

The utilisation of ward committees as an effective tool for improving service delivery

A case study

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ABSTRACT

The socio-political environment within which the local sphere of Government operates, is regulated by a legislative framework that aims to enhance public participation, thus facilitating effective service delivery. This article argues that public participation could be used as a vehicle through which municipalities can achieve efficient service delivery. This article assesses the legislative framework with regard to the establishment and roles of ward committees, as well as ward-based planning. The common challenges that ward committees face are also explored in detail. The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality is used as a case study in this investigation.

INTRODUCTION

Local Government plays a major role in providing basic services, as a requirement for maintaining a reasonable and acceptable standard of living. Over the past few years, municipalities have faced challenges in providing equitable public service delivery throughout South Africa. Dissatisfaction concerning service delivery led to protests in various municipalities. There are a variety of causes that could have triggered these protests, such as misaligned

local governing structures and the lack of public participation by the community members in decision-making concerning the quality of services.

Municipalities have a responsibility to promote development within their surroundings and. Moreover, they are responsible for further enhancing local democracy to help promote a more effective Local Government. The article analyses the composition and duties of ward committees, as well as their functionality. This research is driven by the participatory role that the community should play, through the facilitation of ward committees. Furthermore, a comparative study is made in terms of the functioning of municipalities, as well as the dissatisfaction of their residents. An analysis of ward committees within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM) will be used as a case study. Among a plethora of issues raised, suggestions are further proposed in an attempt to overcome the service delivery challenges.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Historically, in South Africa, the notion of ward committees was first introduced in the Cape of Good Hope when the *Burghers* (ordinary citizens) pressed for a greater share in the Colony's Government in the 18th century. These wards were governed by the *Wardmasters*, whose responsibilities were to *firstly* keep a register of persons residing in their areas (wards) and *secondly* to report to the committee of the High Court on particular municipal and criminal matters. However, it later became evident that the role of the *Wardmasters'* roles evolved into particular relationships, where contact between the people and the municipal commissioners was promoted. These commissioners were members of the committee of the High Court, where laws were made and executed (Craythorne 1997:126-127).

WARD COMMITTEES

To strengthen democracy, the South African Government established the ward committee system in December 2000, in accordance with Sections 72-78 of the *Municipal Structures Act*, 1998. The intent was to improve service delivery by bridging the gap between the respective communities and the municipal structures. Among others, ward committees should be able to enhance participatory government, by collectively organising communities concerning ward jurisdiction (Smith 2008:13). Local Government plays an important role in enforcing Municipal, Provincial and National Government policies within municipalities to ensure effective and accountable service

delivery in a specifically defined jurisdiction. For this reason, ward committees are established.

A ward committee is an area-based committee whose boundaries coincide with a ward's boundaries. These committees have no specifically assigned duties, legislative and executive powers. Hence, they are established as committees that play an advisory role to the council, in accordance with Sections 73 and 74 of the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998* (hereafter called the MSA).

Despite the variety of challenges municipalities face, ward committees could encourage and formulate programmes to promote public participation. This can help ensure that a municipal council is in a better position when making decisions to help facilitate improved service delivery. Public participation is essentially a process that engages communities from the planning to the implementation and the evaluation phases of a particular activity or a project (Draai and Taylor 2009:114).

From the above, it could be deduced that consultation with the community plays an important role in every municipal development plan. As alluded to earlier, a proper mechanism with the potential of ensuring an effective public participation process should be in place. Subsequently, ward committees should enable communities to take charge of the participation process. According to Draai and Taylor (2009:114), this will result in the transfer of process-based skills, knowledge and ownership to the local community. In addition, Napier (2008:163) suggests that, in solving the dilemma of service delivery in municipalities, the ward committee structure should focus on increasing the involvement of the municipal communities when decisions are made within the Local Government sphere.

Committees concerned with ward-related affairs are regarded as the mechanisms that enable public participation within Local Government. Ward committees could serve as the vehicle for promoting local participatory democracy. As a result, the rationale for their establishment is to ensure the necessary contact between the communities and the Government institutions. Furthermore, ward committees should also support the elected councillor to represent a specific sector in the municipal council, in terms of Part 4 of the MSA.

Establishment

A ward committee should include the councillor and persons representing women, youth, religious groups, sports and welfare, environment, education, community-based organisations, ratepayers' associations, traditional leaders, the disabled, the informal traders' association, agricultural associations (where

applicable) and community safety forums. However, the committee may not exceed 10 members (Reddy and Sikhakane 2008:681). It is also important to note that only registered voters belonging to a particular ward may be elected to form part of the concerned ward committee. Other qualifications could be required, as contained in the relevant municipal by-law. Aforementioned could prescribe the criteria to be followed when establishing a ward committee, as well as its functioning and management.

Section 72(1) of the MSA determines that ward committees can only be established within Metropolitan and Local Municipalities of a special type (*i.e.* executive structures within council), but not in District Municipalities. Currently 283 municipalities exist, as depicted in Table 1. Only 231 Local (category B) and six Metropolitan (category A) Municipalities (excluding 46 District Municipalities) can establish ward committees.

Section 73 of the MSA requires the councillor of a particular ward to be the chairperson of a ward committee. A ward committee is not a political forum, and as such it should not be made up of the members of one interest group or only a political party to which the councillor may be affiliated. This is important, as the MSA in Section 73(3) requires a Metropolitan or a Local

Table 1: The establishment of ward committees per province

Province	Population	Number of Metropolitan Municipalities	Number of Local Municipalities	Number of wards	Number of established ward committees
Eastern Cape	6 527 747	1	38	636	636
Free State	2 773 059	–	20	300	300
Gauteng	10 451 713	3	8	423	423
KwaZulu-Natal	10 259 230	1	50	771	771
Limpopo	5 238 286	–	25	513	513
Mpumalanga	3 643 435	–	18	365	365
Northern Cape	1 058 060	–	27	174	174
North West	3 271 948	–	21	365	365
Western Cape	5 278 585	1	24	348	243
Total	48 502 063	6	231	3 895	3 790

Adapted: CoGTA (2009:14)

Council to acknowledge and emphasise the importance of the representation of gender and a diversity of interests within a particular ward, when electing the members of a ward committee. This could be emphasised in the election procedures that the respective councils compile. In fact, Section 72(3) of the MSA defines the objective of the ward committees as the enhancement of participatory democracy in Local Government. It also enables a municipality via a ward committee to contribute to the processes followed to deliver the goods and services, as expected by the municipal community.

Most municipalities who authorised to establish ward committees have established them in order to comply with the legislation to help foster community participation. Some municipalities have decided to refer to these community participation structures as development forums, residents' associations or ward forums and intend to utilise them for the similar purposes than ward committees (Putu 2006:14 and City of Cape Town 2010).

In 2009, the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) released a report: *The State of Local Government*. The report stated that within the 283 municipalities in South Africa, 3 895 wards were demarcated. In all the wards, except for 105 wards in the Western Cape Province, ward committees have been established, as indicated in Table 1.

It is unclear why the Western Cape Province did not establish ward committees in all the municipalities that were entitled to establish them. Their failure could range from the perception that ward committees are non-representative, under-resourced and have no significant authority to make decisions (Naidu 2008:86).

By facilitating public participation, ward committees can help municipalities to determine community needs. This will assist municipalities in identifying the services municipal communities require, as well as contribute towards establishing and advancing the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). As such, the need for formulating an IDP arises to effectively develop a mechanism for identifying community needs and priorities, and to design administrative and managerial practices to meet these needs.

Role of the ward committees for sustainable, effective service delivery

The democratically elected South African Government faces a major challenge of ensuring that municipalities provide optimal and efficient services to a citizenry that consists of heterogeneous cultures (Pretorius and Schurink 2007:19). It is imperative that the elected legislatures receive a mandate from the citizens concerned with regard to their collective needs. As a result, public participation is without a doubt an effective method to determine respective

communities' needs and expectations. Chapter 4 of the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 32 of 2000* promulgates the development of community participation, through community-based structures. As a legitimate right of all citizens – particularly those who were previously disadvantaged – Pretorius and Schurink (2007:19) are of the opinion that access to effective public services should not be reserved for the privileged. All citizens are entitled to equitable service delivery. They should therefore be involved in determining priorities during activities aimed at satisfying the actual or perceived needs.

Challenges facing ward committees

Ward committees are a prominent channel for communication through which communities inform municipal councils about their needs, expectations and problems. Naidu (2008:86) is of the opinion that the present structure and form of ward committees in South Africa are dysfunctional. Furthermore, Naidu believes that it has weakened the role that participation plays within the municipal structure. This failure could be ascribed to various reasons including:

- Ward committees' lack of credibility to influence decision-making.
- Ward committee members' lack of commitment in their endeavours. Some ward committee members perceive ward committees as a mere stepping-stone towards realising their political ambitions.
- Power relations (i.e. political interference) undermine the role of ward committees – a ward councillor is a politically elected representative, and by default s/he is chairperson of a ward committee that has the potential of promoting partisan interests.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORKERS

In 2003 Government attempted to augment the functioning of ward committees by introducing the Community Development Workers (CDWs) system. CDWs are public servants who are assigned to municipalities to ensure that all spheres of Government deliver services by utilising the multi-skills they have acquired. The introduction of the CDWs created problems, as ward committee members often perceive the CDWs as a duplication of ward committees. However, this is not the case, as CDWs are remunerated by the State and are subject to the *Public Service Act, 1994* (Proclamation 103 of 1994). As a Provincial Government assign CDW's to specific wards, they are not accountable to a municipal structure but to a provincial structure. Basically, the CDWs assist communities by integrating the functions of all Government Departments to accelerate a community's access to those services. As a result, the ward

committees are concerned with the services that a municipality provide, while CDWs are required to ensure that all of the services rendered by the respective spheres of Government are integrated into the respective municipality (DPSA 2007:14).

INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Notwithstanding the legacies of Apartheid, the disparity in terms of service provision by municipalities is still a major concern. It therefore becomes important for municipalities to integrate their services and development activities with those of other spheres of Government, thus achieving the principles of co-operative government, as envisioned by the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996. This helps enable a process that ensures and promotes the co-ordinated planning and management of policies. This process is called the Integrated Development Plan (DP) (Craythorne 2003:149-150). An IDP is a mechanism that involves the entire municipal community in finding the best possible solution to achieve long-term development goals through municipal strategic planning. An IDP helps to (ETU undated):

- ensure the effective use of scarce resources in municipalities;
- speed up service delivery;
- attract additional funds;
- strengthen democracy;
- overcome the legacy of apartheid; and
- promote co-ordination among Local, Provincial and National Governmental institutions.

It should be noted that ward committees have a three-fold function in the IDP processes. Through their ward committees, communities are central to *firstly*, participation in creating an IDP; *secondly*, managing municipal performance; and *thirdly*, participation in the municipal budgeting process to give effect to the IDP. However, all these functions are interrelated. For instance, through an IDP, municipal budgeting is aimed at achieving identified key development priorities. Performance management is inevitable, as an appropriate system is needed to realise the municipal vision and mission (DPLG and GTZ 2005:57). Naidu (2008:91) alludes to the fact that a clear service delivery plan should form the basis of all IDPs. Through the priorities determined in an IDP, municipalities could be held accountable by their electorate for achieving or failing to achieve the objectives set out by the municipality's IDP.

The concept of public participation in Municipal Government was developed to facilitate ward-based planning, strategic priorities of municipalities and

to ensure that municipal planning targets are achieved. Through ward-based development plans, communities have an opportunity to ensure that the IDP developed for the municipality addresses the priorities and the concerns of all sectoral interests within a ward (Institute for Performance Management 2007).

In a report commissioned by an *ad hoc* committee on service delivery for the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, it was established that about 25% of the municipalities across the country experienced service delivery protests. Furthermore, these protests did not occur across an entire municipality, but only in specific wards – especially where disadvantaged community members live (CoGTA 2010:6). The so-called *service delivery protests* could even be traced back to the community's lack of participation in the processes required for formulating the IDP.

SERVICE DELIVERY AND THE IDP

Public service delivery is defined as the end-product of a chain of plans and actions involving municipal and provincial plans, as well as the national budget, by a range of stakeholders through local consultations (Hemson, Carter and Karuri-Sebina 2009:156). Thus, service delivery can be regarded as the goods and services that Government is expected to provide to ensure the sustainable livelihoods of its citizens.

An IDP aligns the key priorities of a specific ward in accordance with the urgency of the need, as expected by the community. A community should list the need for access to

- electricity,
- primary health care, and
- facilities.

Through its budgeting process, the municipality will be responsible for ensuring that the delivery of these services is prioritised.

CITY OF TSHWANE METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY WARD COMMITTEES

The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (CTMM) is the administrative capital of South Africa and is a Category A Municipality. It is located in the north-western corner of Gauteng Province. In 2010, at 65 km x 50 km, the CTMM made up almost 13% of the province's total surface area of 2 198 km². It should however be acknowledged that the demarcated size of the CTMM

will be expanded after the 2011 Local Government elections. It is important to note that the CTMM is the second largest municipality in Gauteng. The CTMM consists of 76 wards (subject to change after the 2011 Local Government elections) (CTMM Annual Report 2008/2009:8). These 76 wards are organised into groups of eight to nine wards, which subsequently forms a zone as determined by the jurisdiction. Three zones create a sub-region. As such, the CTMM has nine zones and three sub-regions. Sub-regions are managed by co-ordinators who have the sole responsibility of monitoring the sub-regional development to facilitate the consultative processes by the municipal council.

In 2010, the CTMM included 686 640 households, with 28, 7% living informal dwellings. In terms of basic services, a need arises for an urgent intervention by implementing a strategic plan that attempts to eradicate backlogs. Among others, the municipality faces major challenges to improve infrastructure, such as proper sanitation, as well as access to clean water and safe and secure electricity (CoGTA 2009:71).

Internationally, civil society's involvement in government activities is gaining prominence. To facilitate ordinary-citizen involvement, there is a need for regulations to manage and administrate structures aimed at enhancing the quality of contributions. In achieving its aims and objectives, the CTMM's ward committee system effectively utilises the Executive Mayor's office and the office of the Speaker for structural support (City of Tshwane, ward committees undated:2).

The CTMM has drafted a by-law on ward committees. Although it has not been promulgated, it is aimed at clarifying the roles ward committees already play. This draft by-law highlights, *inter alia*, the powers, functions, duties and obligations of ward committees within the municipality. As a result, the draft by-law confirms the municipality's intent to establish a policy that provides direction to help enhance active public participation on a ward basis. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that the draft by-law provides a dispute resolution mechanism for its ward committees (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, draft by-law). Although ward committees operate under delegated authority from the Metropolitan Council, they are not council committees. They operate as community structures under the chair of a ward councillor. Ultimately, ward committees are established to assist the ward councillor to perform his/her representative duties effectively.

The primary role of ward committees could be seen as the facilitation of communication between the residents and appropriate governing structures, by encouraging public participation. In the CTMM, it has been observed that ward committees have the ability to:

- educate residents;
- promote public participation and local democracy;

- serve as agents of change and transformation; and
- serve as the watchdogs of the municipal council and municipal administration.

Ward committees have many functions and deal with a range of issues. This includes issues that are beyond a municipality's structured responsibilities assigned in terms of Schedules 4 and 5 of the Constitution, 1996, such as housing, education and unemployment. Ward committees should receive their mandate from the communities they represent and convey this directly to the municipal council through the office of the Speaker. As a result, it is important to classify and consider the issues that are often discussed at ward committee meetings. These could be divided as follows.

Primary issues

The issues that ward committees discuss on a regular basis will be referred to as the primary issues. These are the issues that are within the delegated powers of the ward committees. These issues include:

- community safety,
- electricity and water,
- primary health care,
- infrastructure maintenance and development, and
- environmental management.

These issues have a direct and major impact on community development and ultimately contribute towards improving the living conditions of individual residents. More often, both the communities and ward committee members refer to these issues as the services they expect the municipalities to deliver. For instance, the lack of provision of such services in a municipality would amount to *poor service delivery*.

Secondary issues

Secondary issues refer to matters beyond the control of ward committees and municipalities. However, the local residents regard ward committees as agents of municipal government. These issues include:

- poverty alleviation,
- unemployment,
- eradicating the housing backlog, and
- education.

Municipalities attempt to address these identified issues. However, restrictions, such as a lack of resources exist. Through co-operative governance, the

execution of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) aims to improve the livelihoods of people by ensuring sustainability, through the provision of skills. The EPWP aims to capacitate local residents by providing opportunities for employment within the four sectors – infrastructure, environmental, social and economic. Through ward committees, the EPWP has been able to identify infrastructure needs within municipalities. Thus, an EPWP could provide employment and contribute to skills development, which improves citizens' living standards.

Challenges facing CTMM ward committees

In terms of their composition, most ward committees comply with the *Municipal Structures Act, 1998*. Section 73 of this Act contends that when ward committees are formed, gender representation and diversity of interest should be considered. The aim is to ensure that the various sectors within a ward are represented. Depending on a particular ward, the sectors that exist in a ward determine the creation of the portfolios within those wards. The common challenges ward committees face can hamper the promotion of service delivery within municipalities. Ward committees serve as structural communication mechanisms with the municipality. This means that ward committees give community members a platform to raise Government-related issues within their jurisdictional boundaries (Reddy and Sikhakane 2008:680).

Ward committees in the CTMM perform various municipality-related functions. They act as a conduit between the people (at the grass roots level) and the governing institutions. More specifically, these area-based committees assist their communities by directing their queries to the relevant stakeholders, through the office of the Speaker. This was highlighted at a particular ward committee meeting, where the issue of illegal electricity connection was discussed. The primary focus of the discussion was that people who illegally connect electricity to the main power supply has caused an electrical dysfunction, which culminated in serious damage to electrical appliances in about 23 households. As a result, the ward committee argued that it was their obligation to institute a compensation claim for the affected residents at the municipality through the office of the Speaker. They also approached the Public Protector for advice on the matter.

With regard to the effectiveness of ward committees, it is important to clarify their operations. The effectiveness of the ward committees depends on the usefulness of their instituted portfolios. For example, if a specific portfolio in the ward underperforms, it will have a negative impact on the success of the ward committee as a whole. The rationale of instituting portfolios within the committees rests in the notion that effectiveness and efficiency are

achieved only through expert knowledge and the division of labour. At every ward committee meeting, every member who is responsible for a portfolio is expected to present a report and provide feedback, should the need arise. However, members do not show equal participation. Thus, the ward committee members do not show the same passion, enthusiasm and zeal towards ward committee activities. This may depend on the issues discussed, as the eagerness or interest in a particular issue differs from one member to the next. Challenges include illiteracy, ignorance of the municipal governance and administration system, and local residents who show a lack of interest in municipal affairs. An inferiority complex tends to prevail due to illiteracy. Generally, people are afraid of participating in municipal affairs, arguing that they cannot make any worthwhile contribution (Fourie 2001:222). The lack of resident participation could lead to an ineffective participatory structure. As a result, communities might be unaware of deviations from IDPs, which could lead to unacceptable governing and administrative actions by a municipality.

Ward committees within the City of Tshwane receive structural support from the office of the Speaker. Through this support, ward committees are able to organise themselves as the liaison mechanisms responsible for a particular zone and to make the necessary logistical arrangements to ensure that they function effectively. Specific officials in the office of the Speaker are assigned with secretarial functions. These officials have to record, manage and reproduce any administrative documents, such as the minutes of the meetings in each ward within a particular zone.

The challenges ward committees face can potentially hamper the public participation process. Thus, it is important to highlight these challenges to improve public participation for the benefit of the communities. The challenges are:

Citizen involvement

Ward committees were established to promote local democracy by enhancing citizen in Local Government matters. As such, the CTMM ward committees have to increase involvement and participation to improve decision-making in the Municipality. Poor attendance tends to curtail the potential contribution ward committees could make to the municipality's effectiveness. When a public meeting is called in the informal settlements of Mamelodi to address issues of crime prevention or substance abuse, the attendance is often very poor. However, when an agenda involves housing or unemployment, venues are often filled to capacity. This further reiterates the fact that different wards have different needs. As such, a one-size-fits-all approach where a municipal official or a councillor single-handedly compiles meeting agendas, may not address the true needs of a ward, resulting in poor attendance. To encourage participatory

governance, the Municipality should provide training to the residents on municipal issues, such as the functions and powers of municipalities.

Political interference

Traces of political interference are present in almost all of the CTMM wards. Some prominent political individuals who are unaffiliated to the Council also tend to become involved in ward committee matters. Some ward committee members agree to participate in ward committees hoping to be remunerated. Some members exploit the ward committee platform to settle party political scores. Power relations are subject to possible manipulation, which affect ward committees negatively. A municipal councillor may even utilise a ward committee only as a token of compliance with the legislation. In most African National Congress (ANC) led wards, the branch political head normally becomes the ward councillor, who is then *ex officio*, the chairperson of a ward committee. This often creates confusion in as far as the responsibilities are concerned. Thus, the ward committee becomes a mere extension of a political party. Ward committees are then composed of members or supporters of the ruling party in the ward. As a result, ward committees are used as a platform to increase political leaders' status.

Lack of structured / co-ordinated plan of action

In organisational studies, evidence proves that organisations require *inter alia* a well co-ordinated and structured plan of action (POA) for them to function effectively (Robbins and Coulter 2003:232). A POA is used to direct the organisation towards successfully completing or achieving their goals. It is thus imperative for each CTMM ward committee to be able to set its goals and translate them into a POA for members to implement. To ensure an effective POA, the ward committee should include all stakeholders in its planning. Members should be given the freedom to participate in compiling such a plan, which later serves as a guideline to help determine goals. In the case of CTMM, some ward committees lack a structured POA. This has a negative effect on ward committees' contributions.

CONCLUSIONS

Taking note of the socio-political environment within which Government functions in South Africa, it is important to *firstly* emphasise that residents should be educated with regard to when, how and why they should participate in municipal affairs. Failure to do so often results in the residents' lack of participation, which negatively impacts the municipality's decision-making

processes. Consequently, the ineffectiveness of such a participatory structure would have a direct negative impact on the democratic character of Local Government and the Republic of South Africa in general.

Secondly, the ward committee system should be reviewed. Some ward committee members do not take the initiative and do not develop POAs for a committee. This has a significant impact, as the committee serves as a communication mechanism between the community structures of municipalities and individual citizens. Perhaps ward committee members should be remunerated, or financially assisted for their involvement. Ward committees could also be assigned more powers to make decisions for their respective wards.

It could be argued that the role of the CDWs should be changed, so that it does not conflict with the functioning of ward committees. However, this would require that ward committees be empowered to act as liaisons and CDWs be assigned functions to assist ward committees.

Thirdly, it is important for the municipality to formalise processes for the functioning ward committees. Through a legitimate ward committee, it is inevitable that community members will subsequently participate in Local Government matters. Their participation will help the municipal council in meeting their respective communities' expectations.

In summary, ward committees are relevant stakeholders in bridging the communication gap between the municipal councils and the communities they govern. It provides a platform for engagement on the issues that concern Local Government and its processes. Notably, ward committees are in a better position to represent the true views of their communities. Therefore, the functioning of ward committees should be a major focus area for every municipality entitled to establish them.

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