Leaving no one behind in a participative integrated development planning process in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the IDP process for improved public participation and thereafter assess the barriers to the design and implementation of the IDP. The IDP process was developed to improve strategic planning and ensure that no one is left behind at the grassroots. This was done by promoting public participation in municipal affairs. Many South African municipalities have been struggling to use the IDP process to improve public participation. A mixed-methods approach to investigate the participative IDP process and barriers, using the Greater Tameen Municipality (GTM) as a case study was adopted. 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 10 respondents were also chosen through a non-probability sampling technique and were face-to-face interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. The key results revealed that poor public participation exists in the study area due to a lack of encouragement from responsible authorities. Many barriers hinder the effective design and implementation of the participative IDP process, such as protests, working in silos, a lack of institutional resources to address the competing needs of communities, and a lack of transparency, accountability, and consultation. Lastly, the lack of oversight by the municipality in the adoption of e-participation has been discovered as a barrier to the design and implementation of participative IDP process during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study concludes by providing a few recommendations to enhance participative IDP process. The GTM should at all times uphold democratic principles by ensuring active and effective public participation, transparency, and accountability in municipal affairs. South African municipalities, especially GTM, should develop innovative institutional and organizational skills to make better use of their resources, solve socioeconomic barriers, and enhance service delivery.

Keywords: Democratic, E-participation, Leaving No One Behind, Public Participation, IDP Process, SDGs, Service delivery backlogs

JEL Classification: H10, H19

Introduction

The governance principle of “Leaving No One Behind” is fundamental in the design and implementation of the integrated development plan in order to realise different SDGs (Mamokhere, 2022; IASIA, 2022). The IDP process embraces the “leaving no one behind” principle in a form of public participation to ensure that different stakeholders participate in municipal affairs to determine their desired services and aspirations without discrimination. The principle of “leaving no one behind” is the key emphasis of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Leave no one behind” represents a commitment by all UN Member States and governments around the world to ensure that the SDGs are achieved. At its core, leave no one behind” can be viewed as supporting the SDG inequality agenda for inclusive development, supporting marginalized and vulnerable groups excluded from social opportunities, focusing on income and wealth distribution, addressing challenges related to extreme inequality and reaching out to the poor (IASIA, 2022). 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

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introduced new public policies to ensure that the local government plays a meaningful development role to benefit its citizens. For instance, they introduced integrated development planning in 1996 to improve public 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 participative IDP should be used as a strategic plan to help municipalities eliminate service delivery backlogs. Makalela (2017) indicates that promoting public participation throughout the planning and implementation procedures is critical for the IDP to be more trustworthy and resilient. Public participation plays a critical role in ensuring that exact service delivery needs and desires are met.

This research is unquestionably not a unique contribution to the field. Participative integrated development planning has been the subject of numerous local studies in South Africa. The study being conducted in Tzaneen Municipality may be the first, though. In doing so, it will broaden our understanding of the municipality and perhaps even integrate development planning across the province. Consequently, this study aims to explore the IDP process as an instrument for improved public participation and also assess barriers associated with the design and implementation of the IDP process in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. To realize the aim of this study, it will provide an overview of the relevant literature review, the legal framework that applies to IDP and public participation, the research methodology, results, and discussion, and will then offer 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 under investigation.

**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 public participation process is considered indispensable as it improves the relationships between the communities and the government in the decision-making processes. The study implies that public participation is a legal requirement. In the South African context, the constitution provides for public 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. Public 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”. Based on the theoretical grounds and arguments, the United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs (2019) concur that residents should have access to government services, support, and information to guarantee that no one gets left behind." By concentrating on policies and making decisions that leave no one behind, governments must make sure they are inclusive and responsive to the demands of residents. With limited resources, governments must interact with their constituents and practice inclusivity and accountability. If certain social groups are marginalized, excluded, and poor well-being is sustained, sustainable and equitable development is impossible. States need to refocus their emphasis on sustainable development and at the same time battle corruption to ensure that the SDGs are fulfilled. This may be done through multi-level and excellent governance as well as the idea of subsidiarity. It is crucial to make sure that marginalized populations are included in public governance, particularly in planning, decision-making, service delivery, and sustainable development, and are given the power and respect necessary to participate on an equal footing. In the end, “leaving no one behind” calls for political and managerial will, as well as public servants who are determined to address inequities while concentrating on the needs and expectations of the public in a challenging and complicated environment (Brown, 2022). Public participation should be promoted and strengthened in South African municipalities as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

Ulrich & Wenzel (2017) state that in the 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 public participation. Quick & Bryson (2016) further indicate that public 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 study 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 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 public participation in municipal affairs is imperative for the NPM approach, facilitating participatory planning over democratic mechanisms and structures. Having said that, the study 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 public 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 public participation is a democratic process and to be classified as public involvement genuinely, it needs the redistribution of power. Similarly, in Mnguni (2018), public participation implies the involvement of communities in policy and decision-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 study based on their ground and contributions to encouraging active public 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 public 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.
i. **Manipulation and Therapy:** “Both steps are non-participative. The aim is to cure or educate the participants. The proposed plan is best, and participation is to achieve public support through public relations. Instead of genuine citizen participation, the bottom step of the ladder indicates the distortion of participation in the public” (Arnstein, 1969; Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022).

ii. **Informing:** “A 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” (Arnstein, 1969; Arnstein, 1971).

iii. **Consultation:** “This is also a legitimate step attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public enquiries. This further implies that inviting citizens’ opinions, like informing them, can be a legitimate step toward their full participation. However, when the consultation process is not combined with other modes of participation, this step of the ladder is still a shame since it offers no assurance that citizens’ concerns and ideas will be taken into account” (Arnstein, 1969; Arnstein, 1971; Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022).

iv. **Placation:** “Participation as placation occurs when citizens are granted a limited degree of influence in a process, but their participation is largely or entirely tokenistic: citizens are merely involved only to demonstrate that they were involved” (Arnstein, 1969; Arnstein, 1971; Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022). For instance, placation permits communities to advise or plan, but the authorities retain the power to judge the legitimacy or viability of the advice.

v. **Partnership:** “In this step, the power is genuinely redistributed over negotiation among citizens and powerholders. Therefore, planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared”, for instance, through joint committees (Arnstein, 1969; Arnstein, 1971; Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022).

vi. **Delegation:** “The citizens hold a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions. The public now has the power to assure accountability of the programme to them” (Arnstein, 1969; Arnstein, 1971; Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022).

vii. **Citizen Control:** Participation as citizen control occurs when, according to Arnstein (1969); and Arnstein (1971) “residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy-making and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions, under which “outsiders” may change them. In citizen-control situations, for instance, public funding would flow directly to a community organisation, and that organisation would have full control over how that funding is allocated” (Arnstein, 1969; Arnstein, 1971; Gaber, 2019).

By analysing the steps of Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, the researches 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 public participation is a legitimate 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 public 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 public 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. Public participation should not be viewed as a compliance measure but rather as a means of achieving desired results by encouraging interactive and consultative participation (Kgobe & Mamokhere, 2021).

Based on their well-supported arguments and contributions to the current and expanding body of knowledge, all the theories used in this study fit together nicely. All of the theories that have been embraced advise the appropriate authorities and organizations to encourage active public participation in the planning processes.

**Empirical Literature Review**

This section outlines the empirical literature review focusing on the participatory IDP process, barriers, and legislative framework for facilitating the participatory IDP process;

**Participative Integrated Development Planning Processes**

Integrated Development Planning as a planning instrument at the municipal level should follow specific procedural 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 phases: analysis, strategies, projects, integration and final approval. Hereunder are discussed;
Analysis Phase

Tshishonga (2016) and Dlamini & Reddy (2018) indicate that the design and implementation of the IDP process involve several phases to be followed. Asha & Makalela (2020), indicate that the first process of designing the IDP process is the analysis phase, also known as the initial phase. Manyaka & Madzivhandila (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 phase is where the GTM 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 phase, the municipality 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). Each municipality ought to know about the available existing and accessible resources to establish the municipality's limitations in the creation of realistic solutions to identified challenges (Ntlabezo, 2013). The outcome of the analysis phase ought to be an inclusive analysis of the existing level of development, the details of prioritised needs, an understanding of the causes of development challenges and information on available resources (Ntlabezo 2013). The study by Maake (2016:69), indicates that the analysis should be informed by different types of analysis. Different types of analysis unfold below;

i. legal framework analysis (e.g. statutory and regulatory compliance);
ii. leadership guideline analysis (e.g. political and administrative leadership directives);
iii. community and stakeholder analysis (e.g. status of service available in the community, input from ward committees, non-governmental and community-based organisations);
iv. municipality technical development analysis (e.g. infrastructure status, level of essential services);
v. institutional analysis (e.g. strengths and weaknesses that can affect performance by scrutinising the capacity of the municipality);
vii. economic analysis (e.g. contributions of economic sectors within the municipal area);
vii. socio-economic analysis (e.g. demographical realities, social equity, the prevalence of poverty and unemployment, income distribution and per capita income);
viii. spatial analysis (e.g. spatial constraints, problems, opportunities, trends and patterns to determine the need for spatial restructuring, land reform, land use and the spatial dimension of development issues);
vix. environmental analysis (e.g. environmental factors that may hamper or support development strategies and programmes such as geology, air quality, topography, climate, soils and land, fauna and flora, surface water, groundwater, water quality and water pollution) and
x. In-depth analysis (e.g. consolidate and integrate different data sets to assess the overall development status of the municipal area).

Strategies Phase

The accomplishment of the previous phase (hereafter Analysis phase), provides the municipality with an understanding of the problems that affect the community and the causes of those problems. In the Strategy development phase, the municipality has to develop a priority list and solutions to the challenges that have been prioritised (Musitha, 2012:105). Asha & Makalela (2020) posit that strategy development is the second phase of the IDP process and this phase 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 Phase

Dlamini & Reddy (2018) indicate that the third phase of the IDP process is the project phase. The project phase is about the design and specification of each project to meet the prioritised needs and items identified in the previous phase. 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 (Tshishongha, 2016). The project phase 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. For each project, the following details are required:

i. the target group (beneficiaries);
ii. the location of the project;
iii. the date of commencement;
iv. the date of completion;
v. the persons responsible for managing the project;
vi. the cost to be incurred by the project and
vii. Sources of funding to finance the project.
Integration stage

The fourth phase of the design and implementation of the IDP is the integration phase. Asha & Makalela (2020) indicate that "the fourth phase 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 phase is about integrating various projects identified and designed in the previous phase (hereafter strategies phase). Furthermore, Ntlabezo (2013) defines this phase as an ‘operational strategy’ which should include the following:

i. a 5-year financial plan and capital investment programme;
ii. an integrated spatial development framework;
iii. integrated sectoral programmes such as gender equality, economic development, diseases and poverty alleviation.
iv. consolidated performance management systems;
 v. disaster management plan;
vi. institutional plan and
vii. reference to relevant sector plans

Approval Phase

The fifth phase of the IDP is the approval phase. The fifth phase focuses on the decision and endorsement of the IDP projects (Asha & 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 should evaluate the plan and determine whether it accommodates the identified development challenges and whether the strategies formulated in the IDP are suitable to address these challenges. The municipal council has the authority and responsibility to consider and approve the final 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; Munzhedzi, 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 & Uwiziyimana (2020), posit that public 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 an instrument to enhance public participation and service delivery and guide the budget prioritization of different communities.

Different Barriers to the Design and Implementation of the IDP Process in South Africa

Lack of public participation in the IDP process is one of the major barriers towards the realization of adequate service delivery and SDGs in South African municipalities. Public Participation should be at the centre of the IDP process to ensure that “No one is left behind”. In many South African municipalities, Rameli (2021:717), indicates that public participation in development planning is a failure. This has led to difficulties in making balanced development decisions due to the lack of feedback on the wants and needs of the citizens regarding development in their area. The absence of public participation in strategic planning and financial governance is some of the problems. On the other hand, there are still other problems that prevent the public from participating in the IDP process effectively and actively. Mathebula & Sebola (2019) claim that “service delivery challenges persist as a result of poor public 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 public participation in major municipal decision-making.” This is despite the fact that there are numerous laws that encourage public participation in the IDP. Additionally, Asha & Makalela’s (2020) research also supports the notion that South African “Local governments are having trouble implementing IDP and providing services. IDP planning and implementation, particularly in rural regions, did not produce sustainable services”. Furthermore, research conducted in the Mopani District Municipality by Mathebula (2018) found that the IDP process, a mechanism for better community engagement and service delivery, is not used correctly, efficiently, or effectively to deliver the services that are intended. The creation and implementation of the IDP process, as well as the major role that communities should play in the IDP process, are both allegedly poorly understood by local government officials and political office-holders, according to Mnguni (2018). When governments fail to meet the basic demands of the communities, this lack of understanding has fueled protests over service delivery among the communities and their municipalities (Mnguni, 2018). Mamokhere (2020) concurs with the above by indicating 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. Another challenge that impacts negatively the realization of the IDP project is the lack of accountability of public officials and politicians tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the delivery of basic services. According to Zindi & Shava (2022), a lack of accountability in the IDP projects such as the water provision programs for underprivileged communities is detrimental to achieving SDG 6 (Hereafter clean water and sanitation). Christopher (2015) identifies the lack of
transparency and accountability measures in various South African municipalities as triggering inequalities and distracting municipal efforts from providing IDP projects to the communities in need. Equally, corruption in a form of favouritism is also a major barrier to the successful design and implementation of the IDP process. The needs and aspirations of disadvantaged groups and communities in rural areas are often not prioritized as expected. Corruption is one of the major barriers which contributes to poor service delivery in South Africa. The scrouge impedes the delivery of services to the citizens, especially in the local sphere of government. Managa (2012) and Mamokhere (2020) indicate that the municipalities are continuing to loot IDP project funds meant to change their communities’ lives. Consequently, the communities continue to live in unpleasant conditions due to the lack of municipal services yet the final IDP has been adopted and approved by the municipal council aiming to change people's lives.

The Legislative Framework that encourages Public Participation in the IDP Process

This section provides an overview of various pieces of legislation relevant to public participation and IDP in South Africa and their implications. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, make provision for public 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-h) states that a municipality shall structure and manage its administration, budgeting, and planning processes to prioritise the community’s basic needs in the same chapter. Also, chapter 10, section 194(1) paragraph (e), provides for public 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 public 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 public 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 public participation in municipal affairs. The responsibilities of the ward 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 public 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. The author argues 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 study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-method design to explore and describe the IDP process as an instrument for improved public participation and to explore the barriers 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 & Pablo-Clark, 2011). A convergent parallel mixed-method research design was adopted in this study because it enables the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the IDP process as an instrument for improved public 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 researcher was 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 was conducted in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality area in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The GTM community members, municipal officials, and Ward Councillors/Committee members of the GTM served as a sample frame. A total of 410 participants served as a representation of the total population of the region. However, only 409 participants were able to complete the online survey and face-to-face interviews. 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 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 GTM. 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). Thus, in this study, the researcher interviewed nine (9) out of the ten (10) key informants, which included; the IDP Manager and the Ward Councillors/Ward Committee members from the
nine (9) community wards of the GTM. The researchers interviewed these populations because they believed that they would provide concrete, contextual, in-depth and significant information.

For data collection, the researcher used multiple data collection techniques deriving from the primary and secondary data. This was forced by the fact that the study adopted a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Thus, quantitative empirical data was collected using electronic closed-ended questionnaires (hereafter online survey), while qualitative empirical data was collected using a face-to-face semi-structured interview guide. The study also secondary data from existing literature and documents such as journal articles, government policies, and other online information. This study adopted both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. 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. The 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.

Findings and Discussions

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

Quantitative findings

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

Knowledge and Understanding of Communities on Integrated Development Plan as an instrument for improved Public Participation, Public Participation in the municipal IDP process, and different Stages (Phase) of participation in the IDP.

Table 1 below shows the level of communities' knowledge and understanding of the IDP process as an instrument for improved public participation. From the results below, it is discovered that the majority of the respondents, which amount to 317 (79%) indicate that they have full knowledge and understanding of the IDP process as an instrument for improved public participation. In comparison, the minority of 83 (21%) of the respondents indicate that they do not have knowledge and understanding of the IDP and public participation. Figure 2 below illustrates whether communities are encouraged to participate in the IDP process of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality. Out of the 400 participants, the figure indicates that the majority of the respondents, who constitute 308 (77%) in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality, are not encouraged to participate in the IDP process. In contrast, only 92 (23%) of the respondents indicate that they are encouraged and have participated in the IDP process of the Greater Tzaneen Municipality (GTM). While figure 3 depicts the stages of the IDP process in which communities are encouraged to participate within the jurisdiction of the GTM. 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.

Table 1: Knowledge and Understanding of the IDP process and public participation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>83</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors
Discussion

The results in table 1 show that most of the respondents in the Greater Tzaneen Municipality know and understand the IDP process and public participation. One can affirm that an IDP and public participation are familiar and easy concepts to understand, even by a layperson. However, the IDP and public 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), "public 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 public 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. In this regard, it can be assumed based on the above results in figure 2 that the majority of respondents do not view an IDP as an instrument for improved public 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 public 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. Public participation in development planning is a failure according to Rameli (2021:717). This has led to
difficulties in making balanced development decisions due to the lack of feedback on the wants and needs of the citizens regarding development in their area. The absence of public participation in strategic planning and financial governance is a major problem in local government. The absence of public participation, as shown by numerous studies, suggests that there is a persistent lack of public involvement in the municipal strategic planning known as an integrated development plan and that this affects the prioritization of the provision of services like the supply of clean water, electricity, refuse removal, health service and sanitation (Rameli, 2021). Based on the results in figure 3, 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 researcher believes 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. Thus, it can be affirmed that the GTM is not sufficiently consulting communities when designing and implementing the IDP document.

Presentation of Qualitative Findings

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

Barriers to the Design and Implementation of a participative IDP process

The theme that the researcher asked the key informants was whether there are barriers to the design and implementation of the IDP process as an instrument for improved public participation. Out of the 10 key informants, only 9 respondents were able to respond to this theme positively. The responses from the key informants are articulated below.

**Key Informant 1**

With regard to the question of, what are the barriers to public participation in the IDP process of Greater Tzaneen Municipality? Key informant 1 mentioned the following barriers;

- Poor community participation. Working in silos with different departments. The protest 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.

**Key Informant 2**

Key Informant 2 concur with Key Informant 1 who was concerned about the "community members' will to actively participate in the IDP process. The participant believes community members should participate in the IDP process throughout not when they feel concerned. The lack of participation by community members is what puts community needs at risk because they shut up their voices to speak for themselves. The Key Informant raised that IDP meetings are meant for community members to identify their needs to the municipality and if the community members do not want to take part in that particular engagement, the municipality would not be able to know nor identify what their needs and demands are.

**Key Informant 3**

Key informant 3 mentioned the notices information dissemination as one of the barriers hindering on IDP process. The respondent believes the municipality does not do enough to share the necessary information with its communities. The municipality shares the information about IDP meetings at very short notice which limits the opportunity for the communities to attend and engage with the municipality.

**Key Informant 4**

Key informant 4 indicated that service delivery protests and other protests in the municipality are the major barriers to the IDP process. This is so because these actions tend to be violent and the community members destroy the services provided, such as roads, schools and loot shops. This takes every stakeholder in the IDP back to the drawing board to make basic needs available to them which affects the new IDP which did not include those destroyed services.

**Key Informant 5**

Key informant 5 mentioned that the municipality fails to prioritise the needs from ward to ward. The participant believes the municipality delivers the services that favour some of the people in the wards, whereas there are wards that need to be prioritised due
to the level of poverty. Thus, the participant seems to be concerned by the intentions of the municipality to eradicate poverty from poor communities. The respondent believes that the municipality is neglecting rural communities over urban ones.

**Key Informant 6**

Key informant 6 indicates that there is poor support from government officials generally kills the morale of community participation. Local government officials responsible for facilitating economic development projects in their municipalities lack the proper knowledge and skills to make most development projects a success, let alone sustainable.

**Key Informant 7**

In response to the above question on the barriers that hinder active participation in the IDP process, key informant 7 indicated that the traditional forms of community engagement no longer work in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hereafter coronavirus). The respondent further indicated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the GTM has relied on online platforms such as social media to get inputs and adopt the final IDP document. However, adopting an online mechanism posed many challenges. One of the challenges associated with online platforms was the lack of oversight from the municipality because we could not consider age, those in rural areas with no access to smart gadgets, the internet, and those who are uneducated to use online platforms. Therefore this has been challenging during COVID-19 because we only got a few inputs from the communities to amend the 5-years IDP based on the current problems.

**Key Informant 8**

Key informant 8 indicated that there is a lack of resources in the GTM to address the competing needs of communities. The IDP includes mechanisms for breaking deadlocks to ensure that projects and programs are implemented efficiently but without adequate resources, this becomes a barrier. The IDP assists in developing realistic project proposals based on resource availability. It aids in attracting additional funds from the investors and national government”.

**Key Informant 9**

Key informant 9 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 public 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.

**Implications**

In this regard, the results above are supported by a large body of existing literature. It can be affirmed based on the results above that South African municipalities have numerous barriers in executing all of the IDP projects and services that are required. At the same time, Asha & Makalela (2020) indicate that IDP implementation is vital for improving service delivery and public infrastructure. However, 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 (Asha & Makalela, 2020; Mathebula, 2018). Similarly, Molaba (2016), indicates that 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”. Working in Silos or lack of collaboration from the National, provincial and local governments is a barrier towards the IDP.

Cavaye (2001) explains that a lack of collaboration among various government departments potentially limits the required support in income-generating projects. In most rural areas, development project members are in dire need of assistance in accessing funds, capacity building and project management which will significantly increase the project's chances of success. Lastly, online platforms as a form of participation mechanism have been discovered as a barrier to the implementation of the IDP process due to lack of oversight. However, Shahab, Bagheri, & Potts (2021) indicate that online participation (Hereafter e-Participation) has been employed by many planning authorities across the world to facilitate the engagement of people in decision-making processes. Previous studies on e-participation have shown that this form of participation can increase the level of flexibility and inclusiveness of public engagements, make government interventions more responsive to citizens' needs, and increase government accountability. While there is a growing use of e-participation in the planning systems of developed countries, its application in developing countries has remained very limited and challenging. Therefore, it can be affirmed that South African municipalities are faced with huge challenges that require intergovernmental collaboration between the three spheres of government and also with the grassroots communities.
Conclusions

This study assessed the IDP process as an instrument for improved public participation and barriers using GTM as a case study. The study concludes by recognising and acknowledging a gap between the IDP and public participation. Therefore, more studies should be conducted to close the gap and educate the public, civil society organisations, and local government practitioners. Therefore, this study proposes the following strategic recommendations that can be used to promote improved public participation in the IDP process, based on the empirical and theoretical findings of this study. However, the recommendations of this study cannot be generalised to the whole country of South Africa, but they can contribute to the improved public participation of the GTM. The following strategic recommendations are suggested in line with the findings of this study: It is recommended that the GTM 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 GTM 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 GTM 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 GTM 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 GTM if the communities were educated and encouraged to participate in the IDP process. The GTM 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 study recognises the barriers that are faced by South African municipalities, including Greater Tzaneen Municipality. Therefore, the study recommends that the GTM 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, 1998, 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 public 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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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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