Community engagement and policy making matrix: insights from Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa

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**Abstract**

Extant literature has addressed some components of community engagement with little or no connection with the dynamics of policymaking. Hence, the current paper explains the matrix of policy-making using the practice of community engagement with insights from Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa. It discusses the theories of community engagement in policy formulation at the local level. An empirical nature of community engagement and policy formulation is subject to analysis with particular reference to the Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa. Secondary data were sourced from the existing literature. The paper relies on the data suitability of extant studies. It reveals the policy-making matrix within the community engagement sphere. It therefore concludes that the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality should view community engagement in public policy formulation as a tool to increase the legitimacy, transparency, accountability, support, and responsiveness of a particular policy.

**Keywords:** Community Engagement, Policy Making Matrix, Agenda Setting, Policy Formulation

JEL Classification: H10, H19

**Introduction**

South Africa has drawn increasingly on notions of engagement, focusing on opening up, widening, broadening and extending opportunities for citizens to be engaged in deepening democratic practice. Rhetoric is replete in policy spaces, and political spaces or arenas. Community engagement requires increasing control over and access to resources and regulative institutions in society on the part of individuals and groups previously excluded from such control. Participation should be an end in itself in deepening democratic practice. It is supposed to be important for both policymakers and community residents (Roberts, 2004). The inclusion of community engagement in policy formulation assists the policy-makers access...
local knowledge and lived experience of those who are part of the community. Community engagement inclusion ensures that programs and policies address real problems that are experienced daily (Lejano & Stokols, 2010). When policymakers include community engagement in decisions that affect their lives, this brings about legitimacy and can contribute to empowerment of the community members. Community engagement also creates a sense of belonging to the community members and local ownership which can lead to stewardship and sustainable interventions (Herbert, 1996; Metzler et al., 2003; Ahmed & Palermo, 2010).

The increase in community engagement reflects a change in government practice highlighting a focus on response and reaction, considered by understanding and control, to a focus on partnership (Vigoda, 2002; Feldman & Khademian, 2007). Policymakers frequently view community engagement as simply a tool to provide perspective for a relevant decision in consideration of multiple interests (Molotch, 1976; Stone, 1976; Sabatier & Jenkins, 1993; Steckler et al., 1993; Reischmann, 2004; Domhoff, 2007). Community engagement enables the residents to fully participate in decision making and policy formulation, furthermore to eliminate the dominance of elite and business interests which terminate the community influence and to contribute in decision making.

Arnstein (1969), Davidoff (1965), Alinsky (1971), and Krumholtz (1994) discussed approaches on citizen participation and planning, called advocacy planning. This is an approach that Harwood (2003) explains to still be existing. The primary goal of advocacy planning is the transfer of power and resources from established, well represented groups to underrepresented groups. Harwood, (2003); Peterman, (2004); as well as Dandekar and Main, (2014) noted that advocacy planning informed scholarship and practices focus on confrontational mobilization of resident, that is protests, marches, or rallies (Diaz, 2005; Freeman 2010, Dandekar & Main, 2014). Gonzalez (2006) argues that less is known about how community groups, and their leaders actually participate in planning and policy formulation. The collaborative approaches to and deliberative modes of planning and policymaking demonstrate that inclusion of community engagement is a more complex phenomenon, also that the design and process of community engagement is critical for the democratic and comprehensive outcomes required. Bryson et al., (2006) affirms that the policymaking environment has become characterized by multi-actors with their contexts which complicate the simple relationship of residents and policy makers which is found in community engagement. This view is supported by Fraser (1990); Mouffe (2002), and Zagorsky (2013).

Public administrators and managers find community engagement challenging due to its extended definition of policy actors when seeking to reach and include the community. In addition, the community engagement process can be overlooked since it can be argumentative in terms of views of power. According to Montoya (2013), new forms of democracy can decentre the person from ideas of inclusion and instead centralize practices. Roberts (2004) further suggests that the expanding typical concepts of residents as equal with citizens as defined by geographic location is newer modes of democratic practice and community engagement that emphasize deliberation (Roberts, 2004). The new modes of participation deliberately judges who should participate and how to participate (Friedmann, 2004).

Montoya & Kent, (2011) state that the understandings of citizenship and community do connect with the extended ideas of community engagement to result in a continuous deliberative process. Bredow (2015) defines community engagement through practice by political leaders. Quick and Bryson (2009), for instance, distinguish inclusion from participation by identifying practices commonly associated with each phenomenon in politics. Participation policies or political leaders’ practices are oriented toward creating opportunities for input, whereas practices of inclusion are oriented toward creating connections between people, across issues and over time. This shift in scholarship to focus on community engagement as a practice makes visible how people interact. Kerahroodi (2012) suggests that in order for community engagement to be meaningful, attendance and quality of transparency and public participation, components that are strongly allied, must be considered by public office holders. The paper is exploratory in nature with a documentary research design using content and documentary analysis maintaining an investigating standpoint. The documentary selected included articles, reports and other publications of relevance and including literature review.

**Theorising community engagement and public policy formulation in local government**

Booth and Seligson (2009) define legitimacy as popular acceptance of a governing party or system of governance. Additionally, participant’s potential benefits are more realised when the process goes well, but repeatedly it does not take place well. Legitimacy is one of the most disputed features of public participation, typically expressed in terms of the adequacy of participation or representation, the technical or political workability of the decision outcomes and the procedural fairness of the process. Ozawa (2012) stated that when public participation is not seen as legitimate, it can alienate the public from government and disrupt the implementation of policy decisions. Furthermore, how legitimacy is accomplished and evaluated can be viewed through multiple theoretical lenses. One commonly used in discourse about deliberative democracy is about the quality of the exchange, namely that legitimate participation requires that the participants explain themselves clearly, use logical arguments and utilize valid criteria for evaluating options and outcomes (Gastil, 2000).

Bradfort (2016) maintains that the theory of community engagement in modern democracy voting remains a key element and it can be viewed that voters are becoming more apathetic towards. Bradfort (2014) further suggests that representative democracy needs to be supplemented by participatory democracy. Everett (2015) posits that if managers are going to form an effective partnership with residents, they must build strong and successful relationships. Relationship building happens in two ways. Firstly, neighbours must build relationships with each other. Second, local government must develop strong relationships with neighbourhoods. Managers must openly and effectively engage residents. This does not and cannot happen at council or commission meetings (Everett, 2015).
Nakajo (2015) indicates that community engagement has a context effect and can help residents with less information to participate and be informed given the fact that community engagement brings residents more information. Community engagement may work only as appropriate in effect. In addition, the effect of community engagement may produce greater distinctiveness among the residents of community. Nakajo (2015) suggests that if the community itself is vibrant, then residents may develop more distinct perceptions. While the amount of individual activities may promote an increase in the combined information among communities. Community engagement collectively affects trust in local government. Community engagement stems from the local activities. Community engagement is directed at specific community needs and is integrated into public policy formulation. Within the context effect, communities refer to those specific, local, collective interest groups that participate in activities of the municipality (Netschandama, 2010). Such communities are regarded as partners and no longer as receivers who have a full contribution in the identification of service needs and development challenges. Such communities also play a central role in shaping the policy formulation and outcomes.

According to Med (2014), in community engagement the deliberative democracy method is a useful tool to address some of the limitations of known consultation approaches. Med (2014) further indicates that deliberative democracy is used to describe a technique for community engagement in multifaceted ethical issues. Deliberative democracy in community engagement can assist in terms of providing purposeful information to participants, and emphasis on dialogue to iterative reconsideration of different opinions by the participants as they integrate new information and perceptions. In community engagement, deliberative democracy forums are considered to facilitate informed and meaningful public input into a range of public policy formulation. Deliberative democracy has an ability to demonstrate effectiveness in a number of settings, including public policy formulation (Chambers et al., 2014). Deliberate democracy uses consultation to request community attitudes towards public policy formulation and to provide community members with an opportunity to contribute towards developing a governance framework. In deliberative democracy community members are required to own a degree of knowledge about the issues, in order to stretch their discussions, meaning and legitimacy in a public policy formulation context (Molster et al., 2013; Rychetnik et al., 2013).

Deliberative democracy has been labelled as an emerging community movement, an answer to the perceived insufficiencies of representative democracy. Hartz-Karp (2005) asserts that deliberation is an approach to decision-making where community members consider appropriate facts from numerous opinions. Community members further converse with each other and think critically about options to be taken in decision making. The important reasons for deliberate democracy in community engagement are to enable community members to discuss public issues and form opinions; to give democratic leaders better insight into public issues than elections can; and to enable people to substantiate their views and be able to figure out better alternatives from the inappropriate ones. Uhr (1998) also provides other reasons such as capacity to influence policy and decision making; representatives of the general population, inclusive of diverse viewpoints and values, get equal opportunities to participate; open dialogue, access to information, space to understand and review issues, respect, and movement towards some consensus. Deliberative democracy strengthens resident expressions in governance by including people from all walks of life (MacTiernan, 2004). Therefore, the people’s influence can be felt on the public policy making and resource decisions that impact their daily lives and their futures.

The nature of community engagement on public policy formulation: City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality

The lack of clear guidelines on public policy development in the municipalities is an indicative that local authorities have the liberty to design their strategy for community engagement. Hence, the CCTMM hereafter referred to CCTMM establishes its own policy instrument to carry out the process of decision-making. In the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, the standard operation procedures (SOP) for public policy formulation usually involve many stages (City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, 2017). The local authorities’ directorate committees that are directly affected by particular decisions are more involved in formulating the decision more than the other critical stakeholders. On a good day, public policy formulation in CCTMM usually follows these stages: consultation, feedback, approval and implementation. These stages do not make provision for involvement of community engagement. The policy coordinating committee (PCC), an arm of City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality that is tasked to check the appropriateness of the proposed policy hardly confirms if communities’ input has been considered. This then implies that the draft policy that is endorsed and authorised is usual structured entirely on the SOP for policy formulation by the related directorates (City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, 2017).

Whereas, section 79 committee, in the policy orders that community engagement is applicable and an authentic process in grass root decision making. However, once the final draft is ready for submission arising from the involvement of the official directorate of the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, it is almost a law. The public policy formulation process in the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality depicts an emphasis on political interest to elected officials more than the grass roots desires (City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, 2017). More often than not, the policy making process is based on the political vision, mandates, manifesto promises, and ideologies. Authorised public policies are usually targeted to deliver specific self-interested outcomes and not desired demands of the communities. In the real world, however, the authorised policies contain implications for the citizens of the municipalities with little or no impact on their innate demands. Thus, the policy formulation process in the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality does not conform to the policy of the council. Hence, the policy-making process is not precise and concise according to law. Instead, a successful completion of the community engagement processes in accordance with the legislative
standard is lacking in the public policy formulation process of the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality. Section 79 Committee stipulates that public views are necessary and are considered as part of that recommendation that should come before the Executive Mayor and Council for approval. It is therefore, a lacuna in the public policy making process that the council considers draft statement devoid community input (City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, 2017).

According to City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality (2017), the lack of adjustment by public officials in public policy making has had grave impacts on improving the quality of policy setting. In the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, this lack of adjustment resulted to a number of challenges such as:

i. Significant variations in both the structure and quality of policy writing across City departments
ii. Lack of alignment across functional departments causing contradictions and duplications of activities
iii. Lack of alignment with the overarching strategic aim of the organisation as provided for in the integrated development plan (IDP).

At this stage, it is imperative to note that in order to achieve the goal of building an inclusive and enabling environment that will foster opportunities for all the citizens of Cape Town. It is required that the whole organisation has a standardized approach to policy formulation. Policy instruments are some of the important tools of governance and service delivery. It remains imperative that policies are used effectively and able to achieve the maximum impact towards grass roots development and governance. In order to make it achievable the policy environment must therefore be strengthened by the following strategies as captured in the order of informing, consulting, involving, collaborating and empowering:

**Informing:** to provide the community with balanced and objective information to assist community members in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. In public policy making the provision of information is a necessary requirement in the engagement process. This sharing of information is complicated by language and cultural barriers between municipal officials and the community. Poor education amongst some communities and low levels of literacy affect information sharing. As a result, information giving and sharing do not bare expected outcomes as it is expected to be an important way of building relationships and empowering the community (Tedrowet et al., 2012). The aim of providing information is to enhance understanding between government and community issues. To provide stable and objective information to assist the public with understanding the problems, alternatives, and suggested solutions. However, the provision of information on its own is not enough for a community to be actively engaged in municipality. For community engagement, the sharing of information should aim at providing opportunities for a wide range of community members to contribute different views and keep the community members informed about how particular decisions were arrived at. Information sharing is also very important to provide feedback to the communities on previously suggested solutions (International Association for Public Participation, 2007).

**Consulting:** refers to obtaining feedback on various aspects of a public policy. This strategy aims at ensuring that the interests of the community members are considered during the policy design. Consultation is done with community members with all stakeholder groups such as community leaders, community advisory boards, and community representatives ensuring that it reaches every resident. Marsh et al., (2011) noted that consultation requires reliable community representation, where certainty implies fair, balanced and accurate representation of the many and different constituencies within the community. The representation could include community advisory boards, religious leaders, political leaders, community leaders, and respected individuals within the community.

**Involving:** Involving implies to work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. According to the (International Association for Public Participation. 2007), community involvement is a process of working directly with the community or through their representatives. To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered. Involvement requires more than information giving and consultation. This strategy needs time and requires effort to sustain the interests of the community in the public policy formulation.

Collaboration: Collaboration entails connecting with the community to be part of the discussion including alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions in the public policy formulation (International Association for Public Participation, 2007). During this strategy, communities work closely with the municipalities to build accountability, transparency and awareness about decision making. The aim is often to reach people who are affected and involved in the decision making process. Community engagement may provide an opportunity for the community to identify their policy demands. Community Engagement could also provide an opportunity to measure community views on policy issues and discussions which can affect future policy implementation. Community engagement requires direct engagement with communities which amongst many, may include town hall meetings, community meetings, and public meetings.

Against this background, the importance of this study was to investigate how public policy formulators value frameworks for thinking about community engagement. Spaces created for public participation in policy processes tend to be taken over by organised interest groups and that engagement processes tend to give advantage to those who have the capacities which come with access to resources.
with the result that mechanisms which add to representative democracy by creating special channels for citizen participation are likely to reduce avenues for engagement by the poor (Friedman, 2004).

**Policy making matrix in the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality**

The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality is located in an environment of diverse cultures, beliefs, and increasing demands. From all indications, the local government is facing higher demands with less available resource to meet the demands of its people. Consensus abounds that in order to improve the standard of living of residents through effective governance and impact, the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality must focus on core goals that will have a knock-on effect throughout the society. The core goals must equally address the root causes of social and economic issues, rather than a broad and imprecise approach that only addresses the symptoms (City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, 2017).

The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality (2017) achieved its policy goals aligned with evidence-based approach to policy development. This approach emphasised the followings aspects:

i. Understand the policy environment and how it is changing
ii. Appraise the likely effects of policy changes to choose between different options and subsequently assess their impacts;
iii. Demonstrate the links between strategic direction, intended outcomes and policy objectives;
iv. Determine what needs to be done in order to meet the strategic goals;
v. Influence stakeholders positively to help in achieve policy goals and take them through to delivery; and
vi. Communicate the quality of evidence to meet the open government agenda.

In many instances, the evidence-based approach has been used when public policy formulation happens. The evidence-based approach includes various forms of research-based data namely: primary quantitative data collected from experiments; secondary quantitative social data collected by government agencies; clinical trials; and interview or questionnaire-based social surveys. The multiple sources of evidence-based approach are expected to provide knowledge to assist the local authorities to understand values and incorporate public inputs into policy development (City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality, 2017).

Generally, public policy provides information and understanding on how government formulates policy. The intended process of transforming current solutions in preparation to future challenges. Community engagement on public policy formulation assists in deliberating democracy and participatory democracy. However, deliberate democracy is conceived as an approach that measures the reality of democratic decisions during public policy formulation. According to Cloete & Mmakoa (2018) deliberate democracy is a process characterised by five indicators:

*Information:* this implies access to reasonably adequate information.

*Substantive balance:* this implies the extent to which arguments from one side are sufficiently considered by those who hold opposing views.

*Diversity:* this implies the extent to which all major arguments are considered.

*Conscientiousness:* this implies the presence of sincere weighing of public demand as against parochial interest in formulated public policy.

*Equal consideration:* this implies considering all views, irrespective of who raises those.

Participatory democracy has been well illustrated in chapter two of South Africa’s Constitution (1996) as an attempt of citizen inclusion in policy making that affect their lives (Cloete & Mmakola, 2018). Therefore, it is the sphere closest to the people to involve communities in its affairs. Municipalities are required by law to find ways and means to involve communities in their affairs. There is a need to improve the quality of local democracy, the degree of municipal responsiveness and accountability.

**Public policy and policy formulation in community engagement sphere**

Anderson (1997) defines policy as a relatively stable, purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern. Anderson (1997) further maintains public policy as actions “developed by governmental bodies and officials” with the aim of meeting specific objectives. This Anderson’s definition of public policy limits the policy formulation to government officials where there is no role played by other affected stakeholders. In contrast to Anderson’s (1997) definition, Osman (2002) views public policy as a complex process which involves other players besides government. Rivera et al. (2006) further suggested that public policy is a complex nature that involves various issues and actors in which different stages can likely overlap and infrequently follow a linear path. Smith (2012) asserted that public policy is a proposed course of action of government within a specific environment with given obstacles and opportunities that the policy proposes to utilize and to reach a goal. A public policy can be viewed as a broad guide to present and future decisions selected in acknowledgement of a given condition from a number of available alternatives. Dawes et al. (2011) stated that public policies are governmental responses to the interaction of social, economic, cultural, and political factors within a particular instance. Public policy is a course carried out in the designation of the
citizens as a whole which affect the public interest. McCool (1995); Moja (2003); Rivera et al., (2006) further noted that the complex nature of the policy process has led to recognition and identification of several stages to public policy to simplify the purpose.

These public policy processes include these fundamental stages: agenda setting (problem identification), policy formulation, policy adoption (decision-making), policy implementation and policy evaluation (Howlett and Giest, 2015). Each stages of public policy is important because it allows the process to be smooth and thoroughly attended to. Howlett and Giest (2015) explained the purpose of each stages as follows, agenda setting is when government discusses problems that have come to its attention and the causes of those problem. The second stage, policy formulation, is the stage where government formulates policy alternatives to address the identified problems in a bid to find solutions. The third stage, policy adoption (decision-making) stage, government decides on which course of action or non-action to be followed. The fourth stage, policy implementation involves the actual implementation of policies where activities are done. Lastly, policy evaluation involves the monitoring of policy outputs and outcomes. For the success of these stages of public policy process, all role-players from government and society at large should be involved.

Policy-making is the fundamental role of the city or country legislative bodies yet is often misunderstood. The local government policies affect everyone in the community in some way. Public policy regulates what type of services are to be provided by government to the communities including the quality of those services while maintaining sustainable development that will occur in the community (Kennedy, 1999). Public policies are created to guide decision-making. Local government elected individuals are responsible for public policy-making. Local policy-making has complex characteristics. It requires the very best of local officials who have a vision of changing communities’ lives to make a difference. The public policy-making process must remain decentralized. There are many stages in public policy making process such as policy initiation, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation. In public policy, local government legislative functions should include a combination of basic decisions and commitments. The public policy-making process considers and balances public values. Policy-making is often characterized by the clash of challenging and differing interests and perspectives rather than neutral, unbiased solutions for policy issues.

Howlett and Giest (2015) assert that the idea of policy making exists as a set of unified stages to provide a general framework for understanding the policy development process and themes to several of the vital sequential activities. Although a useful conceptual tool, the policy cycle model contains some limitations as an empirical description of policy-making reality due to its interpretation of highly depending and multifaceted policy processes. The reality of policy making is not as orderly and linear as the model might suggest. Also, the stages are often compressed, and the sequence may change entirely. For example, policy formulation can sometimes precede agenda setting, as solutions pursue problems to which they can be applied (Howlett et al., 2009). Furthermore, it also does not answer several key questions such as the definite substance of policy. The number and type of relevant actors involved in the process is not clear. The actual manner and sequence in which policy development processes occur are not static. Overall, when using the policy cycle idea, it has to be clear that the model is a guideline for the analysis of a far more complex reality.

Everett (2003) asserted that like any other social science discipline, policy making was understandable in terms of the scientific pattern during the first half of the 20th century. This narrow model was process comprising a number of reasonably ordered sequential steps which comprehensively campaigned, assessed and compared all options. The demanding application of this instrument ensured the outcome by selecting the most effective means of achieving an end. This action included breaking down decision-making process into phases to ensure assessment of selections to provide a single best appropriate answer.

Conclusions

This study produced new knowledge through development and recommendation of a community engagement model. This model is based on the influence that the improvement of community engagement in public policy formulation depend on positive relationships, partnerships to be built by both the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality and community members. In the regulation of interactions between the state and civil society, national government has created policies and legislation, while also introducing instruments to an enabling environment for meaningful community engagement. The current developmental local government framework is based on the recognition of the critical importance of local community engagement in service delivery and development initiatives. The White Paper on Local Government (1998) argues that building local democracy is a crucial role of local government, and that municipalities should develop strategies and mechanisms to continuously engage with communities, business and community groups. The community engagement on public policy formulation requires the inclusion for all participants, those with an interest in the outcome and those affected by the legislation. The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality must focus more on how community engagement on public policy formulation should be implemented and bring methods that will create opportunities for policy to respond to the actual needs of the communities. The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality should incorporate other usable methods like promoting community meetings. Educate communities about the policies and their significant role.

This can also influence ownership in decision making but it can be possible when the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality considers communicating with the community members in languages that they fully understand during community engagement in different areas. These languages can include isiXhosa, Afrikaans, Braille, and sign language. Furthermore, those affected by development must have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality should view community engagement on public policy formulation as a tool to increase legitimacy, transparency, accountability, support, and responsiveness of a particular policy. Access and inclusivity need to be promoted. Community engagement should accommodate
broader views in public policy formulation. The procedure used to provide policy awareness should be cleared and addressed. Once community members understand and know about their policies, their key roles as stakeholders will be realised and perceptions about their involvement can change and be recognized as an important factor of sound public policy formulation.

Acknowledgement

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, Formal Analysis, Writing—Original Draft Preparation, Writing—Review And Editing by author. Author has read and agreed to the published the final version of the manuscript.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study, due to that the research does not deal with vulnerable groups or sensitive issues.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Howlett, M., & Giest, S. F. (2015). University, Burnaby, BC, Canada: Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.


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