



## Enhancing public participation for local economic development: insights from Jozini Local Municipality

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### ABSTRACT

The study focused on the insights of municipal officials and community members concerning the significance of public participation in promoting local economic development at Jozini Local Municipality. The study aimed to determine the challenges hindering the function of public participation in the uplifting of the local community and how these challenges influence community development. This study adopted a mixed-method (qualitative and quantitative) research method to collect and analyze the data. Both methods ensured various data collection techniques, including questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were presented to community members because several people could be reached in a brief time as numerous community members were targeted. Interviews also served to collect data from the municipality staff, since they were not that many. The study identified the challenges hindering public participation in community development; it also revealed politics as the bearer of public participation between the municipality and the community. The findings also revealed municipal officials struggle with financial resources during their course of work. Corruption and maladministration among municipalities were identified, hampering community development through public participation. The study suggests that the municipality should improve communication between the officials and the residents, enabling them to raise their opinions. The study also suggests providing adequate funding to be effective in development that will satisfy the community.

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## Introduction

Local government is the closest sphere to the people, meant to serve the citizens' interests, and responsible for community service delivery, requiring the implementation of public participation (Matyana and Mthethwa, 2022a; Thusi et al., 2023). According to the South African Constitution (1996), the objectives of local municipalities are presented in Section 152(1), such as to promote social and economic development and encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in local government matters. Public participation concerns empowering citizens to collaborate with the government on decisions affecting them (Pinkney, 2004:87).

Public participation is not an unfamiliar challenge in the decision-making process—people do not want to participate. Masango (2001:17) alleges that public participation is not perceived as a new challenge in South African policymaking and implementation. Municipalities must communicate certain information to the community. According to Madzivhandila and Maloka (2014:652), municipalities must assume a significant function in promoting democracy, ensuring that communities participate in decisions affecting them directly. It is the municipalities' responsibility to ensure that the community participates in decision-making through their representatives.

Ngcamu (2014) contends that community participation should be comprehended as direct community involvement in the planning, governance, and development programs at the local government. The study focused on the contribution of public participation in

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promoting local economic development at Jozini Local Municipality. This study intended to analyse the function of public participation in promoting economic development under Jozini Local Municipality.

This study aimed at analysing the function of public participation in promoting local economic development at Jozini Local Municipality. Research objectives;

- i. To identify challenges hindering the community to participate in decision-making
- ii. To examine the function of public participation in promoting local economic development
- iii. To establish the best way of ensuring the effectiveness of public participation.

Furthermore, the research questions of the study are:

- i. What are the challenges hindering the community to participate in decision-making?
- ii. What is the function of public participation in promoting local economic development at Jozini Municipality?
- iii. What can be conducted to ensure the effectiveness of public participation in Jozini Municipality?

## Literature review

### Theoretical and Conceptual Background

#### Public participation

Public participation is defined in several ways, but (Cele, 2015:6) it is explained as a two-way exchange of information between the public and the local authority. Sebola (2017:26) claims that this concept of public participation can be used interchangeably with concepts like community participation, citizen participation, and public involvement. The choice of a concept depends on the writer because other studies provide discrete differences of those concepts used as public participation. Mathebula (2015: online) indicates that the mentioned concepts are dissimilar in context, interpretation, meaning, and application, even if used interchangeably. Sebola (2017:26) defines public participation as a practice involving the public in agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy formulation in an organization. Public participation is a concept synonymous with democracy, involvement, engagement, transparency, and good governance (Bozo and Hiemer, 2016; Matyana and Mthethwa, 2024).

#### Local Economic Development

In reviewing the literature, various definitions of LED are present. According to Mokoena (2017: 468), LED is the process where LGs engage to encourage or observe business activities. The LED's principal goal is to encourage local employment chances in parts that improve the public by employing usual, existing human and institutional resources (Xaba et al., 2024). Koma (2012) contends that LED is planned to allow the most vulnerable. It also side-lined the poor sectors of local communities for being capable of raising enough income to meet their aspirations and their necessities. Mokoena (2015) suggests that LED cannot be isolated from programs combating poverty alleviation, started, and applied in the local government sphere.

This section aims to assess and examine the existing literature and the theoretical framework linked to public participation in promoting LED. This chapter also explains the legislative framework that governs public participation in South Africa. Additional studies about public participation in the local sphere of government are reviewed.

The basic assumption underlying public participation Bekink (2016) outlines six basic assumptions on public participation as follows:

- i. Public participation is a fundamental right of all people.
- ii. Public participation narrows the social distance between the electorate and elected institutions.
- iii. Public participation promotes the values of good governance and human rights.
- iv. South Africans are encouraged to participate as individuals or interest groups to improve service delivery.
- v. Community is defined as a ward in the context of public participation.

Ward committees are central in linking elected institutions and these linkages are reinforced by other forms of communication with communities, such as the imbizo, roadshows, and the makgotlas (in Sotho and Tswana communities of southern Africa).

#### Challenges to public participation in South Africa

According to Naidoo and Ramphala (2018:82), global local governments (LGs) are confronted with challenges in constructing their mandate of providing basic facilities and adapting to the communities' expectations. Masiya, Davids, and Mazenda (2019:27) disclose municipalities in South Africa, displaying an ongoing decline in public participation at the local level. This may lead to poor service delivery, and tension among decision-makers and the public, while also increasing violent service delivery protests.

Enshassi, Kullab, alkilani, and sundermier (2016:2) identified various challenges of community participation. Some include a low level of community capacity; a lack of capacity of local authorities to work in community-sensitive ways; local authorities reported considerable human resource difficulties in supporting attendance at partnership board meetings; institutionalised resistance

concerning community empowerment; perception divergence between community members and statutory service providers in the partnership context; authoritarian of the local government members.

Participation is an important aspect to be considered by the government when planning or deciding on matters affecting the public (Matyana & Mthethwa, 2022b). This implies that the public provides a chance to voice their concerns through the proper mechanisms provided by the government. Their decisions are presented on the government agenda (Lesia, 2011:12).

According to Sithole and Mathonsi (2015:21) in South Africa, public participation has declined concerning the interface between municipalities and communities. Van Donk (2014:2) contends that South Africans living in poverty have a limited voice in local-level development processes that influence them directly. This necessitates exploring avenues to strengthen public participation aiming to promote citizen-focused service delivery. Existing studies also reveal that municipal officials are hesitant to share decision-making powers with communities (Tshoose 2015; Qwabe & Mdaka 2011 & Kanyane 2014).

The officials hold it is their function, and they have an unfettered ability to invent “the best solution” (Kanyane, 2014:104). According to Tshoose (2015:13), with the establishment of a democratic government in South Africa, the challenges of public administration become more complex, independent, and embracing. Societal problems, such as increasing demand for service delivery at a community level, rising unemployment pressures because of slow economic growth and development, access to health care, and the right to education, have a significant influence on government policy.

Chifamba (2013:13) outlines performers hindering public participation as: a lack of poor community headship in villages that do not give feedback to community members; a lack of transparencies and accountability among community leaders, especially on funds, contributed to rural development projects; Poor road and transportation infrastructures in Buhera, limiting community movement to and from the district offices; Strict and inflexible donor agencies’ policies, especially on budgeting and funding procedures and Ignorance or lack of information; frequent and prolonged droughts in the area causing household food insecurity and the high levels of poverty for the most community.

### **Public participation in promoting Local Economic Development**

Madzivhandila and Maloka (2014: 65) declare that: “In the former periods, it was the experts who had the answers, local, and poor people had the problem, and several problems were to be resolved by education and transferring technology. More and more, that ideology was interrogated and undermined. The balance has shifted. Development imposed from the top-down was often not sustained. Increasingly we have been acknowledged as much of the problem, and their participation as the key to sustainability and several of the solutions”.

According to the European Urban Knowledge Network (2011:1), entrenchment in participation is the faith that elections are not mere events, allowing the public to inspire their government. There is a shift from government to governance, influencing the legal and organisational framework of government organisations. Participation of citizens is not only observed as an important reason for success in developing and sustaining policy implementation, but European governments increasingly turn to their residents to manage community service delivery in periods of economic downturn/recession.

The community participation examples can be established in several policy areas, such as in the social domain, focusing on sustaining community spaces (playgrounds), managing public facilities (such as swimming pools or community centres), and providing health or elderly care. Governments increasingly turn to residents for providing certain community services.

### **Tools, strategies, and mechanisms for ensuring the effectiveness of Public Participation**

Deacon and Piper (2008) identified several possibilities for re-engineering the system of public participation in local government. Such possibilities would include the following aspects. Several chances or possibilities for re-engineering the system of community participation exist in the local government. First, recognising existing community structures and spaces that could contribute to the invited spaces provided by the government, for example, ratepayers associations, traditional institutions, community policing fora, religious bodies, and citizen assemblies.

Second, teaching residents to actively participate in encouraging their developmental needs; the government has to develop collaboration with non-governmental organisations functioning in local societies on similar matters. Community representatives must assess councillors in the local government concerning identified main deliverables. If they fail to deliver, political parties must be held responsible (Deacon & Piper 2008:63).

Krishnaswamy (2012:248) also discloses participation mechanisms as the learning results for this module. These include recognising a change of devices of participation that can be employed to attain dissimilar participation levels and then present rules to select devices of participation appropriate for specific situations. Selecting the device for 48 participation depends on the aim of participation. The choice of devices is diverse according to: the management goals, objectives, and desired outcomes; followed by the community profile and the social-political context; project size, budget, timeline, and lastly resources allocated and skills and availability of management team.

Beckley et al. (2005:27) proposed an establishing outline for categorising several public participation devices. They categorise devices as indirect (non-face-to-face) or direct (face-to-face) and then also divide them into useful devices for minor or large groups. Indirect devices include comment sheets, toll-free lines, referenda, and surveys. Direct devices include public advisory committees, focus groups, workshops, round tables, open houses, and public hearings.

According to UN-HABITAT (2004), public participation differs from the sharing of information to the active engagement of residents in applying and managing tasks and services. Devices developing dissimilar participation range from public-private partnerships, stakeholder consultations, and public hearings to community watchdog groups. The common thread that runs several devices, though, is the commitment of the sphere, close to the public to share information and involve the public in an open discussion. The citizens' opinions must not only be overhead but should reflect in development decisions, therefore, devising governments responsive and accountable to the community.

## **Theoretical framework**

The theory is an assumption or eye of how individuals or organisations observes a certain phenomenon (Matyana & Thusi, 2023). A theory is a set of propositions employed to explain some phenomena, being a narrative. A theory unifies narratives about phenomena; narratives can predict, while others reorganise our perspective or observation on the world. A theoretical framework is a structure that can hold or support a theory of research. The theoretical framework connects the researcher to existing knowledge. The theoretical framework stipulates important variables influencing a phenomenon of interest (De Vos et al., 2005:36). This section covers the human relations theory and the ladder of public participation.

### **Human relations theory**

Mayo (2016:5) suggests that the function of human behaviour in production, emphasising the importance of communication between the workers and the management. According to (Nkosi, 2014), human relations allude to how organisations manage and cooperate with their workers in their attempts to improve worker's functions and the effectiveness of the organisation. It includes crucial concerns, such as individual, group, and needs of the organisation, inspiration, and effort to improve the quality of work life. The human relations approach is based on the understanding of the person as an individual, one-of-a-kind, independent human. This theory attempts to find the cohesive idea of the sentiments, needs, wants, reasons, and attitudes of the individual. The emphasis of this theory settles after respecting the individual rather than attempting to inspire or to control them (Nkosi, 2014:45).

This theory relates to the study. Community representatives (ward councillors) hold the responsibility to ensure that community members participate in decision-making affecting them. Before they are observed as representatives of the community, they must be comprehended as people—those people in power have necessities, emotions, and attitudes. Their personalities must be recognised before they appear as representatives. Those representatives should be self-satisfied by their work to deliver to the community. Ward councillors or traditional leaders must ensure that community members have meaningful participation in local government matters, since they are closest to the community. This theory encourages community involvement and their representation in the municipality. Community members should contact their ward councillor to raise issues and challenges encountered. The ward councillor must present these concerns to the municipality.

## **Methodology**

According to Sileyew (2019), research methodology is the organised procedure the researcher consumes to collect and examine information to find a solution to a problem. Brynard, Hanekom, and Brynard (2014) identified a research methodology as a group of methods aimed at collecting data, requiring a reflection on the planning, structuring, and putting into action of the research to meet the demands of truth, objection, and validity. These are planned, scientific, and valuable processes, schemes are algorithms with the primary purpose of collecting and analysing data to find solutions to problems (Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas, 2013).

In achieving the objective of this study, the mixed-method has been used to collect data. The study relied on primary sources of information, meaning that the study used information that is from direct key informants. To be specific, relevant published reports and scholarly articles on public participation, Local Economic Development, and service delivery were reviewed through document analysis. The document analysis of published reports and scholarly articles was beneficial to this study, by aiding the researchers to find an in-depth understanding of the function of public participation in promoting Local Economic Development at Jozini local municipality.

## **Analysis and Findings**

### **Section A: Respondents' demographics**

This section presents the biographical information of the respondents, comprising gender, duration of residence in the area, and respondents' occupation. Forty-six respondents participated in the study. Officials and community members under JLM formed the sample. The data analysis was conducted by using questionnaires and interviews, involving participants listed as follows:

- i. political parties as represented in the municipal council
- ii. tribal authorities

- iii. municipal council members
- iv. community members

The first part of the results indicates the respondents' demographics, followed by the qualitative and quantitative results.

**The gender of the respondents**

From 52 questionnaires distributed, 46 were returned; from the interviews arranged with 15,12 participants; three municipality employees declined the interview invitation. Most respondents both from the municipality and community were females, with males as the minority. From the community, 21 were male and 25 female participants; from the municipality, five were males and seven were females.

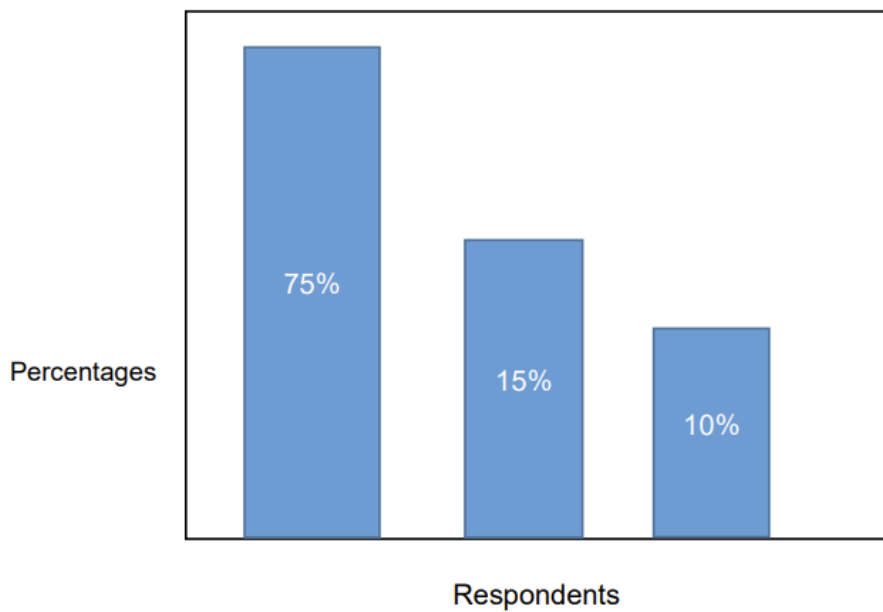
**Table 1:** Participants' gender

	Frequency	Per cent
<b>Male</b>	26	45
<b>Female</b>	32	55
<b>Total</b>	58	100

Source: Author

**Section B: analysis of quantitative data**

Challenges, hindering CP, are indicated in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1:** A lack of awareness, poor communication, and information sharing

Figure 1 illustrates that 75% of the participants were uninformed about matters concerning them; for example, if they need a service rendered, they should first consult the community, indicating a requirement for the service. Community members should be provided with the chance to participate in a decision concerning them, collaborating with the municipality to be effective. Mostly, in local municipalities, a lack exists in updating community members about improvements to occur in the community, causing distrust of the authorities since they are not accountable for their responsibilities.

Fifteen per cent agreed they are uninvolved in projects because of a lack of communication and sharing of information. Ten per cent disagree they are uninformed about municipality project planning, since they were aware and obtained information on 75% 15% 10% 91 time. Most participants indicated encountering difficulty to participate in community projects as they are not informed about events.

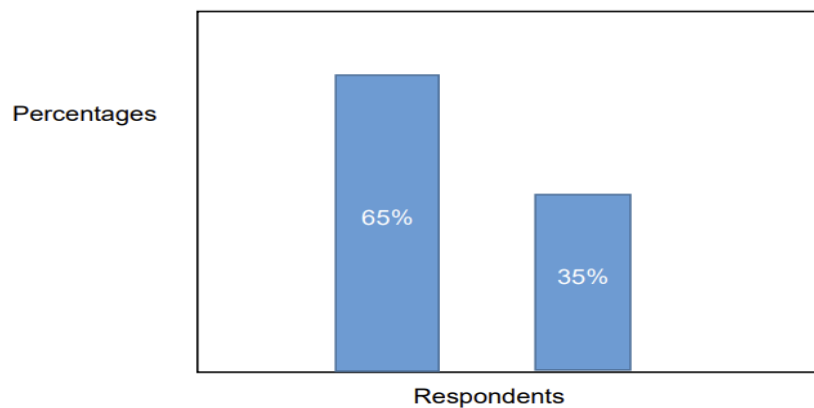
Public participation regards how people in authority treat community members. These challenges are problematic in the studied municipality because of inadequate public participation attributable to a lack of knowledge. Community members are not informed about events within the community, according to the respondents.

Thwala (2009:17) identified that “another challenge was poor communication on CP, and this led to meeting attendance to be poor. Methods of CP employed must be appropriate to the Alexandra community”. According to Kilewo and Frumence (2015), poor communication and information-sharing among lower-level health facilities and CHMT in all subjects connected to the CCHP. The members of HFGCs have incomplete or a lack of information, linked to the implementation and development of facility plans and CCHP, mainly attributable to a lack of united supervision or planning meetings between the two organs.

The perceived poor communication and information-sharing led to inadequate involvement of HFGC in CCHP implementation and development. Evidence from a randomised field experiment on community-based monitoring in Uganda exposed community members could not fully participate in decision-making, monitoring service providers and types of services. This was attributable to poor communication from the health facility to the community concerning service provision to the community (Kilewo & Frumence, 2015).

These findings reveal that traditional leaders and ward councillors are not collaborating with the community. Most respondents raised these challenges. The highest percentage indicated that several community members are not consulted regarding projects, confirming a lack of involvement and communication with the community. This leads to unwanted, unnecessary, or unimportant project implementation by the local government. The Batho Pele principles are, therefore, not followed by ward councillors. The community needs to be informed and involved regarding projects’ intentions to be executed. As it stipulated in Chapter 7 of the South African Constitution, local governments are “to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the local government matters”. These conduct by traditional leaders and ward councils are, therefore, unacceptable, depriving citizens of their right to participate.

Mngoma (2010) supports that, for proper public participation, community members need to be updated in advance on public hearings, meetings, or any other events. The participants’ responses in this regard varied with most indicating that they did not obtain such information, with some professing total ignorance of by-laws. One of the informal traders contended that “in other streets, they pay rent for operating, maybe only those who pay were informed”. Respondents identified a lack of meeting attendance as a challenge hindering public participation. Traditional leaders and ward councillors should discuss with the community procedures of conducting quarterly or monthly meetings to create awareness for all.



**Figure 2: A lack of attendance of meetings**

Figure 2 identifies that 35% of the participants were informed about meetings and have been invited to these discussions. It depends on those calling the meetings. Participants indicated the traditional leaders do not attend unless called by the ward councillor. Their reason for not attending meetings is that people in authority do not keep their promises. Most respondents agreed meetings are announced on time as they attempt for members to receive the meeting invite. Head persons are indicated to announce the meeting to the community members.

They also revealed that meetings are helpful because they can raise important aspects for the ward councillor. They normally host monthly meetings if needed; meetings are hosted during weekends or week afternoons as some community members are at work. From the participants, 65% disagree meetings requests as a reason for non-attendance. They also allege that people in authority usually prioritise politics, inviting only members in the same political party.

Traditional leaders and ward councillors are only concerned about the politics, involving those in political parties of choice. Poor attendance of meetings is caused by inadequate consultation with most communities, exposing a lack of proper planning of projects for the effectiveness of economic development. Meeting invites should not involve politics because citizens prefer participation in decision-making. Communities are supposed to be updated quarterly to create awareness concerning anticipated projects.

Participants were requested to identify functions occupied by local municipality members, emphasising LED promotion through public participation. Participants responded with strategies or functions for assistance:

- i. “Municipality should engage young people and graduates to participate in local affairs and talk on behalf of local communities because it seems as if ward committees are not doing their jobs properly, so that is why the municipality end up not seeing any improvement within the municipality.
- ii. The local municipality can give people knowledge and information about the importance of participation in the local municipality and give them feedback if any.
- iii. Local municipalities must create activities that will involve members of the community.
- iv. They should offer job opportunities to local people and encourage them to open a small business and support those local small businesses.
- v. Address the community before any development project. Never politicise any development rendered.
- vi. Assist or help young people or youth to register at universities to minimise uneducated and unemployed youth in the local municipality.
- vii. Have functional ward committees and regularly have meetings.
- viii. Forget about politics and be united so they can produce ideas that will uplift the community.
- ix. Corruption must be rotted out at all costs. Ward councillors, traditional leaders, and municipal council must have a common goal to render, so they will be effective towards their citizens.”

From the respondents’ contributions, the municipality needs to implement techniques to advance the process of citizen involvement.

Participants were also asked how the municipality can ensure the effectiveness of public participation. They responded as follows:

- i. “There must be strong communication between the municipality and community.
- ii. Promotion of public participation and improvement in financial resources allocated for the municipality.
- iii. The community must be addressed about municipal issues so that they will be aware of what is holding them back in terms of developing the community, the relationship must be strictly professional.
- iv. They should teach community members the importance of participating in the municipality and make sure there is communication between the community and the local municipality.
- v. Ensure that they take the community’s opinion or views into consideration.
- vi. Municipality should keep their promises that are made to the community”.

Participants produced strategies that may help in the attempt to involve community members in decision-making. Municipal officials and community members raised diverse ideas on what can be conducted regarding public participation to improve the living standard of the community. Most local municipalities in South Africa are struggling to concern CP; community members do not want to participate in any activities. Both the municipality and community members need to pursue all processes to apply these suggestions to observe improvement towards community development. Beamlaki (2012) also revealed that public participation in LED was restricted to consultations. The consultations were important to develop demand-driven service products. Sometimes, they produced unexpected results, encouraging innovation. The system is still inoperative and needs to overcome several legal and procedural difficulties. Public participation will be important in awareness-raising, problem-solving, and monitoring.

### Section C: analysis of qualitative data

This division presents difficulties municipal officials encounter in the course of their work. Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis within qualitative research. It emphasizes identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. In thematic analysis have to group important aspects into themes. Themes should be identified from the data not on research questions as the researcher did in this study. Ensure themes have enough data to be convincing and ensure data supports themes, and themes support the narrative. Thematic analysis is just one approach of many ways to analyse qualitative research.

The table below shows a number of participants for municipal officials who participated.

**Table 2:** Number of participants

	Frequency	Per cent
<b>Male</b>	3	25
<b>Female</b>	9	75
<b>Total</b>	12	100

### Corruption, maladministration

When analysing the challenge of corruption and maladministration among municipal officials, 73% of the respondents indicated discontent, revealing dishonesty, resulting in a poor level of economic development; 27% was neutral; 73% expressed dissatisfaction concerning those in opposing parties and authority. As the JLM is in rural areas, this reveals excessive corruption and

maladministration. This is attributable to authorities taking advantage. Most community members are uneducated, therefore; authorities act freely in their favour because no one will challenge them about any progress promised. These findings correspond with some issues raised by Makanyeza et al. (2013:5), Thusi et al., (2023) and Matyana et al. (2023) indicating that the major causes of poor service delivery in local municipalities are:

“Political manipulation, corruption, and a lack of accountability and transparency, inadequate citizen participation, poor human resource policy, failure to manage change, a lack of employee capacity, poor planning, and poor monitoring and evaluation”.

#### **A lack of financial resource**

It shows that 100% of the respondents mentioned that the municipality firstly considers the annual budget while the community expects budget approval, considering their needs. Incomplete projects are caused by the limited budget, not by corrupted officials. They agreed that Jozini Municipality cannot implement projects because of financial constraints. Muthwa (2016) supports the statement, confirming that some municipalities are struggling financially. Insufficient financial resources led to the inefficiency of the municipality since they could not deliver services.

This section reviews the questions scheduled in interviews. Following the interview questions were directed (Annexure C). Participants were requested to identify the causes of the problems municipal officials encounter. Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents revealed that the principal causes of the problem, indicate insufficient funds, poor communication, and dishonesty. Attributable to this, important aspects remain unattended since others are unaware of it or because of distrust. Forty-one per cent disagree with them because they are always updated. They mentioned another cause of the problem as the conflict among themselves during the decision-making process, causing delays. During the interviews, these challenges are huge barriers to public participation.

Participants were asked if they observe these problems as barriers to public participation; 83% alleges that the aforementioned challenges are barriers towards public participation since several expected actions are not conducted attributable to poor communication. Public participation is important to an effective municipality, ensuring public participation in matters concerning them. Seventeen per cent of the respondents revealed that people in power undermine them; they do not know most of the prominent features they are supposed to know since Jozini Municipality is in rural areas. This confirms that public participation is inadequate, especially in rural areas, since people in power reason that most community members are uneducated.

Participants were asked if meaningful communication between the municipality and the community was present; 100% of the respondents revealed that the community does not want to attend meetings, therefore, communication lacks as people in the community refuse to participate. From the municipality's side, they attempt to meet with community leaders to update them about community development to distribute the information to the community. Community members indicated no concern regarding updates since they have identified a lack of sharing information and empty promises from their leaders. Since communication is crucial for success, the community should attempt to accommodate the community leaders regarding communication with municipal officials attending to their needs as a community.

This study observed that community leaders are unaware of their accountability to the community. Community members do not know who their ward counsellor is. This confirms poor or a lack of communication. They express they are in rural areas where even traditional leaders are absent. This forms part of poor communication, as they are not concerned about the needs of the community. If they include the community in their decisions, the community's needs can be identified. Allowing community members to raise their opinions will be valuable as they reside within the municipality. They can, therefore, raise important arguments regarding community development.

## **Findings**

During the research, community members completed a questionnaire while municipal officials responded to questions through interviews to help collect information on the function of public participation in promoting LED. Considering the principal aim of this study, indicating, analysing the function of public participation in promoting LED at JLM. The main study findings indicate that most respondents (90%) identified public participation in local government as an enormous concern. Numerous municipalities cannot engage with their community members in attempting to develop the local communities, achieving the goal of economic development. With the lack of connection between the municipality and local community, local people are still struggling, and their lives are not enhanced concerning skills development and job creation. Most local people, specifically youngsters, are uneducated; even those educated cannot reach community leaders.

Since the problem remains in the local municipality, the living standard for the community is declining attributable to a lack of improvement within the local community. Public participation is crucial in local development. The unemployment rate can also be determined by public participation, since this is the status of most community members. In the local municipality, public participation is not performing the function of promoting local development encountered by several local communities. Based on what respondents empathised, the following aspects hinder public participation:

- i. Poor communication and sharing of information.
- ii. Poor attendance at meetings.



- iii. Corruption.
- iv. Maladministration.
- v. A lack of awareness.
- vi. A lack of financial resources.

The study results identify challenges encountered by the local people of the Jozini city, expressed by respondents. These include interruptions of the effectiveness of public participation to promote economic development to combat unemployment, especially since it affects the local community, increasing daily. These challenges hinder community development in several ways, since most factors depend on communication and financial resources to uplift the community. The study reveals that several local municipalities are still struggling to concern local people in their opinions in decision-making.

The study results reveal that most participants reside in this municipality for over 25 years. Public participation has, however, not change as no changes are indicated towards community development. Participants revealed that effective public participation would lead to the community receiving what they deserve; however, this confirms the issues of poor communication and sharing information, corruption, lack of awareness, and a lack of financial resources encountered by inhabitants of the JLM. These concerns affect several local municipalities in South Africa.

Additional participants, both local people and officials, identified public participation as an immense challenge in several local municipalities. It is, therefore, ineffective in economic development. Some participants did not agree with the ineffectiveness of public participation, alleging that public participation has no challenges since they receive information regarding events in the community. The lack of flow of information between the community members and officials is the fundamental challenge hindering public participation in JLM. The municipality officials attempt to involve the community in linking the divergence in the community.

The techniques employed to inform local people were ineffective. The community members elected traditional authority, traditional council, and committee members to represent them. Municipal officials are unable to communicate with these representatives on behalf of the community members. Attributable to a lack of sharing information and poor awareness between the municipal officials and the community members, the minority of community members did not participate in decisions in public meetings.

Meetings with the community did not reflect the significant features of public participation. Even though the community member's attendance and their representatives were unimpressive, those who attended the meetings could not influence the decision-making. As observed from a meeting during this study, a tendency existed where municipal officials called meetings to notify local people about problems and predefined solutions. The communication between the municipality and the community's leadership was presented under the second objective.

Public participation mostly occurs among them; therefore, the study results revealed that community's leaders do not communicate with community members. This resulted in development within the community. They raised the concern of politics among their leaders, focusing on attempts to campaign for their political party. Various authors revealed similar results regarding poor communication, affecting several local municipalities.

The diagram on information transfer was established from the national framework on public participation. For ensuring the effectiveness of public participation the study results reveal municipalities should be provided with finances to cover the necessities of the community. Municipalities would be more effective to the community without financial struggles. Participants also revealed that by attempting to ensure effectiveness, the communication among them must be improved to easily identify their needs. The engagement of young people or graduates would also make a significant difference. They are young and could produce innovative ideas or solutions that could help solve problems they are confronted with. The community must be consulted before any community development project. For the municipality officials, it is advisable to minimise focus on politics and rather be united, enabling the production of excellent strategies.

#### Recommendations

According to the study findings, the serious challenges fronting JLM are poor communication and information-sharing, a lack of awareness, corruption and maladministration, a lack of meeting attendance, and a lack of financial resources. These factors hinder the function of public participation in promoting LED.

The following recommendations should assist the municipality with its people in improving the living standard of the community.

#### **Lack of awareness, poor communication, and sharing of information**

To avoid poor communication and a lack of information-sharing, the community should host functional ward committees. They have also revealed effective communication between the municipality and the community.

Section 32 (2) of the Constitution of 1996, provides that access to information and a "right-to-know". Access to information was recognised as a basic human right and an important attribute of democracy. The RTI or the right to know allows citizens up-to-date decisions on issues relating to their development. According to Bastidas (2004):

“Access to participation, Likewise, is similar to the right-to-know. Access to participation is also considered a human right. Meaningful participation, in terms of quality of the participation and whether it is timely, is fundamental to exercise a participatory democracy at all levels of government, including the international level”.

Citizens have the right to participate in decision-making about sustainable development, especially during the impact assessment of the trade process. Governments must ensure that all citizens participate in decision-making processes, monitoring, and follow-up. Participation must also contain the right to verbal and written commentary (Bastidas, 2004). There should be an effective approach implemented to ensure that such hindrance is overcome in the future. Using public notices as a method of informing public communities about set meetings and other agendas seems to be ineffective.

#### **A lack of financial resources**

To overcome a lack of financial resources, the municipality is recommended to provide more financial support to these development initiatives since they are dealing with the crisis that the local citizens are encountering daily.

- i. They should set spending priorities, such as focusing on spending on important areas, benefiting the community, such as public safety, roads, recreation, or economic development.
- ii. The municipality must promote efficient, economic, and effective use of resources, as presented in Section 152 of the South African Constitution

A lack of attendance at meetings:

- i. Jozini Local Municipality should not present empty promises to the community members, ensuring they will not miss meetings.
- ii. They must change the time slot for their meetings to the weekend afternoon.
- iii. Those in power should mark the register for those who attended the meeting.
- iv. They should disclose to community members that meetings will be hosted by the ward councillor as his attendance is essential to attend to their needs.

The municipality will also need to develop an open public education, empowering the community for the opportunities. This must be provided by the municipality to develop the local community. It is recommended that the municipality should apply the training and development approach to staff responsible for community development, ensuring they are well equipped for developing the local community.

#### **Corruption and maladministration**

It is recommended that the municipality implement internal and external audit services. Municipalities should eliminate or take legal action against all corrupt municipal staff members. Corrupt members undermine the basic values and principles governing public administration as presented in the South African Constitution in Chapter 10. The municipality should take proper legal action to recover losses, or damage caused by maladministration and corruption. Municipalities should ensure the protection of those revealing information regarding corrupted members.

### **Conclusions**

This study intended to analyse the useful function of public participation in promoting LED within the JLM. The study sought to only involve the Sqakatha (Gumede) tribal authority within JLM to participate in data collection. Various groups were involved within a targeted population, vibrant to ensure the possibility of data collection in this study; those groups were divided into four categories, indicating community members which cover church leaders, youth, people with disabilities and older people within the community; municipality council members; tribal authority under the JLM and the political parties as represented in the municipal council. Data collection was conducted, by interviewing 13 municipality participants while questionnaires were completed by 52 community participants. The study results were acceptable for achieving the research objectives.

The ineffective function of public participation in LED was confirmed by most study participants. Their reactions emphasise that municipalities still need effective change for public participation to be effective in economic development. A minority of participants indicated that satisfactory economic development was not hindered by a lack of public participation. The study noted that most participants had the same perspective about evaluating the function of public participation, promoting LED with diverse challenges encountered concerning public participation within the JLM.

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