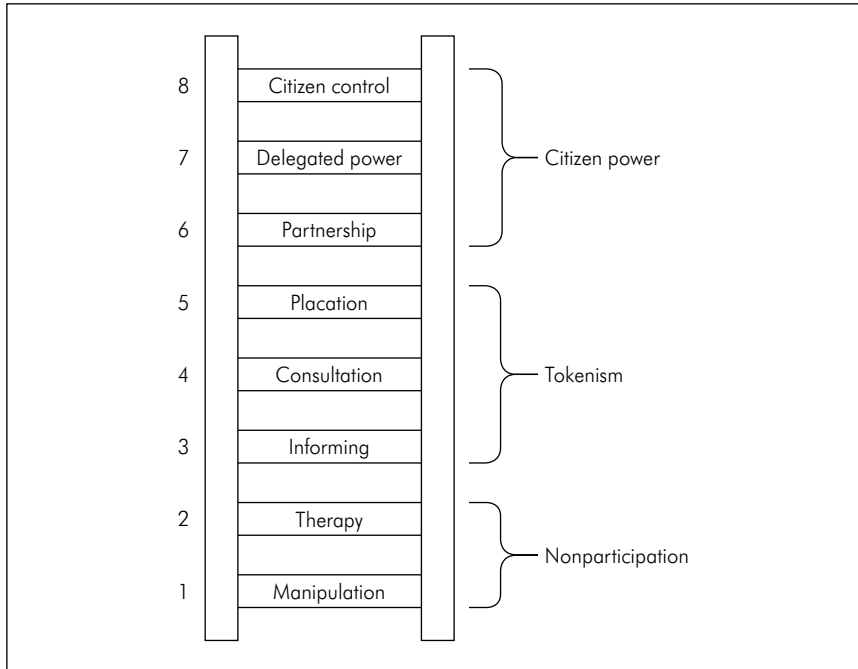
According to this conceptual framework, there are eight levels of participation, with the first and second being highly similar.

- Manipulation – At this level although public participation is pronounced, there is no participation in practice. The decision-making process is manipulative and is imposed on citizens to achieve an outcome that municipalities have already decided.
- Therapy – In this context, public participation is a “feel-good” exercise (therapy) meant to cure or educate the participants. In the context of service delivery, both manipulation and therapy can be viewed as mere public relations exercises by municipalities to secure citizens’ support.
- Informing – This can be viewed as potentially a first step to legitimate participation if applied to municipal service delivery. However, this level underscores a one way flow of information and there is no provision for channels of feedback.

- Consultation – Consultation level is characterised by processes such as attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public enquiries but remains a weak form of participation and is often another window dressing exercise.
- Placation – The power holders retain the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of advice from participants although they allow, for example, co-option of hand-picked ‘worthies’ onto committees.
- Partnership – The power is redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders. Planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared, for example, through joint committees.
- Delegated power – This is where citizens hold majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions. At this level the citizens now have the power to assure accountability of the programme to them.
- Citizen Control – Have-nots manage the entire task of planning, policymaking and administering a programme, for example, neighbourhood corporation with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds.

The Arnstein (1969) ladder is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The ladder of citizen participation



Source: (Arnstein 1969:217)

Three broad tiers can be distinguished from the eight levels on the ladder of participation. The bottom tier essentially entails circumstances of nonparticipation where decisions are made from the top and handed down to citizens. The second tier is associated with circumstances where participation is through informing and consulting citizens without giving them assurances that their contributions will be considered for decision-making purposes. The third tier, which is more ideal, consists of a wholesome involvement of citizens in decision-making processes. At this third tier citizens become partners in making decisions and can directly influence policy formulation and implementation.

Public participation in South Africa has declined in terms of the interface between municipalities and communities (Sithole and Mathonsi 2015:21). Van Donk (2014:2) argues that poor South Africans have a limited voice in local-level development processes that impact directly on them. This necessitates exploring avenues to strengthen public participation as one of the means for promoting citizen-focused service delivery.

Existing studies also reveal that municipal officials are hesitant to share decision-making powers with communities (Tshoose 2015; Qwabe and Mdaka 2011 and Kanyane 2014). The officials hold that it is their role and they have unfettered ability to invent “the best solution” (Kanyane 2014:104). According to Fuo (2015:174), “some municipal officials have reduced public participation to a more technical exercise driven to merely ensure compliance with the requirements of framework legislation” and have become unaccountable for their actions. According to Osborne and Strokosch (2013), municipal officials resist citizen participation because it involves the ceding of power. Consequently, the lack of accountability, transparency and inadequate checks and balances have become commonplace among municipalities (Munzhedzi 2016: Online).

Citizens are of the opinion that municipal decisions do not respond adequately to the needs and values of the communities, especially the poor and disadvantaged sectors; to the extent that planning, including the budgets and Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) are not reflective of the needs of the community (Madzivhandila and Maloka 2014:655).

These arguments are linked to the first and second tiers of the ladder of participation where there is limited citizen involvement in decision-making processes. Consequently there has been poor service delivery, resulting in citizen disenchantment. The highest tier on the ladder of participation is intended to encourage effective citizen participation which can improve service delivery, improve public municipal credibility and drastically reduce polarisation between municipalities and the citizenry. Thus, citizen disquiet has been one of the causes of municipal service delivery protests (Seokoma 2010).

At the local sphere of government, Chen *et al.* (2014:1) describe service delivery as “the distribution of basic resources citizens depend on, like water, electricity,

sanitation infrastructure, land, and housing". Matebesi and Botes (2017:82) define service delivery protests as collective action taken by a community which is directed at a local municipality as a result of poor or inadequate provision of basic services. In South Africa, municipalities are the most basic units of government in the country and are constitutionally mandated to provide fundamental services such as water.

BASIC SERVICE DELIVERY: WHY THE FUSS?

The 2017 Statistics South Africa General Household Survey established that most South Africans were less satisfied with the quality of the services they receive and that the dissatisfaction trend had been growing since 2005. The 2015 South African Social Attitude Survey (SASAS) data revealed that a large proportion of South Africans distrust/strongly distrust (49.2%) their local government and about a third (34.8%) trust or strongly trust local government with the delivery of basic services. A study by the market research firm Institut de Publique Sondage d'Opinion Secteur (IPSOS) in 2015, observed that four in every 10 South Africans trust the government to deliver effective services to the public (IPSOS 2016: Online). The 2013 Edelman Trust Barometer also argues that the lack of trust is driven by perceptions of poor municipal performance (Edelman Trust Barometer 2013: Online). In this regard, such lack of trust is the result of citizen dissatisfaction with services, including the manner in which their concerns are managed by the municipal officials and respective government departments. Wide trust deficit breeds tension between the municipalities and the communities.

Since 2004, many South African municipalities have experienced a rise in service delivery protests. The upward trend in protests is supported by various studies. For instance, the Social Change Unit at the University of Johannesburg argues that there has been a sharp rise in service delivery protests between 2004 and 2014 (Grant 2014:Online). The Presidency (2015:27) also highlighted that more than 78% of the municipalities had failed to perform the 12 mandated functions and approximately 50% of the municipalities performed less than half of their constitutional functions.

Furthermore, in recent years these protests have become increasingly violent, often resulting in the destruction of private and public property and in certain instances injuries and loss of life. The study by Lolwana (2016:8) also concludes that service delivery protests have been increasing and becoming more violent. Alexander (2012:2) has described South Africa as the "protest capital of the world". Swart (2013:Online) argues that communities have been protesting more violently and vehemently as a show of their grievances against inadequate or total lack of municipal service delivery.

All these factors support the existing evidence which shows that municipalities struggle to deliver on their mandate and communities are becoming more impatient with the lack of quality basic services. Ismail and Yunan (2016:269) in this regard argue that service quality is determined by the citizens' comparison of their expectations versus eventual services provided by the municipality. On the other hand, Matebesi and Botes (2017:84) as well as Mbuyisa (2013:122) assert that the ever-increasing service delivery protests are a reflection of the extent to which formal institutional channels for citizen engagement has failed. Communities feel alienated and disconnected from decision-making processes and disempowered to influence municipalities (Beyers 2016:175). Akinboade, Mokwena and Kinfact (2013:462) argue that service delivery dissatisfaction and protests at the local level is a result of local government inefficiencies to provide adequate service delivery which can in many instances be explained by a lack of effective public participation.

Cape Town has largely become a functional city, but the black majority argue that they are continually marginalised, particularly in terms of service delivery. This has led to continued service delivery protests in townships such as Nyanga over the years (McDonald 2014:Online; Abbas and Ntlemela 2016:Online; McGowan 2017).

These protests raise the questions of the attributes of public participation and consultative processes at the municipal sphere. Madumo (2014:141) argues that public participation is faced by structural challenges; that is, related to the mechanisms that could be utilised to promote public participation in municipal governments. Public participation is also of serious concern since municipalities were envisioned as sites of government's commitment to participatory governance to achieve meaning and content.

There is therefore a need to revisit local governance to explore probable ways to improve relations between communities and their municipalities by promoting public participation in decision-making so that there is joint ownership of policies and programmes. In South Africa, there is adequate evidence of the relationship between locally elected officials and communities in the public participation process. Most studies conclude that invited spaces such as ward committees are either seen as agents of municipal councils or gathering of views through wards only constitutes symbolic participation (Mbhele 2017:35); ward structures act as pseudo-structures of their political parties (Mbelengwa 2016:59); most municipalities do not delegate any powers and duties to ward committees and communities (Mtshali 2016:55); lack of both capacity building support to communities and information of the functioning of local government (Sekgala 2016:). These are in line with the lower levels of Arnstein's ladder of participation. Municipal officials are therefore required to play a much greater role to facilitate public participation.

Consequently, the primary focus of this research was on exploring innovative ways of improving service delivery. The relationships between communities and local government officials must be strengthened to address particular

shortcomings prevalent in current public participation structures. To explore this notion, a case study was conducted in the Nyanga local community, Cape Town, South Africa. The study focused on moving public participation to higher levels of the ladder of participation by increasing collaboration between municipal officials and communities around water service delivery concerns.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study is part of a larger project on citizen engagement conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). Funding was provided by the Tirelo Boshu – Public Service Improvement Facility of the Belgian Development Agency (BTC) and the South African Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). The project sought to establish innovative ways to promote public participation in municipal service delivery with specific focus on water and electricity. This research focused on improving dialogue that would allow residents and the city to understand each other's circumstances in matters related to water service delivery. Dialogue was facilitated primarily through focus group discussions.

The research design of the present study consisted of a qualitative focus group component and a desk-based review of the literature concerning public participation and service delivery. The qualitative focus groups can therefore be considered as the primary data collection tool, while the review of the literature formed the secondary data collection component. The focus group method was selected because it enabled researchers to gather data in a short period of time and was more useful in acquiring several detailed perspectives on a given phenomenon where people give insights of their shared understanding of everyday life (Blackburn and Stokes 2000:5).

The desktop review process focused on the review of current literature, legislation and municipal documents on public participation and municipal service delivery systems as well as public participation theories such as Arnstein's ladder of participation. The article also utilised key survey sources such as the SASAS, the 2017 Statistics South Africa General Household Survey, the IPSOS 2015 survey, and the 2013 Edelman Trust Barometer. Most of the results from the desktop analysis are presented in earlier sections of this article.

Study site

Nyanga township in Cape Town was selected because the municipality identified it as an area that requires support to acquire community buy-in on its

service delivery projects that were due to be undertaken in 2017. Nyanga has also been prone to service delivery protests, which became more violent and regular since 2011. It was therefore possible to secure cooperation from both the community and the municipality since both had expressed concerns about each other.

Nyanga remains one of the poorest parts of Cape Town and it is one of the oldest black townships in Cape Town, second only to Langa. It has a population of 57 996 in an area of 3.07 km². The population in Ward 037, the focus area, was 22 207 in 2011 (Stats SA 2011 Census). Other key features of the ward included: population in 2011 was predominantly black African (99%); and 29% aged 20 years and older had completed Grade 12 or higher. This area has been prone to service delivery protests, especially since 2011 when frustration at the slow rate of service provision resulted in violent protests.

Research ethics

Before the study was implemented the HSRC research team obtained ethics clearance from the HSRC Research Ethics Committee (REC). Ethics approval was an important requirement because the research detailed in this article involved human subjects, which means ethical protocols needed to be followed to ensure participants in the study did not experience undue harm because of their participation in this research. In addition to the ethics approval the researchers also obtained informed consent from all the participating individuals.

Fieldwork

The primary research was conducted between May 2016 and July 2017. A total of 12 focus groups were conducted in three under-resourced areas in Nyanga as identified by the City of Cape Town: Nyanga Old Location, Mau Mau, and Zwelitsha. The City felt that these areas would benefit a great deal from the scorecard process in terms of electricity and water service provision. All 12 focus groups focused on water and electricity service provision but four of these focus groups entirely discussed: 1) water provision and maintenance in Nyanga and informal surrounding settlements), 2) improving water provision in Nyanga with communities from the 14 areas, 3) implementing water projects in Zwelitsha with community members, and 4) improving service delivery and communication engagement with local civil society organisations. The 12 focus group discussions conducted included community leaders and city officials. The focus group discussion guide included water service delivery concerns such as water connections, repairs, metering, water reliability and access to the township.

Selection of the focus group participants

Community leaders were drawn from local community groups such as the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO) that had established structures. These also included political representatives from the area. Municipal officials were drawn from departments whose mandate included water service delivery, namely: Water, Sewer, Housing, Water Demand Meter, informal settlements and the Technical Operation Centre (TOC).

Data analysis

The focus groups qualitative data analysis comprised of content analysis, which involved a systematic comparison across units of data (for example, interviews, statements or themes). The primary purpose of the qualitative data analysis method was to identify key themes which would emerge from the data and enable extraction of key issues related to the research questions. The qualitative data obtained through the desktop review was also reviewed through content analysis.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This article notes that lack of water service delivery, particularly in low-income areas such as Nyanga in Cape Town and indeed in many other South African municipalities can in part be attributed to limited engagement between municipal officials and communities mainly confined to the first and second tiers of Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation. Limited engagement has also resulted in poor communication; weak responses to service delivery demands; and lack of water education.

Improved water service delivery can be acquired by addressing problems through enhancing public participation as outlined in the third tier of the ladder of participation. The third tier will address existing gaps through sharing of planning and decision-making responsibilities and developing mechanisms for resolving impasses between municipal officials and communities.

In the focus groups, most discussions revealed the existence of weak public participation in municipal water service delivery. For example, the community leaders questioned the functionality of ward committees. They reported that the City of Cape Town programmes in the area were not communicated to the community. However, city officials highlighted that the city assumed that the ward councillor and ward committee were informing the communities, and those who came to the city as Nyanga representatives, represented the area.

The functionality of ward committees has been questioned by researchers such as Mbelengwa (2016:59) and Mbhele (2017:35) who argue that ward councillors are not only renowned to ignore public input, arrogant and insensitive to the needs of the community and when detail is conveyed to both the councils and municipal officials, it is disregarded. Vivier *et al.* (2015:83) reveal that citizens perceive the councillors' role as intermediaries between residents and municipal administration as limited, with minimal communication between municipal administrations and the residents. These observations implied that a gap existed in public participation between the municipal officials and the communities that needed to be bridged if water service delivery was to improve. Weak forms of public participation on the ladder of citizen participation centre on informing and consultations without assurance that citizen contributions will be considered for decision-making purposes. Weak implementation of public participation therefore meant that the municipal officials were often not certain of the priorities of the communities.

The focus groups established a platform that promoted public participation processes and enhanced collaboration of communities and municipal officials as well as ward committees and councillors. In the process, the community representatives raised key concerns about water service delivery, which included that certain areas were still in need of water provision.

For example, residents in sections such as Mau Mau shared one water pipe between four houses. This meant that since they shared one water pipe and tap stopper among four houses, if one neighbour opened the tap at the same time as the next, the flow was extremely slow. Furthermore, the residents noted that communal taps were often placed close to the roads by city officials, and when leakage occurred (which was almost always) the water would flow onto the road which in turn gave rise to potholes and ruined the road infrastructure.

Concerning maintenance, community participants reported that infrastructure repairs were a problem. Leaking taps and overflowing sewers were a common sight and occasionally went unattended for lengthy periods. This problem was compounded by a large number of blocked drains, which often led to localised flooding. However, during the focus group discussions, it also emerged that these blockages were exacerbated by illegal connections or by community members who used drains and sewers for garbage disposal. Illegal structures built over water and sanitation infrastructure made it extremely difficult to address many of these problems.

The community participants in the focus groups also highlighted that they had experienced much difficulty in drawing the attention of city officials to resolve these problems in their area. This implied that municipal officials could be aware of the challenges but choose not to take action. Marutlulle (2017:Online) argues that such actions may be as a result of, *inter alia*, administrative concerns (municipal maladministration, lack of control and corruption). Municipal officials confirmed the existence of administrative problems when they stated that although

the city was committed to undertaking repairs, it was known that certain staff closed their assigned jobs without having undertaken repairs.

Furthermore, the lack of collaboration between the community and municipal officials through an established public participation mechanism contributed towards community service fraud. In one instance, the Mau Mau residents in Nyanga revealed that their houses had been built without toilets, which had posed serious challenges. They devised a way to connect to the sewer system, allegedly because the City Council had done nothing about it. However, these illegal connections posed a number of problems for residents. A resident stated that: "We did not have toilets. But we had to build our own. Now the issue with the toilets is that they are cracked and are beginning to fall apart. The councillor was even consulted, but to no end. But now we have toilets that are falling apart. The toilet is connected to the drain, and we admit we built and connected the toilets ourselves since no one from the city was giving us a direction on when and how we were going to be supplied with toilets".

Nxumalo (2016:12) argues that to overcome the divide between municipal officials and communities there is a need for public participation opportunities such as joint committees that bring together municipal officials and communities to enhance water service delivery. These focus groups, therefore, acted as such joint committees, increasing the levels of participation to the third tier on Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation and revealing how such interactivity can result in expressing concerns and expectations from both council and the communities.

The focus group discussions also revealed that a multiplicity of departments were involved in the provision of water services of which community members had not been advised and had limited knowledge. Moreover, participating city officials acknowledged that there was both poor communication and limited working relationship among various departments which provide water services, particularly among the Solid Waste, Water and Sanitation, and Housing Departments, which affected water service delivery. As a result of the multiplicity of departments that manage water service delivery and the lack of an effective platform for citizens and municipal officials to interact, the residents failed to distinguish the responsibilities of the different departments in water service provision. For example, residents occasionally reported maintenance problems to the sewer unit when they actually should have reported it to the Housing Maintenance unit. Furthermore, residents were often unfamiliar with the nature of the problems that were reported. Therefore, water faults or problems were reported incorrectly. In such instances the incorrect department might be called to deal with a water problem.

The municipal officials thus utilised the focus groups interviews to explain the roles of the different departments concerning water service provision. In certain instances, the responsible party was the Department of Water and Sanitation, in

others, the Department of Housing, while in others, the individual community members themselves; because the faults had emanated on private property.

The Water Demand Meter Unit and the TOC also had a role to play in improving water service delivery. The TOC is the centre where residents register their requests for municipal services or lodge complaints. The centre is responsible for capturing reports or complaints from residents and directing these to the appropriate department that manages the particular problem or service. The lack of information appeared to result in confusion and frustration on the part of the community. According to Mdlongwa (2014:Online), the lack of awareness and knowledge among communities impeded service delivery because communities do not know how or who to approach when they face service delivery challenges. The present study revealed that the lack of awareness and knowledge among the Nyanga community residents may also be attributed to the lack of communication by the municipal officials. Vivier *et al.* (2015:83) revealed that the lack of communication between citizens and the municipality weaken both municipal responsiveness and citizen engagement. Limited communication can be associated with the levels of informing and consultation on the ladder of participation. These levels emphasise information flows from the municipal officials to the citizens with no channel provided for feedback and no power for negotiation (Babu 2015:244).

Both the municipal staff and the community members concurred that the TOC was not functioning properly. One concern was that TOC staff was incompetent because they were only granted six-month contracts without continuity. This is corroborated by Mnguni (2018:Online) who states that in certain instances, service delivery failure can be attributed to the lack of capacity among municipal staff who are not equipped to manage their responsibilities. Both the municipal staff and community leaders agreed that there was a need to provide sufficient training and/or longer contracts to the TOC staff. At the moment this centre seems to underscore hiring staff every six months to generate higher employment statistics for the municipality.

The levels of informing and consultation on the ladder of participation were further evidenced by community participants who did not only seem to lack knowledge about maintenance processes within their area but also lacked insight of other projects such as the City of Cape Town's rolling out Water Management Devices (WMDs), popularly known as "blue water meters, and the difference between the City's various types of water meters as well as how they functioned." WMD limits the amount of water a household receives per day. Installation of these devices has in certain instances been characterised by resistance from the community.

The community participants did not seem to understand the purpose and the processes that had to be followed to install the meters. The municipal officials explained that there was an important unit responsible for WMDs. More specifically, the unit essentially managed the blue meter, which regulated water consumption in the city. A senior Water Department employee noted that the blue water meter

could be utilised simply to reduce consumption by high water consumers or to limit water consumption by those identified as indigent (earning less than R3 200 per month) households. Hence, the WMD provides an option for the indigent to address the needs of poor households as a form of minimum service provision and a socio-economic safety net.

However, the focus group which comprised of community members, expressed serious reservations about the processes the municipal officials followed to install the WMDs on their properties. The community participants argued that the city had not sought the property owners' consent before installing the devices on the properties. Ordinarily such consent had to be sought, and the property owners given the opportunity to sign an agreement/consent form. Moreover, the city was accused of getting children and/or the elderly to sign off on the water meters. They often did not understand what they were signing.

One resident also reported how her water meter box was changed without her consent. Her complaint resonated with many community members who participated in the focus group interviews. The community participants accused the city officials of walking onto properties to install the blue water meters in the absence of property owners. Furthermore, the companies contracted to install these meters executed substandard work. Consequently, leaks and infrastructure damage as a result of poor installations were frequent.

However, according to an official from the Department of Water, the municipality had engaged in a consultative process regarding the installation of new blue water meters. The official stated that the project and its intentions were communicated to various stakeholders prior to the project roll-out. Furthermore, according to reports, the officials had undertaken door-to-door campaigns during which they informed homeowners about arrears for water and informed them that if they signed for the new meters, their debt would be cancelled.

Further discussions established that those who signed did so without full disclosure of what they were signing. The level of citizen engagement in the process appeared to have been limited because it focused primarily on consultation. In fact Thompson (2016) states that participatory spaces at the local government level are less about engagement and more about information sharing and consultation as a form of compliance. In her seminal work "A ladder of citizen participation", Arnstein (1969) argues that consultation alone is the weakest form of participation and is often simply a window dressing exercise and offers no assurance that citizen's concerns and ideas will be taken into account. The lack of participation was also exacerbated by the municipal officials' failure to familiarise the community with their work and their general ignorance of the community. The focus group discussion with community members as well as city officials also revealed that there was a need for sound communication between city officials, city departments and the community to enhance water service delivery.

Furthermore, the Cape Flats area is renowned to be crime ridden (Standing 2006). The city officials stated that municipal personnel in the water department had experienced difficulties to access Nyanga. Often city personnel called to undertake infrastructural repairs were attacked by community members who believed that they offered poor service or that there were unnecessary delays in restoring services. Such attacks are potentially as result of lack of communication and stronger public participation.

Location thugs called “Skolies”, attempt to rob city officials of their essentials or hijack municipal vehicles. Speaking of her experiences, a city official stated that “When we go to check a house in Gugulethu, we have to keep the car engine running, with four other staff keeping guard in all directions. We have four people on the lookout for possible attacks all the time.”

In certain areas, groups encouraged communities to revolt and attack council officials. Umraw (2017:Online) contends that protests of this nature emanate from “genuine concerns” from community members, but criminal elements soon infiltrate. Once that happens, municipalities focus on the criminality and neglect the community’s original concerns. In order to minimise this, there is need to promote sincere participation with municipalities and spend more time in dialogue with the communities as protests often result because of miscommunication.

During the focus group interviews, both the community and municipal officials resolved to work together to ensure effective service delivery. For example, to enhance the municipal employees’ safety when they entered the Nyanga area to restore water services or undertake maintenance, the municipal officials would contact community leaders in the area who would then facilitate access to enhance service restoration or project implementation.

Arnstein (1969) noted that a move towards partnership level, delegation and citizen control symbolised by a significant presence of public participation is recommended in fostering effective service delivery. Overall the focus group discussions revealed that increased public participation that includes the community and municipal officials can yield positive results in service delivery as it fosters joint decision-making and identifies expectations of the communities and the city officials as well as providing a platform for resolving implementation challenges. However, correlation between the levels of Arnstein’s ladder and the frequency and intensity of public protests could not be established and this is an area for potential further research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to enhance municipal service delivery, there is a need to strengthen the relationship between the City of Cape Town officials and communities, including

civil society; rooted in public participation. In terms of the theory of the ladder of participation, communities have to be encouraged to get involved and participate in ways that are further up the ladder.

In addition, the City of Cape Town officials need to increase the water service delivery process and regulations awareness incorporating the third tier of the ladder of participation. This can be done by working with organised citizen leaders and groups within the community to promote an open and accountable two-way communication and collaborative activity through which citizen concerns, needs, and values are acknowledged and integrated into municipal decision-making.

Lastly, the municipal officials should avoid imposing decisions on the communities such as installation of water management devices without the consent or knowledge of community members as it borders on manipulation and therapy.

CONCLUSION

This article examined how public participation can be enhanced with reference to Arnstein's ladder of participation in order for it to meaningfully contribute towards improving municipal service delivery. Using focus groups it generated adequate detail of the perceptions of water service delivery in Nyanga, Cape Town as well as gathered information on why water service delivery is a concern. In particular, the discussions enabled a clearer understanding of the feelings, shared representations and significance and interpretations of certain actions by both the community and municipal officials. It was concluded from the focus groups that lack of higher levels of public participation as encompassed in the ladder of participation, in particular when the community and municipal officials are expected to collaborate; contributed towards numerous water service delivery challenges among the Nyanga community. One way in which water service delivery could be enhanced is by increasing community participation in water service delivery decision-making processes taken by municipal officials. During the 15 month period of this research project, it was observed that the tension between the municipal officials and community leaders had eased while public participation had increased from the original levels that appeared to fit Arnstein's manipulation and therapy levels and informing to partnership level which symbolises a significant presence of collaboration. This provided an environment conducive to improved service delivery. Despite the positive results, city officials are still required as a matter of urgency to continue with efforts to build and sustain relationships with the community through public participation. Engagement may contribute towards decreasing the number of strikes and protests, because residents protest when they are not included in service delivery discussions. Openness creates effective communication channels if officials ensure their presence and concern.

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