



A Review of Spaces of Local Participation to Promote Service Delivery in South Africa

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ABSTRACT In many developing countries, there is a continued decline in public participation at the local level which often results in poor service delivery and as a result, a rise in protests. South Africa has experienced a sharp increase in service delivery protests in the last decade. One of the reasons advanced is that existing constitutional spaces of democracy do not seem to facilitate effective local participation. Consequently, there is a need to investigate potential mechanisms to enhance local participation because it is believed to contribute towards improved service delivery. This study responds to the following question: What challenges inhibit existing spaces of participation? How can these identified spaces be improved? The study draws data from existing literature and local government documents on South Africa. It concludes that there is a need to improve existing spaces of local participation, which would improve service delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1994 democratic elections, the primary project the South African government undertook was to provide services to the neglected masses as a result of spatial planning by the former apartheid regime. In practice, such redress is complex, and the basic needs of the citizenry can easily be disregarded. The decentralisation process that the country embarked on, offered local governments an opportunity to become central places of service delivery, bequeathed with autonomy as well as legislative and administrative authority (Koelble and Siddle 2014; Mokgopo 2017). The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (2016), notes that local government is the key site of delivery and development and is central to the

entire South African transformative project. The reason is that local government is in close proximity to the citizens and engages directly with communities, promotes democracy and tends to immediate needs (Tshoose 2015).

Despite local government being central to service delivery, the rise in protests in the last decade signify the failure and in part, limitations of the existing spaces of participation (Matheka and Buccus 2006; Bradlow et al. 2011). Protests over basic services have been on the rise in the last decade with Gauteng, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and the North West province accounting for the majority of the service delivery protests (Chigwata et al. 2017; Jordaan 2017).

In many instances the protests have degenerated into violent confrontations because local authorities tend to ignore voices which they perceive to be politically weak and illegitimate (Skenjana and Kimemi 2011). Therefore it is important to question why citizens prefer protests instead of formal invited channels of local participation. This paper argues that reasons for such action include the ineffectiveness of exist-

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ing mechanisms for participation. According to Ngamlana and Mathoho (2012: 33), “it appears that even legislated spaces for public participation are poorly resourced and supported and that they fail to contribute meaningfully to local governance.”

This paper is structured according to the following five sections: introduction focuses on the rationale for the research; objectives of the paper are identified; research methodology adopted for the study; interpret the results from the focus groups; followed by a conclusion and recommendations.

Objectives

This paper seeks to achieve the following objectives: Firstly discuss South Africa’s local government reforms to promote local participation. Secondly explains the spaces of local participation resulting from local government reforms. Thirdly, analyses the challenges faced with respect to existing spaces in public participation. Finally, the paper provides recommendations on how invited spaces can be improved in the country.

METHODOLOGY

This paper draws data from existing literature, municipal documents as well as fieldwork based theses and focus on service delivery issues with specific reference to South Africa. The data gathered from the sources enable the critique of potential reconceptualisation and understanding of spaces of local participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the paper discusses the purpose of local participation to provide a basis for the purpose of local government legislative reforms in South Africa. In this section, the various legislative reforms to strengthen local participation are discussed extensively. The reforms resulted in the establishment of various invited spaces for local participation. Invited spaces of participation refers to state-based frameworks to facilitate public participation in decision-making where citizens are invited to participate in policy deliberations (Berry et al. 2019). These invited spaces are broadly analysed followed by recommendations at the end of the section.

The Purpose of Local Participation

Mak et al. (2017) and André et al. (2006: 1) assert that local participation is the participation of individuals and groups which are positively or negatively affected by, or are interested in, a proposed project, program, plan or policy that is subject to a decision-making process. In the African context in particular, local participation is believed to afford poor communities the opportunity to exercise their voice through consultation and/or mobilisation designed to inform, and to influence larger institutions and policies (Campbell 2014). In the same light, the Overstrand Municipality (2016) highlights that local participation is viewed as an open and accountable process through which local communities exchange views and influence decision making. In general, citizen participation is also an important “School of Citizenship”, which enables the citizens to familiarise themselves with their rights, express their views and observe whether these affect policy and action.

Opportunity to influence decisions results in policy choices favourable to meet the needs of the citizens (Fitzgerald et al. 2016). As a result, there have been growing calls for increased citizen participation in local government by civic organisations and communities as an effective means to identify needs, set priorities and determine resource allocations (Masiya 2012).

Participation not only increases the role of the citizens in the decision-making processes but also improves the capacity of cities to manage community demands (Pandeya 2015). Furthermore, when local citizens participate in decision making processes that affects service delivery, it unites and fabricates their relations with the municipalities and encourage harmonious resolution of challenges (Osborne and Strokosch 2013).

Masiya and Makanza (2009) notes three critical benefits of local citizen participation. Firstly, citizen participation at the local level increases trust between citizens and their respective local governments. This is done by improving transparency and unlocking blurred boundaries of accountability. Consequently, the officials’ actions become transparent as well as minimises dishonest practices such as corruption. Secondly, it promotes political inclusion and greater social justice, particularly empowering marginalised groups and the poorest neighbourhoods. Third-

ly, local citizen participation provides the citizenry and local government a platform to discuss constraints together, make trade-offs and optimise the utilisation of scarce public resources. Overall this promotes improved service delivery and satisfaction.

However, local participation should not imply assembling affected community members and informing them of the decisions taken or to be taken by council (Kiingi 2018). It should include the distribution of power through negotiation between the citizenry and power holders as well as shared planning and decision-making responsibilities, for example through joint committees (Arnstein 1969).

The White Paper on Local Government (1998:8) instructs local government to be developmental in the provision of service delivery by being a government “which is committed to working with citizens, groups and communities to create sustainable human settlements which provide for a decent quality of life and meets the social, economic and material needs of communities in a holistic way.” In other words it encourages local participation and governance based on the consent of the people. South African local governments are expected to provide locals opportunity to actively participate in local policy processes, namely: express their views during the policy development process and implementation to ensure that these reflect the local citizens’ preferences. Alemu and Mulunesh (2018) conclude that local participation is an indispensable element of development. Masten and Obradoviæ (2006) further postulate that the participation of all stakeholders who will be affected by decisions taken is imperative. As a result, it is evident that proper community engagement at local level is crucial and obligatory.

Legislation and Policy for Local Participation in South Africa

South Africa’s local government has experienced numerous transformation stages since the first democratic local elections held in 2000. The latter elections aimed to correct the inequality created by *apartheid* through effective local participation (Modise 2017). A key aspect that enabled transformation and democratisation is the decentralisation of power to facilitate local participation through institutionalised spaces of participation. In the South African context, de-

centralisation is seen as an effective means to promote citizen participation to successfully address injustices of the past.

Subsequently, democratic procedures and principles were adopted at a lower sphere to bring government closer to the people, as well as have them act as agents to promote service delivery. In theory, local government is now physically closer to citizens in the form of municipalities. This also implies that citizens are more aware of their role in society, which creates an active citizenry that fulfils the procedural dimension of debate and holding local governments accountable. The needs of the citizenry ought to be fulfilled because the communities engage directly with local government. This creates stability and fosters the realisation of individual community goals.

The South African Constitution (1996) extensively stipulates the promotion of participatory governance. It also prescribes that one of the objectives of municipalities is “to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government”. In particular, Chapter 7, section 152 of the Constitution outlines the objectives of local government that include the need to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities as well as encourage the participation of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government (RSA Constitution 1996). Section 195 (1) (e) asserts that the needs of the people must be responded to and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy making. Local community participation in local governance is known to facilitate effective and efficient service delivery. Empirical surveys have revealed that efficiency is primarily found in metropolitan municipalities (Monkam 2014).

In addition to the Constitution, various pieces of legislation have been implemented to promote citizen participation through invited spaces.

The White Paper on Local Government which was enacted in 1998 identifies local government as the sphere that is closest to communities and mandated with the responsibility to deliver services and infrastructure fundamental to the well-being of the citizens. Local government is also responsible for promoting growth and development by incorporating local citizen participation and accountability. Furthermore, the

local sphere is required by legislation and policy to discuss the type of basic services required by communities (for example, health, water, electricity and sanitation) through public participation and Integrated Development Planning (IDP) processes.

The provisions of the Municipal Systems Act (2000) also requires that municipal services be provided equitably and ensure accessibility. To ensure this, both the political and administrative leadership must include the communities in municipal policy formulation, planning and any decisions that may affect them. Thus municipalities are expected to establish effective mechanisms, processes and procedures to facilitate local citizen participation.

The Municipal Structures Act (1998) together with the Municipal Systems Act (2000) provides for external consultations with an array of stakeholders such as residents, business, state departments, and similar entities (Masiya 2012). Mechanisms of participation established by the Municipal Structures Act (1998) in particular include ward committees that provide a vital link between ward councillors, the community and municipality. This is expected to result in a situation where local citizens' influence planning in a manner that would best address their needs.

The Municipal Finance Management Act (2003) provides the framework within which municipalities may compile budgets with specific timelines for preparation and approval. It stipulates procedures to inform the community of the municipality's financial status and thereby promotes transparency and effectiveness in financial management at the local sphere. The Municipal Property Rates Act (2004) promotes community participation and determines the rate policies.

The Constitution and the web of legislation governing the local government system have created invited spaces for local participation with a view of contributing towards effective service delivery. Therefore, in theory, local government is accessible to its constituents to participate in existing forums to prioritise the community's agenda. Subsequently, in theory, this could result in one assuming that South Africa's local government is effective and efficient in realising its goal to deliver basic services, engage citizens and be transparent. This would bring democracy and services closer to the people. Together with the Integrated Development Plan

(IDP) process, provision is made for reporting, citizen engagement, including review and implementation of the set basket for service delivery activities. This implies that citizen engagement results in a deeper form of participation and improved service delivery. However, this does not seem to be the case in practice.

Despite these provisions, critics have argued, that created local participation spaces in South Africa have not been effective in promoting local participation (Monkam 2014). Piper and Lieres (2008) posit that there is clear legislation and policy that govern public participation. However, its implementation has been poor due to deficient administration and a lack of commitment from the elite political candidates. Furthermore, Monkam (2014) points out that there are spaces which remain largely inaccessible for many. The South African local government landscape requires improved methods of public participation.

In the following section, the paper analyses how citizens engage at a local level through both invited and invented spaces, including attendant limitations.

Analysis of Spaces of Local Participation

Le Roux (2015) argues that spaces of local participation include 'invited spaces' implemented by government to foster participation, as well as invented/claimed space through which residents assert their agency as active community members. The existing legislation and policy process generated invited spaces. Both invited and formal spaces are generally a means to access the state through formal mechanisms. Important spaces utilised by South Africans are created by the state, which functions as a supply dimension. At a local government level these include local elections, ward meetings, council meetings, and public forums.

Local Government Elections

Elections allow citizens to exercise their democratic right to vote. Furthermore, the electorate elects the individual and party of their choice to represent their interests. In South Africa, local government elections are held in a five year cycle in terms of the Local Government: Municipal Electoral Act 27 of 2000. However, February (2018) and Menocal (2014) highlight the weak-

nesses which comprise elections. Both hold that although the citizens hold the state to account through elections in a democracy, these have proved weak and a blunt instrument to enforce service provider accountability. Although the process and space for participation exists, it does not always manifest in material gains. Monitoring in particular during policy implementation is difficult to enforce through this process. Furthermore, in several municipal areas, the citizens seldom utilise their vote as a bargaining tool because they do not punish political parties at the polls. Instead they tend to abstain from voting. Afrobarometer (2016: 1) established that “less than half of South Africans believe that elections ensure that their views are represented (44%) or enable them to remove non-performing leaders from office (36%). Both measures have decreased from previous surveys.” A total of 1 631 832 more voters were eligible to vote during the 2016 local government elections compared to 2011 local elections (Electrol Commission 2016). There was a 57.97 percent turnout in comparison to 57.64 percent in 2011. This statistic revealed high voter apathy with a marginal increase of only 0.33 percent.

Govender (2008) notes that there is a lack of meaningful mechanisms for councillors to influence decision-making at a municipal level. This subsequently affects the relevance of local government elections because invited spaces can facilitate citizen concerns related to service delivery issues. October (2018) argues that in the South African landscape political parties generally deploy councillors opposed to citizens having a say. Consequently, councillors have limited incentive to account to their constituency because the party is perceived to be accountable. As a result, these spaces for engagement prove less important, especially for those who are marginalised or poor, because the decision processes tend to be influenced by parties that generate deployment lists.

Since the current electoral system limits ward councillor accountability due to the party selecting ward candidates, it is important to introduce a system of direct representation.

The Ward System

South African ward committees are established in terms of the Municipal Structures Act (1998) and each ward comprises of a ward coun-

cillor, and up to ten other members who represent the diverse interests in the ward, and serve voluntarily for a five-year term. Ward committees provide feedback to the ward councillor and serve as informers on behalf of the community. The councillor is required to serve as the voice of the people, express the community needs, as well as act as a watchdog. Furthermore, the incumbent must ensure that the municipality implements policies to address the identified needs (Corruption Watch 2016). In theory, councillors are a key access point for engagement at a local level and are generally the most accessible to communities. The onus of creating rules, election of ward committees, how frequently they meet and the potential dissolution of ward committees, lies with the municipal council (Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs 2017). Generally, ward committees are expected to hold regular meetings with a specific agenda, and serve as a bridge to disseminate information to the community and municipal council. Of significance is that these committees are generally expected to be neutral and not be subject to political capture.

Although ward committees are integral, they are an advisory board to the municipal council, and have limited power in decision making. This is unfortunately the core of their weakness to facilitate effective participation. Various authorities have condemned the performance of the ward system. Ward committees largely depend on the councillor to function effectively. As a politician the councillor may co-opt political sympathisers on the ward committee (October 2018). Piper and Nadvi (2010) assert that with respect to historically disadvantaged communities, ward committees seem to have become extensions of the dominant political party, while in affluent areas they are overshadowed by rate-payers’ associations. Piper and Nadvi (2010) conclude that ward committees are an ineffective space for municipal and citizen interactions.

The Department of Provincial and Local Government (2005) advised that avenues to report back from the ward committee to the council are confused and the notion that the ward councillor has the opportunity to raise matters from ward-level at council meetings is misplaced. A study by Paradza et al. (2010) established that less than half (47%) of the respondents perceived that ward committees had limited influence and impact on council decisions. Further,

Paradza et al. (2010) argued that citizens perceive the councillors' role as intermediaries between residents and the municipal administration as limited, with minimal communication between municipal administrations and ordinary residents. Therefore, councillors need to open the channels of communication between themselves and their constituency so that they can gain insight into the public needs and report on municipal decisions. Furthermore, councillors must cooperate with all stakeholders in the community rather than rely on a "gentleman's club", that is, councillors appoint their favourite individuals and groups to work.

The Integrated Development Plan (IDP)

The IDP is reviewed annually. The municipal councils manage their budget, evaluate progress and prioritise the most basic needs of a community (Auriacombe and Ackron 2015). It is a process which underscores the need for citizen participation, as well as to ward meetings as a space for local participation. Public participation in these processes takes place through institutional structures such as steering committee meetings which is internal, and representative forum meetings which are external. The latter forum meetings include representatives from state departments, NGO's, CBO's as well as local sectors which may include business and agricultural sectors. The IDP focuses on social and economic development, and facilitates the development of the five-year plan for each municipality.

In terms of the Municipal Systems Act (2000) the IDP must be participatory in nature, that is the community participates in drafting the actual plan, and all stakeholders are included in the process through appropriate forums. The IDP is a constitutional obligation, and effectiveness and functionality should assess community needs and draw up vision for the long-term future (SALGA 2012:4). Although the IDP is supposedly participatory, it has been argued that the information is not easily accessible and is also an extremely technical process. Matosse (2013) asserts that these processes are often very top-down and technical. Consequently, the citizens withdraw due to its complexity as well as feel that they do not really have a voice in the process. Moreover, the IDP does not explore the issues faced by communities, since it comprises of set priorities identified by the relevant

city. As a result, community members often do not participate because the process is rigid, while the needs of the community are often not prioritised.

Tshoose (2015) argues that local government officials often act as gate-keepers and controllers rather than partners who provide communities with space to have a greater voice and control over resources and resource allocation. Qwabe and Mdaka (2011) posit that local government officials are often unwilling to share decision-making powers with communities and tend to ignore input from councillors.

Furthermore, local government officials often believe that it is their role and they have unfettered ability to invent "the best solution" (Kanyane 2014: 104). Molaba (2016) posits that local government officials do not meet the expectations and real needs of the community. They reduce local participation to a mere technical exercise and utilise it merely to ensure compliance with the requirements of framework legislation.

In small towns and rural municipalities, the IDP process is ineffective because the local citizens input is not prioritised due to the levels of education in such areas, and the limited influence citizens truly have of the agenda (Matosse 2013). What is evident in this instance is that participation is transformed into a manipulative design (Mac Kay 2004:14; Pretorius 2017) and can be considered as 'non-participation' (Arnstein 1969: 217). This form of participation is conducted in a disguised manner to substitute genuine participation. Mac Kay (2004: 14) asserts that all the communities achieve through this activity is to be able to say that they 'participated in participation'. The author further describes the illusiveness of the term 'participation', that is, participation in the IDP processes can be regarded as a mere consultation session. This could be alleged to be a window-dressing exercise when communities are perceived as statistical abstractions, and participation is measured by how many come to the meeting, take home brochures, respond to a questionnaire or participate in surveys (Arnstein 1969: 219; Gaffey 2013).

There are various other invited spaces which include public meetings/*imbizo* but as highlighted above, are spaces which are primarily utilised by the middle class and elite. Non-profit organisations do escalate the needs of communities but it is resource intensive and not the norm. Moreover, there has been a growing shift to uti-

lise invented/informal spaces by communities at the local sphere.

Invented Spaces

Dissatisfied with participation through invited spaces and subsequently its results, local communities have increasingly resorted to the utilisation of invented spaces, which refers to actions of marginalised groups in the local political elite who mobilise “subaltern” groups on the basis of popular grievances and create new spaces of interaction between the state and the communities (Ndlovu 2016). These spaces have resulted in wide-spread protests and a spirit of insurgent citizenship: the inhabitants take to the streets, march, burn tyres, destroy municipal property, and numerous instances of extreme protest action have occurred (Prince 2013: 1).

Since 2004, many South African municipalities have experienced a rise in service delivery protests. Studies by institutions such as the Social Change Unit at the University of Johannesburg established a sharp rise in service delivery protests between 2004 and 2014 (Grant 2014). Even the office of the Presidency (2015: 27) reported that over seventy-eight percent of the municipalities had failed to perform the twelve mandated functions and approximately fifty percent performed less than half of their constitutional functions by 2015.

The protests have gradually become violent, often resulting in the destruction of private and public property and in certain instances injuries and loss of life. A study by Lolwana (2016: 8) revealed that service delivery protests have been increasing in intensity and violence. Alexander (2012: 2) has described South Africa as the “protest capital of the world”. Citizens have been protesting more violently and vehemently to display their grievances against inadequate or total lack of municipal service delivery (Swart 2013).

All these findings confirm that municipalities are facing challenges in delivering on their mandate and communities are becoming more impatient with the lack of quality basic services. Matebesi and Botes (2017: 84) as well as Mbuyisa (2013: 122) contend that the ever-increasing service delivery protests is a reflection of the extent to which formal institutional channels for citizen engagement have failed. Communities feel alienated and disconnected from decision-

making processes and disempowered to influence municipalities (Beyers 2016: 175). Akinboade et al. (2013: 462) confirm this argument and assert that service delivery dissatisfaction and protests at the local level is as a result of inefficiencies at the local sphere and failure to provide adequate service delivery which can in many instances be explained by the lack of effective public participation.

Among other issues, these symbolise increasing frustration with the performance of invited spaces of participation and their ability to serve the people’s interests. Booysen (2009) contends that the protests signify citizen desperation and anger over the disconnection of local councillors as well as a dearth of a lending ear from public officials through the official systems. Reddy (2010) states that invented spaces are also pre-dominantly utilised by the poor and marginalised because the state often ignores the needs of the poor who are implicitly viewed as less important citizens.

The issues of the poor are important since the majority of South Africans are poor and the country is one of the most unequal societies in the world based on its Gini coefficient (Piketty and Goldhammer 2014). In theory, using formal spaces seem more useful for the middle class and the elite than those with limited resources. Clark and Wise (2018: 206) postulate that “the state machinery is compelled to respond to middle class resident welfare associations, weakening the bureaucrats’ ability to address the concerns of the poor.” The marginalised, who are the majority, are often ignored and resort to informal spaces as a means to access the state and to make their voices heard.

Therefore, although local participation is codified in the Constitution (RSA 1996) and written into many pieces of legislation, effective citizen participation remains elusive in South African local government. Consequently, there is need to increase and/or to remodel spaces of participation.

Suggestions to Strengthen Spaces of Local Participation

Efforts to strengthen spaces of local participation should be identified by analysing potential gaps in participation in the existing invited spaces. This study notes that many authorities state that the gap in local participation and

subsequently in service delivery satisfaction arises from limited interaction between municipal administration officials, and the frustrations that councillors experience with regard to scarcely making any impact in municipal decision making (Piper and Deacon 2009; Paradza et al. 2010; Powell 2012). Furthermore, certain authorities contend that there is a gap between the citizenry and municipal officials. This tends to widen the gap between citizen expectations and the officials choice of service delivery because consensus and shared understanding among stakeholders cannot be reached (Tshoose 2015; Qwabe and Mdaka 2011; Molaba 2016). Therefore, there is a need for spaces of participation that effectively foster citizen-driven social accountability measures by bringing together local citizens, councillors and municipal officials from the inception of projects to implementation and evaluation phases. Such spaces will strengthen and deepen local participation. The community scorecard as participatory action research is one such mechanism that can be implemented.

Joshi (2010) postulates that the community scorecard as a methodology is a citizen focused and accountability mechanism that can be utilised to replace, strengthen or enhance the conventional spaces and means used for local participation. Chambers (2016: 6) posits that “The community scorecard has become internationally recognised as an effective social accountability tool for building and strengthening citizen collective action for improved service delivery.” Gullo et al. (2016) observe that social accountability mechanisms such as the community scorecard raises social and public accountability and responsiveness from municipal governments but more uniquely, includes an interface meeting between the municipal officials and the community that allows for immediate feedback.

The critical strength of the scorecard in fostering local participation and promoting service delivery lies in that it brings together a broad spectrum of stakeholders including councillors and municipal officials who are responsible for project formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as community members to provide feedback on service delivery. Gullo et al. (2016) assert that the scorecard includes various dialogue processes where various stakeholders can discuss situations and collaborate to improve service delivery.

Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) (2013) notes that the community scorecard is largely executed at a local level, generates information through focused group interactions and supports enhanced participation of the local community; provides immediate feedback to local municipalities and emphasises immediate responses and joint decision making which allows for mutual dialogue between local communities and the municipality, and can be followed by joint monitoring. Thus the community scorecard helps citizens provide systematic and constructive feedback to municipal officials and councillors of their performance. The municipal officials and councillors learn directly from local communities on which aspects of their services and programs function well and which do not. The information generated through the community scorecard concurrently enables officials and councillors to make informed decisions, policy choices and implement service improvements that respond to the citizenry’s rights, needs and preferences.

In the final analysis such spaces promote participation through three interrelated elements: an open and transparent municipal government, including citizens in its activities and decision-making processes; a consistent and persistent flow of information from the government to its citizens and vice versa; and efficient approaches to inform the citizens of their roles and responsibilities to participate as equal partners.

CONCLUSION

Since the demise of apartheid, South Africa has transformed the local government landscape by promulgating legislation and policies geared towards local participation through invited spaces. Critical invited spaces created in the process include periodic elections, ward committees, IDP process and other spaces such as public meetings/*imbizo*. However, these invited spaces do not seem to adequately facilitate effective local participation which contributes towards service delivery protests. To enhance local participation, there is need to introduce and institutionalise additional spaces for local participation, particularly through social accountability mechanisms such as the community scorecard premised on better dialogue and interaction between citizens, councillors, municipal officials and appropriate stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers of this paper provide the following recommendations to strengthen local participation. Local participation is known to contribute towards improving local government service delivery. However, in South Africa, invited spaces of local participation need to be enhanced to foster inclusive participation by bringing together local citizens, councillors and municipal officials throughout the policy cycle.

Major criticisms of the existing spaces of participation relate to the unwillingness of local government officials to share power with communities. To overcome this problem, local governments should consider introducing social accountability measures such as the community scorecard to enhance the inclusion of municipal officials in effective participation particularly at the policy implementation stage. Furthermore, local government officials should begin to seriously consider citizen input in local policy processes because technical capacity is as important as prioritising citizen demands.

The findings revealed that where participation is implemented, it is often considered a technical exercise driven to merely ensure compliance with the requirements of the policy and legislative framework rather than enhance accountability. Citizens should be given more time and space to discuss agenda items during meetings in invited spaces.

Finally, given that the current electoral system accentuates the significance of the party in the selection of ward candidates, councillors have limited incentive to feel accountable to their constituency because the party is perceived to be accountable. Therefore, councillors need to enhance communication between themselves and their wards so that they can gain insight into public needs. The councillors should also avoid selecting favoured individuals and groups to work with but instead cooperate with all stakeholders in the community. Targeted accountability and in turn consequences need to be placed on ward councillors and municipalities in order for local participation to improve. This includes revisiting existing spaces for participation, as well as being innovative to create new and effective ones which are likely to work best in specific municipalities.

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