A case study of street committees in enhancing participatory democracy in the Emfuleni Local Municipality and the need for civic education

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INTRODUCTION

The slogan ‘the people shall govern’ is contained in the Freedom Charter signed at Kliptown, Johannesburg, on 26 June 1955 (ANC, 2010a), but it was only on 27 April 1994 that the first democratic elections were held in initial but partial fulfillment of the ideal “the people shall govern”. Democracy offers several alternatives based on the principle of government of the people, by the people, for the people, as articulated by Abraham Lincoln in his 1864 Gettysburg Address (Anon). Ideally, the aim is that the people hold the authoritative power to make the final decisions that affect their daily life, thus deepening democracy (Heywood, 2007, pp.73). The challenge of the new 1994 government was to transform democracy from a representative democracy to a participatory democracy, in realization of the desire to be a more inclusive democracy in which “the people shall govern”. The challenge cannot be taken lightly, because globally we see the advance of democratic deficit as fewer people trust politicians, participate in elections and even fewer people participate in the decision-making processes of government - more importantly at local government level, where decisions impact on their daily life (Gaventa, 2006:8; Rosenberg, 2007:335). Political parties and governments attempt to deepen democracy through participatory engineering by transforming democratic institutions to increase opportunities for ordinary people to engage in decision-making (Zittel, in Zittel and Fuchs, 2007, pp.9).

The Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996; hereafter called the Constitution), the Municipal Structures Act (Act 117 of 1998), and Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) all give credence to a participatory democracy. The present paper concerns itself with street committees in the local government of Emfuleni Local Municipality and how the role of street committees can contribute to advancing participatory democracy, as well as the subsequent need to educate people in the practice and understanding of participation and how local government works.
Kew words: Street Committee, Participatory Democracy, Emfuleni Local Municipality, Civic Education.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH

Chapter 7 of the Constitution (Sections 152e and 195) places a legal duty on local government to improve democracy, by encouraging the public to participate, and to respond to the needs of the people.

The Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000, Chap. 4, Sections 16-22) mandates local government to establish mechanisms and procedures that will create opportunities for community participation. Specifically, local government must develop a culture of community participation (Section 16) through mechanisms, processes, and procedures for community participation (Section 17) and communication of information concerning community participation (Section 18).

The Integrated Development Plan (Municipal Systems, Act 32 of 2000, Chap. 5; Municipal Systems Act, Act 32 of 2000, Section 29), is the master strategic plan of local government for the allocation of local governmental resources. Local communities should be consulted on developmental needs, and should be encouraged to participate in the formulation of the Integrated Development Plan and to exchange information.

Ward committees (Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998, Sections 72-78) have been institutionalized within local government structures to enhance the relationship between citizens and local government, but may only make recommendations to the ward councilor, or through the ward councilor to the council, and therefore do not have decision-making powers.

Community development workers were established by former President Mbeki (2003) as a formal structure within government, with the aim of improving the standard of living of the people. Included in their task is to help those in need to access poverty alleviation grants; research indicated that as many as 70% of the poorest of the poor were not informed of government programs that improve their living standards through poverty alleviation initiatives. Mulder (2011) is of the opinion that the need for community development workers is an acknowledgement by government that ward councilors cannot or do not perform their duties.

It is clear that there is sufficient legislation that places the onus on local government to practice participatory democracy. Why, then, is the research on street
committees in the face of the existing mechanisms and the need to educate ordinary people necessary?

The motivation for this research is twofold. Firstly, as an active community member, in my own experience, I found that the current mechanisms in the Emfuleni Local Municipality were either not working or did not exist. In other instances, the mechanisms were established without due consultation, and without consultation participation did not exist. Any attempts by the people to communicate with local government were ignored. In day-to-day conversation, many residents expressed a need to have decision-making powers when speaking to the Emfuleni Local Municipality and a desire to know more about how local government works.

Secondly, over the years, in conversations with black people, they spoke about the effectiveness of street committees during the apartheid era; how street committees contributed to bringing order to daily behavior in the townships and the role of street committees in bringing down the previous government. I asked myself, if street committees were so effective in the past, when they performed under an illegitimate government, why can’t street committees be effective under a legitimate government? Street committees bring about a positive change by enhancing participatory democracy in the new South Africa.

During the initial research on street committees it became clear that civic education has a vital role to play in public participation, as people did not participate because they did not understand the relevance or necessity of participating in local government and were ignorant of the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders and of the mechanisms of participation.

The question then arises, given all the legislation supporting participation in local government, can street committees contribute to advancing participatory democracy in local government and do we need to educate ordinary people to enhance participation?

**METHODOLOGY**

The scope of the research is the period from the previous municipal elections held in 2006, to October 2010. It is limited to the Emfuleni Local Municipality.

This paper is based on research conducted during 2010 towards a Master’s degree in Governance and Political Transformation (Dosoudil, 2010). It was broad-based, qualitative and informed by lay knowledge, rather than by statistical data; a
consultative participant approach was followed. Both structured and unstructured, face-to-face interviews and questionnaires are paramount as a means of including communities in the research. The investigation was not only to determine the role and impact of street committees but essentially to bring about change, by empowering communities to play a greater role in improving their lives by using street committees as a means of improving their living standards through participatory democracy.

Respondents were all residents of the Emfuleni Local Municipality, represented the demographics of the Emfuleni Local Municipality and included a snowball sample (Babbie and Mouton, 2001, pp.202). Interviews were conducted with high profile members of the South African Civics Organization, Emfuleni Local Municipality officials, ward councilors and a previous municipal manager of the Emfuleni Local Municipality. The questionnaire involved people familiar with, and belonging to, street committees and were politically active, and others with no knowledge of street committees and inactive in political structures. It was necessary to gauge how people generally would respond to street committees as a mechanism of participation.

More specifically, the questions posed to respondents asked whether or not they understood the current mechanisms such as roles and responsibilities of ward councilors, ward committees, and the Integrated Development Plan process. These questions attempted to determine the perceived impact of street committees on communities, bearing in mind that, in many instances, the respondents had never been exposed to a street committee system. If participation is poor, and especially amongst white people, who historically have no experience of street committees, it was necessary to gauge whether street committees would be an acceptable mechanism to white people to increase participation in local government.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

"Local government structures are believed to be the essence of participatory democracy", posits Mathekga (2006: 89). Participatory democracy, as a form of self-government, is a corner-stone of a healthy democracy and relies on free and open discussion amongst government members, politicians and the people; the essence of any government should be to improve the living standards of all people, especially the poorest of the poor.
Chabane (2009:5) refers to a process that requires government to convert inputs into outputs. In a participatory democracy the power shift to the people would improve inputs and improve outputs, thus improving service delivery and ensuring greater political stability, because more people have more say in prioritizing local government service delivery.

In Africa, the attempt to deepen democracy has been led by people who have established organized movements such as non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations (Friedman, in Racionzer, 2009). Whilst these movements do increase participation, they often have their own self-interests at heart and do not give room to the majority of the people (Geyer, in Geyer and Jenkins, 2009). A broad-based decision-making process typical of a participatory democracy creates the opportunity for people to govern through participation in, and finalization of, decisions relating to service delivery in at least the area in which they live.

However, if local government is to be held accountable for fulfilling the legal requirements of public participation, it requires that ordinary people play an active role in decision-making processes, to ensure government is not only representative but that government also responds to the needs of the people as a result of consultation (Seedat, 2004). We need to deepen democracy by devolving power to the people, so that they can make decisions that affect their daily life and hold government accountable (Shubane, in Geyer and Jenkins, 2010: 23). The onus would be on local government to not only consult with but to allow decision-making powers to be granted to the people at grass roots level.

Added to this, Pityana (2010) says civil society is a condition of good governance. A critical role of street committees would be to support community development workers, the ward committee and ward councilor, and also to monitor and evaluate performance in local government to ensure good governance.

If local government is unable to deliver services to improve the living standards of the people, we have seen a trend of sometimes violent protests increase in intensity and incidence (Hough, 2008). If the trend of violent protests continues, it can culminate in anarchy or either a coercive or other form of non-democratic government. Street committees have the potential to broaden participation in all legislated structures and mechanisms.

Not only is violent protest a threat to democracy, but other methods of protest such as the withholding of taxes by local tax-payers’ associations can intensify. The
local tax-payers’ associations withhold their taxes, which they pay into a trust account and then undertake certain service delivery functions under their own auspices (Cilliers, 2010; Hoffman, 2010; Kelder, 2009). Saul (2005:154) describes this as ‘action as refusal’. When government is increasingly unable to deliver services, this governmental decay results in communities taking over the functions of government. Although this prevents the collapse of society, these actions undermine democracy and the legitimacy of the state (Du Plessis, 2010; Shiceka, 2010), and some contest that it is also illegal (Steenkamp, 2010).

Marko (2010) stresses that people must have the authoritative power to influence decision-making; “Violent protest is participation and does influence decision-making but is undesirable, therefore we need to create space on a daily basis for people to access decision-making processes that enable self-determination”. Friedman (2010) points out that the recent service delivery protests are about people saying to government, “You do not know what I want; I am telling you what I want – government you are not listening to us. I want a share in the decision-making” (see also Shubane, in Geyer and Jenkins, 2010: 22). Seekings (in Mathekga, 2006:97) writes that some of the protests during the apartheid years “emphasized [sic] the need for residents to secure control over decision-making”, much the same as is being said 16 years later. Therefore one cannot ignore the impact on local government’s political stability if local government continues to ignore the need for people to influence decision-making.

STREET COMMITTEES

Defining street committees evokes different responses due to the changing nature of street committees, from “lekgotla” to people’s courts to street committees to self-defense units and back to street committees, with many references to organs of people’s power. All were mass civil processes and the advent of the South African National Civics Organization in 1992, instead of clarifying the definition, confuses any attempt to clearly define street committees (Taljaard, in Geyer and Jenkins, 2010: 10). Street committees, as a scope of study, are defined as autonomous democratically elected units based in a particular street/cell/block dealing with issues pertinent to the immediate locality in which the members of that street committee live (Williams, 2010). Williams was the political advisor to the President of the South African Civics Organization (2001-2007), National General Secretary of the South
African Civics Organization (2001-2007), and head of policy research and advocacy of the National Working Committee of the South African Civics Organization.

Traditionally, black people in South Africa practiced a consultative decision-making process under their chiefs, known as ‘imbizo’ or ‘lekgotla’, which is similar to the way the early street committees operated, and which was inclusive and had decision-making powers (Kunene, 2010). The first street committees in South Africa were initially formed as informal courts operating in areas under tribal rule during colonial rule, as an alternative to the then formal justice system (Burman and Schärf, 1990: 693).

Urbanization led to the breakup of tribal life, but black communities in the townships maintained the ‘lekgotla’ and were organized within streets or a number of adjoining streets under the elders (Kunene, 2010). Williams (2010) and Suttner (2003) explain the role of street committees before the intensification of the struggle against apartheid, as follows: street committees did not belong to formal structures and were spontaneously formed to provide a coping mechanism for everyday life in the township and an attempt to maximize opportunities to improving daily life. Street committees would deal with bread-and-butter issues such as domestic violence, disobedient children, alcohol abuse, anti-social behavior, even loud music; literate people would assist those who could not read by interpreting correspondence such as hire purchase agreements and accounts (Hlongwane, 2010; Kunene, 2010; Williams, 2010). Hlongwane is a previous National President of the South African Civics Organization.

This leaves us at a juncture where street committees are prolific, broadly represented, and legally engaged in non-political community activities.

After 1948 living conditions became more difficult for black people through an increase in subjugation and a more repressive approach by the National Party government. This eventually led the African National Congress (under Mandela) to prepare for the expected future banning of the African National Congress and the formation of an underground movement, known as the M-Plan (Suttner, 2003; Williams, 2010). According to Geyer (in Geyer and Jenkins, 2009) street committees acted as members of the vanguard of the violent struggle against apartheid and were able to mobilize communities in large numbers, thus playing a significant, albeit violent and repressive, role in the transformation of the political system (Taljaard in Geyer and Jenkins, 2009: 6).
In 1985, street committees were replaced by youth-run people’s courts, with devastating results when youths attempted to redefine community values, often leading or delegating others to build road blocks or participate in protest marches using physical force and punishment if the youth were not obeyed (Burman and Schärf, 1990:693; Lodge and Nasson, 1991: 76-78). The lack of accountability to the community and the violent, illegal activities of youth-dominated street committees in the late 1980s, under the guise of people’s courts, prompted efforts in the early 1990s to cultivate - through education by non-governmental organizations - a democratic approach to running street committees, to enhance both democracy and accountability (Singh, 2008: 94-119). In preparation for the new democracy it was decided to form the South African Civics Organization in 1992, as a means to formalize and monitor street committees to achieve a legitimate non-political role in civic structures (Singh, 2008: 107).

Unfortunately the new democracy in 1994 resulted in the removal of many of the street committee leaders from their communities, to take up positions in either parliament or government, thus creating a leadership vacuum at grass roots level (Taljaard, in Geyer and Jenkins, 2009: 8). This loss of leadership might have contributed to the subsequent loss of impetus and loss of many opportunities to lead a mass-based civic organization in the new democracy, resulting in an almost total collapse of street committees (Williams, 2010).

Hlongwane (2010) says the 1994 elections led to an expectation that has since not been realized. The need for street committees in one or other form is as necessary today as it was during the struggle. Bread-and-butter issues still exist and, instead of protesting, constructive engagement is a better solution. The biggest drawback of the current situation is that, due to the urgency of bread-and-butter issues, communities neglect their more important roles in determining developmental projects (Hlongwane, 2010). Street committees have, during the apartheid years, proven that they are instruments of mass mobilization and that people at grass roots level have the ability to identify and find solutions to their own problems (Nzimande, 2008).

Heller and Ntlokonkulu (2001) and Williams (2010) state that, although after 1994 the cívics lost their role as leaders of grass roots political mobilization, they have retained a significant presence and legitimacy on the streets. The South African Civics Organization claims to represent the common people and broader population
in poor and needy communities (Freund, in Buhlungu, Daniel, Southall, and Lutchman, 2006: 310), i.e. the ‘civics’. On enquiry, ‘civics’ is the street committees and therefore the South African Civics Organization in the Emfuleni Local Municipality consists of members of street committees. A study of street committees necessitates comment on the role of the South African Civics Organization.

The South African Civics Organization is an alliance partner of the African National Congress and can no longer claim to be a non-party political movement. Zuern (2004: 3) attempted to determine whether or not the South African Civics Organization is a broad, vibrant participatory social movement or a dying institution, since the South African Civics Organization’s support declined after 1994 - which Zuern (2004: 7-8) attributed to people saying that there was no difference between the South African Civics Organization and the African National Congress. People either joined the African National Congress or withdrew from the South African Civics Organization due to the alignment with the African National Congress (Pityana, 2010).

The present researcher attended the Sedibeng Regional General Council of the South African Civics Organization, held on 14 November 2010. In their study, Heller and Ntlokonkulu (2001: 33) make a telling statement - and the South African Civics Organization Regional General Council of 2010 is a picture perfect example of that very statement made nine years ago:

Participation has been subordinated to incorporation, reflected in the fact that the single most important source of conflict between the South African Civics Organization and the African National Congress has been the list nomination process, the struggle for control over representative structures. It is also been reflected in the peculiar way the South African Civics Organization’s watchdog function is often located within political, rather than civil society.

The South African Civics Organization Regional General Council was devoted to two topics. The first was the African National Congress’s list for the 2010 local government elections, and the number of local government councilor positions the South African Civics Organization would get out of the 2011 election. The second was the groundwork the street committees had to do in order to assist the African National Congress to win the 2011 local government elections. During the meeting not a single person questioned the partisan nature of the discussion nor did anybody object to the refocusing of the operations from serving the community to serving a
political party. Despite professing to represent the people, not a word was said about local government service delivery, community issues or municipal development.

When asked how members of the street committees would react to being ‘instructed’ to campaign for a particular political party, a member of the South African Civics Organization executive replied that because most of the street committee members are uneducated, they do not question the actions of ‘higher authorities’ and they do as they are told. Civic education might prove to be a means of empowering uneducated people to understand that they have a voice in all realms of society and that they do not have to act as fodder for ‘higher authorities’. Geyer (in Geyer and Jenkins, 2009: 3) warns that civil society, in whatever form, is the cornerstone of democracy and must not fall into the trap of allowing political interests to usurp community issues.

On how street committees are formed, the South African Civics Organization respondents (Tsukudu, 2010; Mpembe, 2010) described the process as follows: a street public meeting is called by the South African Civics Organization, at which time residents living in the street elect a committee to represent them. Membership is R20 for two years. The street committee, through the chairperson and secretary, reports to the block committee, whose chairperson and secretary reports to the branch, and the branch reports to the regional committee. The region reports to the province and the province to the national executive. The block committee is made up of several street committees and a branch is made up of a number of blocks. Branches are normally represented on a ward committee and up to this level the committee is elected for a two-year period. Regional and higher committees are elected for three years. Only the regional committee may deal directly with the council in writing.

Morolong (2010) and Ndindwa (2010) explain that, other than through the street committee, ordinary residents do not have direct input. Legally, residents may at any stage approach the ward councilor directly or attend the ward public meeting and have a say, but this is rarely done, as they have to work through the structures, i.e. the street committee where they live. Street committees usually have seven committee members who are tasked to keep in contact with the people in the street, usually through a weekly meeting. At these weekly meetings people voice their concerns and discuss problems and, where possible, issues are resolved at street level.
If not resolved at this level they progress through the structures until the issue reaches the ward councilor, who directs the issue to the council. A lot depends on the working relationship between the councilor and the South African Civics Organization representatives, as some ward councilors see the South African Civics Organization committee as a threat (Mpembe, 2010; Ndindwa, 2010). This threat was also mentioned by some of the councilors interviewed. In a report by McLaverty and Morris (in Zittel and Fuchs, 2007: 75) in Scotland, it is said that politicians should not see civil society as a threat, because once a decision is taken by the broader mass, representatives are still needed to take the decision through the process of government.

Williams (2010) is convinced that today street committees are hijacked by individuals with their own agendas, whilst Freund (in Buhlunlu et al., 2006: 323) thinks that street committee members have ambitions and expect to be rewarded at every turn.

The Inkatha Freedom Party warns that all people be vigilant, monitor, and report on street committees, which could become infiltrated with criminal elements. Also warning against street committees is Dr. Loren Landau, whose research found that xenophobic attacks were committed by street committees that sprung up in areas where an absence of legitimate leadership was experienced (Mnguni, 2009). Heywood (2007: 8) warns against people with vested interests hijacking grass roots participation. This warning is reiterated by some of the councilors, who say street committees are prone to being hijacked by people with personal agendas.

Both Friedman (in Geyer and Jenkins, 2010:36) and Williams (2010) state that participatory mechanisms are in place and we should concentrate on making existing structures work. This is a valid argument, but one cannot ignore the history of street committees as a mass-based movement. Baglioni (in Zittel and Fuchs, 2007: 105) is of the opinion that the broader the participation, the less likely it is that vested interests can hijack the democratic process, control agendas, and influence outcomes. Street committees, in the light of failings in the current system and their historical role, are therefore a solution to broadening participation.

THE CASE OF EMFULENI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

The mission of the Emfuleni Local Municipality lists inter alia “deepening democracy and strengthening public participation” supported by a statement by
Mayor Mshudulu, in his report at the People's Assembly (2009b: 2), stated that the People's Assembly serves not only to inform the community of “the achievements and challenges”, but also “to provide a platform for community members to give input, raise questions and contribute to the sustainable development of the municipality”. However, in a six-hour program filled with speeches, the people were allotted a meager 45 minutes in which to contribute.

Despite evidence of significant service delivery, which will improve the lives of residents, such as the electrification of the townships, eradication of the bucket system, free basic water and electricity, increased access to running water and sewage, new roads built and tarred, land allocated for provincial housing projects, cleaning of open spaces and refuse removal (ELM, 2009: 32, 38, 41; Mathebula, 2009; Mshudulu, 2009b), there were several violent service delivery related protests (ELM, 2009, pp.32, 38, 41; Mathebula, 2009; Mshudulu, 2009a). Lefko-Everett (in Misra-Dexter, 2010: 166) warns that data shows a worrying decline in confidence in South Africa’s state of democracy. She concludes that this has resulted in people having to express their concerns through protest instead of through formal government channels. Booysen (2007) and Shubane (in Geyer and Jenkins, 2010: 21) find that public participation in the form of political protest action appears to be an increasing occurrence, gnawing at the heart of South Africa’s new democracy.

So it is in the Emfuleni Local Municipality, where protests are largely attributed to unfulfilled expectations (Serero, 2010a) with regard to service delivery at local government level. As one observer, Peter Mathebula, during a protest on 22 February 2010 declared, “We demand service delivery! We want running toilets, sewage, roads and electricity!” (Serero and Mathebula, 2010).

Emfuleni Local Municipality Council meetings are advertised outside all municipal buildings and financial reports are presented, as legally prescribed, at the relevant council sittings. Without some book keeping knowledge, these financial reports are largely not understood by many people. All departments report that public participation has been implemented. An example is the finance department that has been holding ‘revenue enhancement’ meetings to urge people to pay their accounts (Zwane, 2010). Zwane is the senior coordinator in the Emfuleni Local Municipality, heading the Department of Public Participation in the Speaker’s Office. Zwane (2010) calls for some form of basic education at grass roots level that will explain the
simple process of income and expenditure, so that uneducated people can better understand the reasoning behind municipal accounts.

A department dedicated to public participation was established in 2008 to assist the council body and municipal officials to hold public meetings. This department is situated in the Speaker’s Office (Zwane, 2010). Zwane keeps records of all ward councilors, ward committees, other public meetings, and attendance registers. This department assists with loud hailing, to announce meetings. It provides flyers and will assist when requested.

There are 43 wards in the Emfuleni Local Municipality and 17 of the 43 ward councilors were interviewed. Unfortunately only ward councilors from the peri-urban townships were interviewed, because ward councilors from the opposition, the Democratic Alliance, who represent the majority of white people, refused to participate in the research. According to ward councilors, attendance at public meetings varies between 100 to over 1,000 and Zwane (2010) confirms the ward councilors’ responses. The peri-urban ward councilors hold monthly public meetings. High attendances are attributed to issue-based agendas, where visible service delivery problems are evident such as leaking sewerage or broken street lights. Unfortunately, because communities do not know how local government works and do not understand simple income and expenditure processes when allocating finance for projects, much of the input is of a poor quality. Ward councilors call for education that will enable community inputs to reflect an understanding of local government operations, especially the Integrated Development Plan, budget processes, and the allocation of resources.

Zwane (2010) says that in the suburbs (Democratic Alliance controlled wards) there is very little record of ward councilors holding public meetings. Zwane (2010) acknowledges that this is symptomatic of there being little reason for people living in suburbs with developed service to attend meetings, whereas in the peri-urban wards services are lacking or even non-existent. Mukwevho (2010) concurs. Mukwevho heads the Integrated Development Planning department at the Emfuleni Local Municipality.

Ward councilors (wards 11, 15, 21) that have ‘mixed’, i.e. peri-urban and suburban wards, find that (as experienced in the Democratic Alliance controlled suburban wards) attendance is very low in the suburbs. This bears out what Jordan and Maloney (in Zittel and Fuchs, 2007) concluded, that where people are not
involved it is because they see no reason to be involved. Hlongwane (2010), Williams (2010), and Mukwevho (2010) explain that where a lack of services has not disrupted the comfort of middle to upper class people, the incentive to become involved is minimal. The councilors agree and say that the people are eager to get involved if they believe their decisions will directly affect their lives and they are able to set the government agenda (see also Zittel in Zittel and Fuchs, 2007: 18-19).

There are 43 ward committees, comprised of community members, which are established in accordance with the Municipal Structures Act (Act 117 of 1998), with the express purpose of enhancing participatory democracy in local government. The Emfuleni Local Municipality places an advertisement in the local newspaper calling for nominations for each of the ten portfolios, which are aligned to the municipal clusters that head all activities of the municipality. Thereafter another advertisement is placed, at which the community is called to elect the final ward committee from the received nominations. Ward committees are chaired by the ward councilor, who must submit all minutes and attendance figures to the Public Participation Department (Zwane, 2010).

Zwane (2010) says that, although all ward councilors have submitted a complete list of names of their ward committee, he is not convinced that the ward committees are functioning as they should - with especially little evidence that regular ward committee meetings are held with the broader public. Communities also report the failure of ward committees (Vanderbijlpark Zonal Committee, 2008). Zwane (2010) believes that properly functioning ward committees will lead to efficient and effective local government, as this would enable the people to participate and prioritize the affairs of local government, but says that street committees would be in a more effective position to lead public input.

Other than ward committees there is evidence of street committee activity; about half of the ward councilors interviewed purport to have either a street or block committee in place and, in contrast to what the South African Civics Organization respondents report, it is the ward councilors, and significantly not the South African Civics Organization, who establish street committees in line with President Zuma’s 2008 call to re-launch street committees. All ward councilors interviewed agree that street committees should be non-political. Ward councilors believe that street committees will increase participation, and improve communications, and each street committee can drive their own process.
Street committees can aid the ward councilor in identifying issues specific to a street and enable the ward councilor to assist, where possible. Currently, the councilors cannot reach all their people and street committees would be a great help. More information on a timely basis will lead to better input, and, where problems are serious, will prevent protests. This will improve local government service delivery according to issues prioritized by communities.

Integrated Development Plan meetings are advertised in local community newspapers (VaalWeekblad, 2010; Vaal Weekly, 2010). The Emfuleni Local Municipality consults widely with the community, with the Integrated Development Plan being informed by community meetings (ELM, 2009; Mukwevho, 2010). Mukwevho (2010) explains the Integrated Development Plan process as follows: demands are identified on a specific ward-based basis. This suggests that if the process is consultative and participatory then a municipal Integrated Development Plan can be said to be a fair reflection of the demands of the people, thereby enabling the Emfuleni Local Municipality to satisfy a high percentage of people. However, a lack of, especially, financial resources prohibits the ability of the Emfuleni Local Municipality to complete projects identified in the Integrated Development Plan. Capital projects are at present funded through the Municipal Infrastructure Grant, which means that the Emfuleni Local Municipality is dependent on financial support from the Gauteng Province. The health of the Emfuleni Local Municipality inter-governmental relations will determine the success in accessing these grants (Mukwevho, 2010).

One reason both Zwane (2010) and Mukwevho (2010) present as a cause for poor public participation in the Emfuleni Local Municipality is that the current system is executed from the top down and depends on the willingness and capabilities of the authorities and individual councilors to make it work. Significantly, both believe street or block committees could offer a solution, but would require formalization through regulation and governance. Another reason is that people simply do not understand the process of public participation and have little idea of how local government works. Mukwevho (2010) adds that even councilors and officials are not conversant with the processes. It is suggested that an education process is introduced to teach not only ordinary people, but also councilors and officials about participation and the different roles of the various stakeholders (Mukwevho, 2010).
Integrated Development Plan meetings are not ‘people friendly’ because they are very long and often the community does not understand the language, terminology or technical aspects of the budget and allocation procedures (Mukwevho, 2010). Mohamed (2006) queries the use of all the documentation if nobody can explain the technical language or legal ramifications of the proposed legislation or policy. There is no mechanism to explain the language of the Integrated Development Plan or the choices and consequences of decisions. In a country with high illiteracy levels and low levels of education, it is unreasonable to expect the people to give substantive input and produce reflective decisions without being educated and work-shopped on a specific decision-making opportunity such as the Integrated Development Plan (Mukwevho, 2010).

Another weakness other than a lack of funds, is that when the community does present developmental projects, other than a lack of funds, the community does not have the skills to put together a proposal and to motivate the need. Information at grass roots level is lacking and people are not properly prepared prior to a meeting with government. During the 2010 research, questions on the Integrated Development Plan indicated that less than 30% of the respondents understood the objective and value of the Integrated Development Plan process and the necessity to participate. Mukwevho (2010) believes few people seem to be aware of the purpose of Integrated Development Plan meetings and the importance of determining community priorities:

we need to start an education process from school level through to people who have already left school. Until people understand the significance and opportunities of the Integrated Development Plan process they will not participate as stake holders in local government developmental resource allocation.

Not only with regard to the Integrated Development Plan, but the large majority of respondents indicated that they have little understanding of the roles and responsibilities of ward councilors or ward committees. Only 4% of white respondents could name their ward councilor.

Responses to the questionnaire indicated that black people are more likely to participate in public meetings, whilst it is more likely that both black and white
respondents (82%) would attend a street committee meeting; most respondents agreed they are more likely to attend a street committee meeting than any of the current mechanisms. Again, 82% of the respondents agreed that a street committee system would put greater power in the hands of the people. White people would be willing to participate in their community and engage with local government as a member of a street committee, and evidence of ad hoc ‘street committee’ actions - such as road closure applications and town planning objections - confirms this.

CIVIC EDUCATION

An impediment to local government delivering services is not only the lack of people involved in participation, but also the quality of information received from communities during the Integrated Development Plan process (Mukwevho, 2010). Quality of information can only be improved if people are educated in the mechanisms of local government. Officials and councilors need education on the different structures of participatory democracy in local government (Mukwevho, 2010; Hlongwane, 2010). There is a need to educate people about how government works; the roles and responsibilities of ward councilors, ward committees, politicians, and also of what ordinary people can do to drive developmental and other issues (Maletsa, 2010; Kubahse, 2010).

The Centre for Civic Education in the United States of America (2009) describes civic education as being aimed at promoting public participation in support of democratic principles and increasing good governance by teaching citizens about government and politics, skills capacitation to analyze and evaluate community issues, government policy, and how to use their new knowledge to influence government and community processes.

A study undertaken in South Africa by Finkel (2000) shows a positive correlation between civic education and an improvement in competence (Finkel, 2000, pp.108). An improvement in competence will increase the value of input of communities. Significant to street committees is evidence that the impact on individuals, that are active or belong to existing networks is greater (Finkel, 2000:106). Therefore street committees make the perfect venue for educating the broad masses. Zittel (in Zittel and Fuchs, 2007: 14) also stresses neighborhood groups as a basis for self-development. More than any of the current mechanisms,
RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that, in the Emfuleni Local Municipality, participation levels in local government are low, service delivery is unsatisfactory, and respondents show a preference to engage with local government through a non-political forum and are open to greater engagement in a street committee system.

Local government should acknowledge the role of street committees and encourage the establishment of street committees outside of current public participation mechanisms, but ensure that, through the ward councilor and ward committees, election of street committees is free and fair.

Legitimizing the role of street committees should have at its core, not the structure but rather the legitimacy of the participatory outcome street committees have on deepening democracy and the impact on governance. Let the people govern, give power to the people as a mass and not to the institution.

Street committees should not necessarily be elected to serve for a defined period of time. The street committee should be democratically elected for a period that coincides with the onset and conclusion as and when an issue/project arises that affects on the people living in that street. Instead of hierarchical organizations, local government should consider a more dynamic approach, whereby everybody can play a leadership role; let everybody use their skills, apply their skills, and apply their enthusiasm on issues that interest them. Street committees do not need regional, provincial and national structures, which seem to create pockets of elitism and serve no purpose for the poorest of the poor. If anything this hierarchical structure results in ‘social distancing’.

The highest authority should be vested in the changing nature of an issue or skills-informed leadership, confined to the ward boundaries, and should give space for a self-regulatory operation. This also immediately puts an end to the bottom-up, top-down debate, and to the threat of the elite few usurping power. It also minimizes the opportunity to hijack the street committee because the authoritative power rests in an issue-based agenda and dissolves when the issue is resolved. The aim should be to develop communities by broadening leadership and increasing the role of as many individuals as possible in the structure, rather than a system that continues...
with a hierarchical hegemony that results in elitism and allows individuals with self-interests to hijack the process.

Street committees should be encouraged to drive small projects that require limited resources, instead of people waiting for somebody to tell them what to do. Street committees can be aligned to these smaller projects, whereby the street committee is formed to complete a specific project with limited duration. This not only divides the burden of work between all the people in the street and spreads resources, but effectively gets more people involved. Instead of cementing power in the hands of the elite, opportunities to lead and dispersal of power results.

Local government, through the existing Public Participation Department, should establish an education section that will teach communities about the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders and the process of local government decision-making. People should be educated on how to analyze and evaluate community issues and government policy, and how to use their new knowledge to influence government and community processes.

Part of this education process is to capacitate communities to identify skills within the community. The sharing of skills will produce a transfer of skills and begin an educational process. By using the different skills available, communities can be empowered to drive smaller projects that require limited resources.

Members in the street committees can be educated as trainers and attend the trainer workshops conducted, so that there is a continual transfer of skills within and between communities. Skills training in simple, but essential tasks, such as community gardens, project management, and small business development or entrepreneurship, will not only empower communities but improve the ability of communities to help themselves and grow. Skills and capacities between different streets can be shared, which will broaden community unity, open opportunities for diverse peoples to interact as equals, and build social cohesion.

Public participation must extend decision-making to ordinary people, so that they can set the agendas and determine outcomes according to their own needs and priorities. Without decision-making powers, public participation is diminished to a process whereby communities are left to rubber-stamp decisions made for them that do not reflect their specific needs and priorities.

Only a body that is truly broad-based and is driven by the people will give space to all people, with the freedom to deal with service delivery issues so that we
can build social cohesion, and have a mechanism that is the founding basis for informing policy development and service delivery. Street committees, as a point of departure for improved inputs and as a means to monitor outputs, may improve the alignment of demands and delivery, thus decreasing the need for people to resort to undemocratic measures to voice their demands and dissatisfaction.

Further research on street committees and civic education, as a combined mechanism to advance participatory democracy, is suggested. This will assist in developing a culture of informed, broad-based public participation that will enhance democracy.

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