Including the excluded in the integrated development planning process for improved community participation

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Abstract

This article aims to assess the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process for improved community participation. The IDP process was developed to improve strategic planning and community participation at the municipal level. Many South African municipalities have been struggling to use the IDP process to improve community participation. The methodology included 400 respondents who were chosen through a probability sampling technique and probed to complete the online survey using a closed-ended questionnaire guide, and ten respondents were also chosen through a non-probability sampling technique and were face-to-face interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The key findings revealed that poor community participation exists in the study area due to a lack of encouragement from responsible authorities. The Tzaneen municipality does not provide adequate feedback to the communities, and the inputs of the communities are not considered. There is a continuous lack of community consultation during the annual review of the IDP. The ineffective IDP process for improved community participation presents several challenges. Thus, this article concluded by providing a few recommendations to enhance the application of the IDP process and community participation. The Tzaneen municipal area should at all times uphold democratic principles by ensuring active public participation, transparency, and openness in municipal affairs. It also recommends making it easier for marginalised and previously disadvantaged people to participate in municipal policy and decision-making without prejudice. South African municipalities, including Tzaneen municipality, should develop and innovate institutional, and organisational capabilities to better utilise their resources, mitigate socio-economic challenges and enhance service delivery.

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Introduction

The provision of services in South Africa was predicated on racial segregation during the apartheid period up to 1994. However, when the new government was established, residents were hopeful for changes for a better quality of life for all. The emergence of a new democratic government in 1994 allowed for transformation to reduce the injustice and inadequacy related to service delivery challenges (Mashamaite & Madzivhandila, 2014). The government introduced new public policies to ensure that the local government plays a meaningful development role to benefit its citizens. For instance, they introduced the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) in 1996 to improve community participation and ultimately reduce service delivery backlogs (Mashiachidi & Moeti, 2016). Equally, Section 25 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000) indicates that all municipalities should adopt a single, inclusive and strategic plan (IDP) to promote the area's development under its jurisdiction. As such, the IDP was adopted as an instrument to ensure that municipalities collaborate with communities and other government agencies to promote sustainable service delivery. Makalela (2017) and Asha & Makalela (2020) believe that the IDP should be used as a strategic plan to help municipalities eliminate service delivery backlogs. According to Makalela (2017), promoting community participation throughout
the planning and implementation procedures is critical for the IDP to be more trustworthy and resilient. Community participation plays a critical role in ensuring that exact service delivery needs and desires are met.

However, there are still other issues that hinder effective and active community participation in the IDP process. Despite numerous laws that encourage community participation in the IDP, Mathebula & Sebola (2019) assert that “service delivery challenges persist as a result of poor community participation in the IDP process, primarily in local municipalities, and are deeply rooted in the disaster of implementing decentralisation, mismanagement, corruption, inability to deliver to communities, and lack of community participation in major municipal decision-making”. In addition, a study by Asha & Makalela (2020) concurs that South African “local municipalities are struggling with the application of IDP and service delivery. The planning and application of IDPs have not resulted in sustainable services, especially in rural areas”. Furthermore, a study by Mathebula (2018) in the Mopani District Municipality, revealed that the IDP process, which is a tool for improved community participation and service delivery, is not properly, efficiently and effectively applied to provide the services that are envisioned. Equally, Mnguni (2018) asserts a poor understanding of the formulation and application of the IDP process and a poor understanding of the significant role that communities ought to play in the IDP process by the local government officials and political office-bearers. This poor understanding has contributed to service delivery protests among communities and their municipalities when they fail to deliver the basic needs of the communities (Mnguni, 2018). Also, Mamokhere (2020) indicates that in South Africa, protests against lack of community engagement in the socio-economic development process and poor service delivery have become fashionable, with several communities seeing it as the sole mechanism of communication and attracting the attention of the responsible authorities. Based on the introduction provided above, the research questions to be answered in this study will be: What are the IDP processes involved for improved community participation in South African municipalities? Consequently, this article assesses the IDP process for improved community participation and seeks to determine if communities are involved in the IDP phases when facilitating service delivery and development projects. The research question that forms the foundation of this research is: How could the IDP process be used for improved community participation?

This study is certainly not a new contribution to the focus area. Many studies have been undertaken on Integrated Development Planning in South Africa at the local level. However, this could be the first study to be undertaken at Tzaneen Municipality. Consequently, it will add to the knowledge base on the municipality and possibly integrate development planning in the province. Thus, this article will outline the literature review related to the study under investigation, the legislative framework applicable to IDP and community participation, and research methodology, findings and discussion and conclude by offering strategic recommendations.

Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the theoretical and empirical literature review relevant to the study.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Democratic Decision-Making Theory, better explained by Enwereji et al. (2020). Enwereji & Uwizeyimana (2020), in their study, indicate that the community participation process is considered indispensable as it improves the relationships between the communities and government in the decision-making processes. The study implies that community participation is a legal requirement. In the South African context, the constitution provides for community involvement in municipal policy-making and decision-making. The requirements of the Democratic Decision-Making Theory are consistent with constitutional requirements and the growing secondary literature. Therefore, this theory is deemed relevant for this study based on its theoretical grounds. The theory emphasises the need for a leadership style that will allow community members to participate in the decision-making process (Holman, 2010). Bhatti et al. (2012) see democratic leadership, also known as participative leadership or shared leadership, “as a type of leadership style in which group members take a more participative role in the decision-making process”. As such, Quick & Bryson (2016) affirmed that in democracies, community members are seen to be significant stakeholders in that they can participate neither indirectly nor directly via elected representatives in the formation, adoption, and application of the laws and policies such as IDP and service delivery that affect them. Community participation, therefore, is a major part of the government-public connection in democracies. However, according to Enwereji & Uwizeyimana (2020), Democratic Decision-Making Theory “is the opposite of an autocratic leadership style where leadership happily dictates the shape of management”.

Ulrich & Wenzel (2017) state that in Democratic Decision-Making Theory, leaders agree to equity, equality, fairness and transparency in the process of management. Although the democratic decision-making style seems frank, the process is considered intricate, as it can be challenging to bring groups of people from different backgrounds together and make them agree on a single matter. The democratic leadership style is complex, but the researcher further argues the pros (advantages) and cons (disadvantages). The advantages may include a transparent process that is perceived to be fair, while the disadvantages may include communities being vulnerable to political campaigning and a lack of ownership in implementing decisions. McCallister (2019) indicates that “the process entailed in the democratic decision-making style comprises assessing situations and evolving options, meetings’ scheduling for agreement, assigning an advocate for each option, holding reasonable discussions with delegates on each option, and voting for options or agreeing on each concept raised”. Similarly, Quick & Bryson (2016) also affirm that stakeholders, including government agencies, political leaders, nonprofit organisations, and business organisations, interact to formulate or implement public policies (IDP) and programs through community participation. Quick & Bryson (2016) further indicate that community participation in many
instances could be “limited to discrete acts (e.g., a town hall meeting or citizen survey) or described by a set of practices (e.g. arranging public hearings or other types of consultation processes), participation more generally is the process of engagement in governance”.

The article also adopted the theory of New Public Management as a lens better explained and promoted by Munzhedzi (2020), who indicates that NPM is a dominant paradigm in the public administration field of study. The goal of NPM as a theory is to systematically reform traditional public administration to improve a capable and effective government operation. The NPM theory, according to Islam (2015), has been on a mission to transform the old or traditional public administration. The theory aims to reform the public administration and ensure innovative ways to reduce service delivery backlogs. The theory aims to reduce the service delivery backlogs by adapting to decentralising responsibilities, encouraging public participatory planning, and reform or modernisation (Maserumule, 2009). The NPM aspect is consistent with the constitution and democratic decision-making theory, promoting participatory governance. Furthermore, Munzhedzi (2021) indicates that community participation in municipal affairs is imperative for the NPM approach, facilitating participatory planning over democratic mechanisms and structures. Having said that, the article finally adopted Arnstein Sherry’s ladder of citizen participation theory, which he pioneered in 1969. Arnstein (1969)’s ladder of citizen participation theory talks about community participation in the planning process in the United States. “The ladder of citizen participation is one of the most widely referenced and influential models in the field of democratic public participation. This theory describes how empowered public institutions and officials deny power to citizens and how levels of citizen agency, control, and power can be increased” (Arnstein, 1971). Arnstein (1971), in his or her study, further argues that community participation is a democratic process and to be classified as community involvement genuinely, it needs the redistribution of power. Similarly, in Mnguni (2018), community participation implies the involvement of communities in policy-making activities. This also involves the identification of services’ needs, budget prioritisation and preparation of the IDP.

Eight (8) steps constitute the ladder of citizen participation theory. These steps guide who has power when imperative decisions are made. Thus, formulating effective approaches to involve communities has become important. The ladder of citizen participation developed by Arnstein (1971) includes the following eight steps namely citizen control, delegation, partnerships, placation, consultation, informing, therapy, and manipulation. The steps by Arnstein are relevant in this article based on their ground and contributions to encouraging active community participation. Therefore, The Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality should use the steps recognised by Arnstein’s theory of citizen participation. The steps stipulated by the ladder of citizen participation theory ensure that community participation is achieved. The citizen participation ladder theory is presented ascending from “manipulation, Therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegation and citizen control”. Hereunder is the ladder of the citizen participation model.

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**Figure 1:** Ladder of Citizen Participation; Source: Arnstein (1969)

By analysing the steps of Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation, the researchers argue that communities should control the planning processes (IDP), thereby identifying service priorities. Giving communities a say in planning processes could lead to the successful implementation of local government programs like IDP. Equally, as much as community participation is a legitimacy mandate, it should be maintained and not just be done for compliance as per step three (3) of the model above. Step 3, which is informing, indicates that “informing is the most significant first step to legitimate community participation. However, the emphasis is on a one-way flow of information too frequently. There is no channel for feedback and no power for negotiation”. It can be argued that step three (3) undermines community participation because the municipalities often do not provide feedback to communities on municipal affairs. The municipalities are undermining the constitutional mandate to provide adequate feedback to communities. Rowe & Frewer
(2005) indicate that there are “various methods that can be used to provide feedback to communities on the activities of the municipal council and municipalities in general. Municipalities can use media announcements, public notices, ward committees, and ward meetings to provide feedback to communities”. The municipality should avoid manipulation (Step 1) of communities, a non-participation. Community participation should not be viewed as a compliance measure but rather a means of achieving desired results by encouraging interactive and consultative participation (Kgobe & Mamokhere, 2021).

All the theories adopted in this article fit well based on their grounded arguments and contribution to the existing and growing body of knowledge. All the theories adopted urge the responsible authorities and agencies to facilitate active community participation in the planning processes.

Empirical Review

Integrated Development Planning Process for Improved Community Participation

Integrated Development Planning as a planning instrument at the municipal level should follow specific procedural processes or phases as indicated in the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000). Tshishonga (2016) indicates that an IDP should be understood and conducted per the following consecutive stages or phases: analysis, strategies, projects, integration and final approval. Hereunder are discussed;

Analysis Stage

Tshishonga (2016) and Dlamini & Reddy (2018) indicate that the application process of the IDP involves several stages or phases to be followed. Asha & Makalela (2020), indicate that the first process of applying the IDP process is the analysis stage, also known as the initial phase. Manyaka & Madzivhendila (2013) indicate that the analysis stage deals primarily with assessing the current situation of a particular municipal area to determine and rationalise the nature of service delivery and challenges. The analysis stage is where the Tzaneen municipal area analyses all the current challenges faced by the communities and other stakeholders. The stakeholders, including communities, are encouraged to identify their development needs and other items that require the municipality's attention. During the analysis stage, the Tzaneen municipal area should assess the needs of the communities, prioritise them, set goals to meet the identified needs and implement projects and programmes to achieve objectives as indicated by (Mashamba, 2008).

Strategy development stage

Asha & Makalela (2020) posit that strategy development is the second stage of the application IDP process and this stage is about formulating strategic goals that include developing a shared vision and objectives in the short-term, mid-term, and long-term among multiple stakeholders. In the strategy development stage, Tzaneen Municipality is “required to develop a vision, objectives, strategies and project identification. The vision is a statement of what the municipality seeks to achieve” (Molaba, 2016).

Projects stage

Dlamini & Reddy (2018) indicate that the third stage of IDP application is the project stage. The project stage is about the design and specification of projects to meet the prioritised needs and items identified in the previous stage. During this stage, the municipality designs projects, including the content informing such initiatives with clear targets and indicators to measure the performance of individual projects (Tshishonga, 2016). The project stage includes the development of an operative strategy and provides a detailed plan for designing project proposals by setting up objectives, targets and indicators. The municipality needs to ensure that the proposed projects respond positively to service delivery needs and issues confronting community members.

Integration stage

The fourth process of the application of the IDP is the integration stage. Asha and Makalela (2020) indicate that "the fourth stage includes the screening, adjusting, consolidating and approving of project proposals, thereby ensuring an integrated process between preparation, implementation and delivery". Similarly, Pauw et al. (2013) opined that once the projects have been identified, they should be evaluated to confirm that they meet the municipality's objectives and address the identified items. The Integration stage provides an opportunity for the municipality to align and coordinate the application of different projects and programmes based on their nature, location and timing to ensure that consolidated and integrated programmes are included in the IDP. For instance, Mashamba (2008) indicate that this stage is about integrating various projects identified and designed in the previous stage (project stage).

Approval stage

The fifth process of the IDP is the approval stage. The fifth stage focuses on the decision and endorsement of the IDP projects (Asha and Makalela, 2020). Once the draft of the IDP is completed, it has to be submitted to the municipal council for consideration and deliberation. The municipal council has the authority and responsibility to consider and approve the IDP. The municipal council will not approve the IDP of the municipality without having gone through the necessary consultation process as mandated by legislative regulations (Mashamba, 2008; Munzheodzi, 2016). In terms of section 25(4) of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (Act 23 of 2000), the municipality is required within 14 days of adopting the IDP to give effect to public notice for comments. Community members should be allowed to comment before the council approves the IDP. As indicated by Enwereji & Uwizeyimana (2020),
posit that community participation plays a vital role in local government. The researcher argues that the IDP should be prepared to assist the municipality in drafting the annual budget. The IDP is a tool to enhance community participation and service delivery and guide the budget prioritisation of different communities.

The legislative framework that encourages community participation

This section provides an overview of different pieces of legislation relevant to community participation and Integrated Development Planning in South Africa and their implications. The Republic of South Africa Constitution, 1996, make provision for community participation in local government affairs. In Chapter 7, section 152 (1) makes specific provisions to encourage communities to participate in municipal affairs actively. Section 153 paragraph (a-b) states that a municipality shall structure and manage its administration, budgeting, and planning processes (IDP) to prioritise the community's basic needs in the same chapter. Also, Chapter 10, section 194(1) paragraph (e), provides for community participation in policy and decision-making processes like in the IDP. The section indicates that "People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making". While the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) also indicates that municipalities must develop mechanisms, processes, and structures to foster active and effective community participation. This is per sections 16(1), 17(1), and 25(1) of the Act. Section 16 of the Act explicitly mandates municipalities to "encourage, and create conditions for the local community to participate in the municipality's affairs, including in IDP and strategic decisions relating to services. The motivation behind this Act is to ensure that beneficiaries of the municipality are involved".

On the other hand, the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (Act 117 of 1998) states that structures to facilitate community participation should be put in place by South African municipalities. Section 72-74 of the Municipal Structures Act provides that ward committees should be established as a mechanism to facilitate community participation in municipal affairs. The responsibilities of the award committee are people who make a recommendation on any issues that affect communities to the Ward Councillor. Participation is also rooted in a representative democracy, where the people elect individuals to represent them and subsequently hold them accountable for decision-making (Foster, 2009; Dyum, 2020). Lastly, the White Paper on Local Government, 1998, states that communities should be involved in municipal affairs, consulted to determine service needs and aspirations, and should hold officials and political office-bearers accountable. The White Paper on Local Government, 1998, related to community participation, is clearly explained in the Batho Pele principles. Zwane et al. (2022) maintain that local government is the branch of government that interacts most closely with communities and provides people with vital public goods and services as prescribed by the White Paper on Local Government of 1998.

Thus, failure by the municipalities to abide by the above pieces of legislation will mean that they are undermining the constitutional mandates. Authors argue that they have witnessed many protests as a result of undermining the constitutional mandates such as providing sustainable service delivery and encouraging active public participation. In other words, failing to adhere to the abovementioned legislation has implications.

Research and Methodology

This article adopted a convergent parallel mixed-method design to explore and describe the IDP process for improved community participation better explained by (Morse, 1991). "A convergent parallel design entails that the researcher concurrently conducts the quantitative and qualitative elements in the same phase of the research process, weighs the methods equally, analyses the two components independently, and interprets the results separately" (Creswell & Clark, 2011). A convergent parallel mixed-method research design was adopted in this article because it enables the researchers to gain a complete understanding of the IDP process for improved community participation and achieve balancing results by using the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research design. By incorporating both the qualitative and quantitative data, the researchers were able to ensure reliability and validity to analyse data through analytical, descriptive narration, and comparative and statistical analysis. These designs were considered the most appropriate in terms of responding to the research problem.

The study area selected to conduct this research was the Tzaneen municipal area in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The Tzaneen municipal area community members, municipal officials, and Ward Councillors/Committee members of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality (GTM) in Limpopo Province served as a sample frame. A total of 410 participants served as a representation of the total population of the region.

Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used. Probability sampling is a method whereby a large group of people have a preferable chance to participate in the study (Salkind, 2012). Simple random sampling was used to randomly select respondents to participate in the study in probability sampling. Therefore, in this study, a total number of 400 closed-end questionnaires were randomly distributed electronically and completed by the community members of the Tzaneen municipal area. While non-probability sampling is a method in which the researcher selects units that represent the population based on his professional judgment (Burger & Silima, 2006). Therefore, in this article, the researchers interviewed ten (10) key informants, which included; (1) the IDP Manager and (9) the Ward Councillors/Ward Committee members from the nine (9) community wards of the Tzaneen municipal area. The researchers interviewed these populations because they believed that they would provide concrete, contextual, in-depth and significant information.
Data collection in this context is seen as the precise, systematic gathering of information relevant to the research purpose or specific objectives, questions, or hypotheses of a study (Burns & Grove, 2005). For this article, the researchers used multiple data collection techniques deriving from the primary and secondary data. The study adopted a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Thus, quantitative empirical data was collected using electronic closed-ended questionnaires, while qualitative empirical data was collected using a face-to-face semi-structured interview guide. Bless et al. (2013) assert that data analysis is about establishing, accounting for, and explaining the data; in simple terms, it is making sense of data out of what participants' views are about the circumstances, and checking the patterns, themes, categories and regularities. Given that, this study adopted both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. In this manner, empirical data gathered through electronic closed-end questionnaires were generated and analysed utilising Microsoft Excel, with the aid of the university statistician. Descriptive statistical data was used to analyse the data. Thus, frequencies, tables, bar graphs and pie charts were used to present and interpret the results. On the other hand, qualitative data collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews were analysed utilising the thematic analysis method and NVivo. Data from the same categories were grouped and presented in a description format. Also, themes and categories that are common and unique were identified and presented.

The ethical clearance certificate was obtained before the researcher(s) began with empirical data collection. The ethical clearance code is 21PMGPP19. Ethical clearance was granted from the University of Johannesburg. All ethical considerations were followed. Participation in this study was voluntary, and participants were encouraged to give prior consent to participation by completing an informed consent form. Privacy and respect were maintained.

**Findings and Discussions**

This section provides the empirical findings and discussion. The article begins by outlining the quantitative findings and is followed by qualitative findings. Given the nature of this article, the findings and discussions are outlined concurrently.

**Quantitative Findings and Discussion**

This section presents quantitative findings that have been obtained through a survey. The findings are presented in tables, figures, percentages, and frequencies.

**Understanding of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and community participation.**

Table 1 below shows the level of communities' knowledge and understanding of the IDP and community participation. From the findings below, it is found that the majority of the respondents, which amount to 317 (79%) indicate that they fully understand the IDP and community participation. In comparison, the minority of 83 (21%) of the respondents indicate that they do not have knowledge and understanding of the IDP and community participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Source:** Authors

The findings show that most of the respondents in the Tzaneen municipal area know and understand the IDP and community participation. One can affirm that an IDP and community participation are familiar and easy concepts to understand, even by a layman. However, the IDP and community participation can also be complex concepts to other uneducated people. Therefore, the municipality should provide workshops or training to ensure effective, timely participation and understanding of the full consultation and approval processes. In this regard, Greater Tzaneen Municipality IDP (2021), “the IDP process is understood as a process through which municipalities prepare strategic development plans for five years. An IDP is one of the key instruments for local government to cope with its new developmental role and seeks to arrive at decisions on issues such as municipal budgets, land management, promotion of local economic development, and institutional transformation in a consultative, systematic, and strategic manner”. According to the World Health Organization (2002), “community participation is the active participation of people in the analysis, decision-making, planning, and program implementation, as well as the activities”. Because most respondents claim to understand IDP and community participation, the researcher(s) contends that it should not be taken for granted but should be leveraged to overcome service delivery backlogs. Failure to provide communities with the opportunity to participate in the IDP process has policy implications.

**Relationship between the IDP process and community participation**

Figure 2 below depicts whether there is any relationship between the two variables of the study. Out of the 400 sampled participants, 291 (73%) of respondents indicated a significant relationship between the IDP and community participation, while 109 (27%) of the respondents indicated there is no relationship between the IDP and community participation.
Figure 2: Relationship between the IDP process and community participation; *Source:* Author

In this regard, it can be affirmed based on the above findings that there is a significant relationship between the IDP process and community participation since the new democratic dispensation. The Republic of South Africa Constitution, 1996, recognises the relationship between the IDP and community participation by encouraging local government in terms of section 152(1) to involve communities in municipal affairs. Furthermore, the relationship between the IDP and community participation is also distinguished by Education and Training Unit (2021) that "the IDP is based on community needs and priorities. Communities have the chance to participate in identifying their most important needs. The IDP process encourages all stakeholders who reside and conduct business within a municipal area to participate in the preparation and implementation of the development plan". However, Mbelengwa (2016) opines that there is also a disconnection between the district and the local municipalities when it comes to development planning. District municipalities sometimes construct IDPs without contacting local municipalities, leading to a circumstance in which a conflict of interest arises. The engagement of the community is one of the essential aspects that might stymie the smooth progress of the IDP process. Therefore, the researcher deduced that to have an effective relationship between the IDP and community participation, the IDP ought to be participatory from the budgeting process to the execution of the identified and approved projects.

**Encouragement and participation in the municipal IDP process.**

Figure 3 indicates whether communities are encouraged and have ever participated in the IDP process of the Tzaneen municipal area. Out of the 400 participants, the figure indicates that the majority of the respondents, who constitute 308 (77%) in the Tzaneen municipal area, are not encouraged and have not participated in the IDP process. In contrast, 92 (23%) of the respondents indicate that they are encouraged and have participated in the IDP process of the Tzaneen municipal area.

Figure 3: Participation in the IDP process; *Source:* Authors

In this regard, it can be assumed based on the above findings that the majority of respondents do not view an IDP as an instrument for improved community participation and a mechanism to resolve service delivery backlogs confronting their community; hence they are not actively participating. Few respondents recognise that the only way to have improved and accelerated service delivery in their communities is to participate in the municipal IDP. According to Malatji (2019), the problem of low community participation in the IDP process stems from "most municipal officials choosing to use the 'top-down approach' when consulting, which many scholars have proved to be ultimately hindering the desired objects of most projects". The constitution and other legislative frameworks encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in local government matters. Therefore, the
involvement of communities and other stakeholders should not be taken for granted because this is a legal requisite and democratic principle.

**Community Participation Stages**

Figure 4 depicts the stages of the IDP process in which communities are encouraged to participate within the jurisdiction of the Tzaneen municipal area. Out of the 400 participants, figure 4 indicates that the majority of the respondents, which constitute 308, probed for 'None', which means none of them ever participated in any of the IDP stages mentioned. In contrast, 37 respondents participated in the analysis stage, 22 respondents participated in the project identification stage, 11 respondents participated in the strategy development, 18 respondents participated in the approval stage and only four respondents participated in the integration stage.

Based on the findings, it can be deduced that communities only participate in different stages of IDP, and some communities only participate in the stages that are only beneficial to them. However, since most of the respondents are not participating in the IDP process, one can affirm that the municipality does not adequately encourage communities to participate in the IDP process. According to the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (1998), section 16 (4) cited in the study by Zwane (2020), “the local communities ought to be encouraged to participate in the municipal affairs. In this manner, the communities can participate in municipal planning processes like the IDP in terms of the preparation, implementation and review of it”. The researchers believe that it is critically important for the municipality to involve community members in the IDP process. This ensures that community members can be active participants in their development initiatives.

**Feedback and inputs**

Figure 5 illustrates if communities' are provided with feedback on their participation in the IDP meetings and whether the Tzaneen municipal area considers their inputs. From the 400 randomly sampled population, 98 (24.5%) majority of the respondents strongly disagreed, and 82 (20.5%) of the respondents disagreed that the municipality provided them with feedback and their inputs are not considered in the IDP, while 111 (27.8%) of the respondents are unsure if the municipality was providing feedback or not. In contrast, 41 (10.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 68 (17%) of the respondents agreed that their municipality provided adequate feedback and their inputs were considered.
From the findings, it can be affirmed that the Tzaneen municipal area does not provide the communities with good feedback and their inputs are not considered. Therefore, one can still assume that communities are taken for granted, and consultation is done for formality rather than project prioritisation and implementation. According to Malatji (2019), if the government and municipal officials do not provide adequate feedback and do not consider communities’ inputs, this will result in community members’ losing interest in participating in the IDP process in the future because it will be perceived as a formality. The researcher(s) opines that before the municipal council can approve the IDP, the municipality should give 14 days of public notice for comments. This ensures that the drafted IDP reflects the real needs and issues identified by the communities. Zwane & Matsiliza (2022:7), indicate that follow-up visits in a form of providing feedback to stakeholders ought to form part of public involvement to identify the extent to which decisions affect community members and to analyse the extent of municipal decisions on service delivery.

The researchers also acknowledged that the IDP policy cannot consider each participant’s input, but it has to represent the needs of communities holistically.

### Annual consultation in the IDP review process

Figure 6 illustrates whether communities are annually consulted when the municipality reviews the IDP annually. Out of the 400 participants from the Tzaneen municipal area, the majority of the respondents, who constitute 128 (32%), strongly disagree, and 98 (24.5%) of the respondents disagree that the municipality does not consult them when reviewing the IDP, while 78 (18.3%) of the respondents are unsure whether they are consulted or not. In contrast, the minority of the respondents, which constitutes 43 (10.8%) of the respondents, strongly agree, and 58 (14.5%) of the respondents agree that they are consulted annually when the Tzaneen municipal area reviews the IDP annually as mandated by laws.

![Figure 6: Consultation during annual review; Source: Authors](image)

In this regard, it can be affirmed that the Tzaneen municipal area is not sufficiently consulting communities when reviewing the IDP. It can also be affirmed that if community members are not consulted by their municipal area and consultation is also selective or biased, communities lose interest in participating in the IDP process because they do not feel a sense of belonging and ownership (Desai, 2009). Therefore, “consultation is the important step to the setting up key performance indicators in ensuring transparency and accountability to the communities being served by a municipality” (Dlamini et al. 2021). The researchers acknowledge that many studies have been conducted that highlight the influence of several failed attempts by the local government to meaningfully consult with communities. These attempts were, however, scuttled by the selfish interests of those who considered themselves important stakeholders or “local champions” of communities. Owing to their influence, the IDP initiatives are not supported by the communities due to a lack of consultation.

### Implementation of all projects and services as stipulated in the municipality IDP

Figure 7 indicates if all the projects and services identified by the communities and approved by the municipal council are successfully rendered. Out of the 400 sampled participants from the Tzaneen municipal area, the majority of the respondents, which constitutes 82 (20.5%) strongly disagree, and 92 (23%) of the respondents disagree that the municipality is not implementing all the projects identified and approved by the council, while 136 (34%) of the respondents are unsure. Again, the minority of the respondents which constitutes 28 (7%) strongly agree, and 62 (15.5%) of respondents agree with the fact that all the projects and services are implemented or rendered within the Tzaneen municipal area.
Thus, it is impossible to know whether the Tzaneen municipal area executes all stated projects and services. As a result, the researcher will draw a valid conclusion based on the qualitative findings. It is no secret that South African municipalities, including the Tzaneen Municipality, face implementation challenges “due to poor leadership, budget constraints, lack of cooperation from various stakeholders, and service delivery protests that obstruct development needs,” according to Mamokhere et al. (2021:1). As a result, the issue of project implementation delays can be linked to the difficulties of the twenty-first century, as indicated above. Also, it can be argued that several studies have been undertaken that illustrate the impact of the local government’s unsuccessful attempts to effectively interact with communities. These efforts, however, were thwarted by the self-interests of people who saw themselves as key stakeholders or “community champions”. The IDP programs are not supported by the community because of their clout.

Presentation of Qualitative Findings and Discussion

This section presents qualitative Findings that have been obtained through interviews. The results are presented in themes and textual descriptions.

Knowledge and understanding of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP)

The theme above was designed to assess the Tzaneen municipal areas IDP Manager and Ward Councillors/Committee members’ knowledge and understanding of the IDP, and their answers are shown below. The IDP Manager indicated that;

“I am conversant with the concept of the IDP. An IDP is a five-year strategic planning process that guides and informs the strategic decisions, budget, and overall planning of the municipality”.

While the Ward Councillors/Ward Committee members share sentiment by indicating that;

“The IDP is a process in which the municipality and the communities collaborate to identify developmental projects, service needs and challenges that different communities face, and find feasible solutions. It is seen as a municipal plan that the municipality uses to identify the priority needs of communities and plan for the future. It is understood as a strategic development plan that the municipality uses to attract local investors”.

In this regard, it can be affirmed based on the above findings that there is a consensus understanding among the respondents about what the IDP is all about as most of the respondents are aware of and understand this concept. The findings are also in line with the existing literature which indicates that an IDP is understood to be “a strategic planning instrument that informs all planning, budgeting, management and decision making of local municipalities. In principle, IDP aimed at assisting the South African municipalities in attaining their developmental needs and to guide the activities of any institution or agency operating in the municipal area” (Oranje et al. 2000:19). Therefore, the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) also requires all the municipalities to create and implement a five-year IDP that should be reviewed annually.

IDP process for improved community participation

From the theme above on whether an IDP can be used to improve community participation, the key informants indicated that;

“The IDP is an important tool used by the local government to improve the community participation. In terms of the Republic of South Africa Constitution, chapter 5 dictates that the municipality must involve the community in the drafting of the IDP. In each of the six (6) phases of the IDP, the community is given a chance to participate. The Process Plan, the Draft IDP and the Final IDP are publicised on the website, notice boards, offices and other strategic areas of the municipality. The community needs and the projects are consulted thoroughly to the community”.

Figure 7: Implementation of IDP development projects; Source: Authors
In this regard, it can be deduced based on the findings above that the Tzaneen municipal area encourages the participation of communities in the IDP process in line with different pieces of legislation such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 and the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (2000). In accordance with Chapter 5 and section 25(1), 16(1), and 17(1) of the Municipal Systems Act (2000), all South African municipalities should establish an IDP process, which is a strategic planning document for a municipality and to ensure that the public is actively engaged in the processes.

**Accurate implementation of the IDP**

The other theme that the researcher posed to the interviewees was whether the municipality's strategies and objectives stated in the IDP are implemented accurately to address the challenges confronting communities. The key informants indicated that;

"In the main, the strategies are implemented accurately, and they do a lot in addressing communities' needs. The weakness is the competing needs of the communities instead of the lack of resources. The IDP includes mechanisms for breaking deadlocks to ensure that projects and programs are implemented efficiently. The IDP assists in developing realistic project proposals based on resource availability. It aids in attracting additional funds from the investors and national government".

The data above indicate that the strategic goals of the Tzaneen municipal regions emphasise community needs. On the other hand, South African municipalities have numerous problems in executing all of the IDP projects and services that are required. IDP implementation is important for enhancing service delivery and public infrastructure, according to Asha & Makalela (2020) study. Municipalities frequently face a variety of obstacles throughout the implementation process. Key problems include “lack of money, unfinished initiatives, inadequate community involvement, politics-administrative meddling, and insufficient institutional capability”, and among others. As a result, the municipality’s implementation plan and service provisions are not fully realised and adequately addressed. The researcher(s) also argues that it is critical for municipalities to develop and innovate institutional, and organisational capabilities to better use their resources and enhance service needs.

**Implementation of projects over the last 5 years**

The other theme that the researchers to the key informants posed was whether there were projects identified in the IDP that were never implemented in the last five (5) years. The key informants' responses are articulated below.

All the key informants indicated that;

"Yes, some projects were not implemented. The main reason is the reduction of funds through the Municipal Infrastructure Grants (MIGs). Projects cause the other reason rolled over from previous years, which makes it difficult to implement all the planned projects. Yes, this is due to limited resources. The municipal council holds continuous meetings to re-prioritise projects according to their importance and attends to these as per the availability of funds. However, unattended projects are often carried over to the next financial period so that they are also addressed”.

In this regard, it can be affirmed that the South African municipalities, including the Tzaneen municipal area, are faced with financial resources to ensure that all their priority needs are adequately addressed. The challenges presented above are not new. The existing literature also echoes that "there are numerous challenges preventing municipalities from successfully implementing the IDP and subsequently improving service delivery. As a result, some of the common challenges confronting municipalities in accelerating the delivery of services, and fundamental services through the implementation of the IDP have been identified, and these challenges are related to financial constraints, structural and organisational support, infrastructure, and expert support” (Mathebula, 2018).

**Challenges confronting the municipality in the preparation and implementation of the IDP process**

The theme that the researcher asked the key informants was whether there are challenges that are confronting the municipality in the preparation and implementation of the IDP process. The responses from the key informants are articulated below.

The IDP Manager mentioned the following challenges;

"Poor community participation. Working in silos with different departments. Strikes during the implementation of the project and poor workmanship”. The IDP Manager also stated that the municipality is still facing some challenges in formulating and implementing the IDP. These are some of the challenges that the municipality faces, which include, among other things, "a lack of funding for prioritised needs and projects, insufficient human resources, low community attendance at IDP meetings, and political interference in which political parties constantly compete for influence”.

While the Ward Councillors/Committee members indicated that;

"Members of the community are uneducated about the municipality's powers and functions. The municipality consults late, there is low community participation, and transparency and openness are frequently barriers to community involvement. The municipality frequently does not provide feedback to our communities or report on issues raised, and the IDP documents are frequently not translated into different languages that accommodate local communities, making it difficult for them to understand”.

In this regard, the findings above are supported by a large body of existing literature. Several studies have been undertaken that illustrate the impact of the local government's unsuccessful attempts to effectively interact with communities. These efforts, however,
were thwarted by the self-interests of people who saw themselves as key stakeholders or "community champions." The IDP programs are not supported by the community because of their clout. Thus, Molaba (2016), there are some barriers to public participation which include: "lack of government response; low citizen participation levels; a threat to the professional image of public administration; lack of information; representativeness; time; costs and benefits; the attitude of public managers; participation mechanisms; and citizen competence". At the same time, Asha & Makalela (2020) indicate that IDP implementation is vital for improving service delivery and public infrastructure. During the implementation process, municipalities often encounter several challenges. This includes key challenges such as a lack of physical and financial resources, incomplete projects, poor community participation, a political-administrative dichotomy, and limited institutional capacity. As a result, the municipality's implementation plan and service provisions are not fully realised and adequately addressed. Therefore, it can be affirmed that South African municipalities are faced with huge challenges that require collaboration among communities provincial and national governments. The researcher(s) also opines that the Tzaneen municipal area should at all times uphold democratic principles as stated in the constitution by ensuring active public participation, transparency, and openness.

Conclusions

This article assessed the IDP process for improved community participation using Tzaneen municipal area as a case study. The article concludes by recognising and acknowledging a gap between the IDP and community participation. Therefore, more studies should be conducted to close the gap and educate the public, civil society organisations, and local government practitioners. Therefore, this article proposes the following strategic recommendations that can be used to promote improved community participation in the IDP process, based on the empirical and theoretical findings of this article. However, the recommendations of this article cannot be generalised to the whole country of South Africa, but they can contribute to the improved community participation of the Tzaneen municipal area. The following strategic recommendations are suggested in line with the findings of this study: It is recommended that the Tzaneen municipal area should at all times uphold democratic principles as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, by ensuring active public participation, transparency, and openness; that the Tzaneen municipal area enhance its publicity campaigns and educational activities of IDP since there is a gap among what the communities understand about the IDP process. Similarly, the Tzaneen municipal area ought to consider that most of the people in its area are uneducated about the IDP as revealed. It is revealed that there is a poor understanding of the powers and functions of the municipality, including the IDP. Thus, this study recommends that roadshows be adequately provided to educate communities about municipal functions and powers. The roadshow should further aim to promote effective, timely participation and understanding of the whole consultation and approval process of the IDP; the Tzaneen municipal area should design mechanisms that make it easier for marginalised and previously disadvantaged people to participate in local government policy and decision-making freely and without prejudice. Because most of the respondents in this study stated that they were not adequately encouraged to engage in the IDP process, it would benefit the Tzaneen municipal area if the communities were educated and encouraged to participate in the IDP process. The Tzaneen municipal area may solve this issue with its citizens by constantly educating and encouraging them to actively engage in the planning and implementation phases of the IDP through roadshows and other means of engagement. The communities' accessibility to the IDP process should also be strengthened and promoted.

The article recognises the challenges that are faced by South African municipalities, including Tzaneen Municipality. Therefore, the study recommends that the Tzaneen municipal area develop and innovate institutional capabilities to make better use of its resources and enhance the implementation of service needs. Therefore, the municipality should also prioritise their resources to implement the IDP projects. Working in silos has been revealed as one of the challenges that hinder the effective implementation of the IDP process. Therefore, the study recommends that there be collaboration among the municipality and communities and the municipality with other government agencies. The preparation and implementation of the IDP process should be integrative and participatory. The study also recommends that the Batho Pele principles, as stated in the White Paper on Local Government, need to be applied to the whole of municipal functions and operations. The Batho Pele principles may guarantee a harmonious relationship between the municipality and its constituencies. Communities will have reasonable expectations regarding service delivery due to effective consultation and other Batho Pele principles.

It is revealed that the inputs into the communities are not considered adequately. Therefore, the study recommends that the inputs of communities ought to be considered adequately without compromise and must also influence policy-making and decision-making. For community participation to be active and effective, communities should have self-assurance that their inputs will guide decision-making. Moreover, the communities have to get feedback on their inputs. With all that being said, the IDP process must be transparent as prescribed by many South African laws.

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