Criticizing Participatory Integrated Development Planning in the Eastern Cape

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Abstract

The South African municipal legislation on integrated development planning provides for community participation in integrated development planning. Participatory development planning is vital for re-ordering political space and revitalizing the “local” as far as accountability, transparency and responsiveness issues are concerned. This article is an evaluation of participation in integrated development planning in the Eastern Cape. From a participatory development perspective this article examines the magnitude of community participation in integrated development plans. This is an empirically grounded study focusing on the Amathole District Integrated Development Plan (IDP) in the Eastern Cape. Research findings show that participation in integrated development planning is “phony”. The findings also reveal that there is mere compliance instead of constructive engagement on IDP reviews and ward committee meetings. Ordinary villagers are therefore literally shut out of the policy decisions that affect their lives, meaning that they remain trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. The need for participation to be made real and not “phony” can never be over-emphasized. The article argues that the spaces for participation are not only poorly structured as noted in literature, but are unknown to the communities for which they are meant. There is need for effective and efficient participatory methodologies to enhance participation by communities and make it real.

Key words: community participation, integrated development planning, participatory development planning.

Introduction

The South African Constitution of 1996 provides for a new developmental mandate for local government, with the Municipal Systems Act of 2001 requiring municipalities to come up with IDPs for strategic, inclusive, responsive, and performance-driven municipal governance. While political will is crucial for participatory development planning, since it

Participatory development planning is vital for re-ordering political space and revitalizing the local as far as accountability, transparency, and responsiveness issues are concerned. The danger with participatory development is that it can be a fluid and a flexible discourse, thus rendering it vulnerable to manipulation by hegemonic representation and local elites, hence the need to make it real in the context of IDP in South Africa.

Donk, Pieterse (2006) write that the IDP has been the centerpiece of planning in South Africa since 1996. However, the IDP is bedeviled by a host of challenges. The period between 1996 and 2000, which was the first round of the IDP, unearthed controversies and dilemmas in the formulation and implementations of the IDPs (Donk, Pieterse: 2006; Harrison: 2001; Ministerial Advisory Committee: 2001). During this period IDPs were found to be mere shopping lists, instead of being a framework for, and a strategic long-term vision for the development of municipalities (Ministerial Advisory Committee: 2001; Donk, Pieterse: 2006). Harrison (2001) attributes this to lack of experience in planning as well as limited resources and capacities and a multiplicity of demands from national and provincial government. According to Harrison (2006), the Mbeki era saw a subtle shift in IDPs which have become increasingly annexed to a system of intergovernmental coordination and have been spoken of in technical and manageralist terms which further alienate the poor and effectively stifle their meaningful participation.

The second round of IDPs, which is the post-2000s phase, was also not without difficulties. Harrison again refers to preparation, operationalization and implementation questions as stumbling blocks to the success of municipal IDPs. An evaluation of IDPs within six districts (Harrison: 2003) ‘identified 16 key areas of concern, ranging from lack of strategic planning and analysis to weak linkages between the IDP, budgets and intergovernmental alignment’(Donk, Pieterse: 2006). A German agency for development cooperation (GTZ) funded study revealed that IDPs and budget processes are viewed as separate by municipalities (Donk, Pieterse: 2006), thereby posing serious threats to the successful implementation of IDPs.
Samson (2007) observes that the model of the South African developmental local government with regards to participation, is problematic in the following ways:

- The participatory process is still firmly controlled by the local council and not the community;
- Absence of real decision-making and democratic structures in the legislation. The legislated local government structures do not provide for participation by individual members of the community;
- The mechanisms for the incorporation of community inputs are not clearly spelt out, such that the prerogative of how and when to include them still lies with the council;
- The lack of gender expertise and sensitivity among IDP officials implies omission of gender issues in the final plan;
- IDPs can be reduced to mere wish lists if there is no genuine political will;
- The liberal framework model of participation, whereby individuals avail themselves for participation on a voluntary basis, is problematic, since there is no obligation for the state to build capacity for meaningful and effective participation; and
- The conceptualization of community participation in the model of developmental local government is problematic.

Theron (2005) observes that the question of success or failure of the IDP largely derives from the management of the reciprocal relationship between municipalities and the grassroots. He further succinctly posits that thirteen strategic shifts in conceptualization present a major challenge to policy-makers and development practitioners regarding strategies of participation. They are the following: from a top-down to a bottom-up approach; from a blue-print to a release style; from a system-maintaining to a system-transformation approach; from a control style to a release style; from a person as subject to a participant as actor focus; from a hard/hardware scientific approach to a soft/ware scientific approach (interdisciplinary approach); from a closed system to an open system approach; from a mechanical to a dynamic approach; from a representative democracy to a participative democracy approach; from a closed communication style to an open style; from a formalized style to an incremental style and from a fast-slow sequence in project planning and management to a slow-fast sequence.

These 13 strategic shifts imply that the public (beneficiaries) and not the development planners have the most important role to play in development planning (De Beer &
Swanepoel 1998; Chambers 1983). There is therefore a need for a ‘reversal in learning’ or ‘the reversal of roles’ for meaningful participation to be realized (Chambers 1983).

**Why participation?**

Municipalities stand to accrue major benefits through a properly constructed IDP which includes the following: it assists a municipality in allocating its scarce resources in a focused and sustainable way; it provides a municipality with a tool to access funds for development projects; it provides a basis for co-coordinating policies and actions within the municipality, and between other agents and spheres of government; and it provides a public arena for the discussion and making of trade-offs and for the building of partnerships around development (Oranje, Harrison, Huyssteen and Meyer: 2000).

The World Bank (1998) defines participation as a “process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and decisions and resources which affect them”. Chambers (1983) observes that in participatory development the institutional challenge for development institutions is becoming learning organizations, to flatten softening hierarchy; developing a culture of participatory management; recruiting a gender and disciplinary mix of staff committed to people; adopting and promoting of procedures and norms and rewards permitting and encouraging open-ended participation at all levels.

Chambers states argues that ‘participation, ownership and empowerment’ by and for the poor requires institutional change by us. Participation by them will not be sustainable and strong unless we, too, are participatory. While ownership by them implies non-ownership by us, empowerment for the vulnerable poor people must mean disempowerment for the ‘professionals’. Due to participation and consultation, development programs and projects will not only be more inclusive, while involving more and key stakeholders, but the traditionally disadvantaged, the poor, and the marginalized. Sustainability and effectiveness can be achieved by the institutionalized ownership of such programs (Aycrigg: 1998).

Swanepoel (1997); Chambers (1997); De Beer & Swanepoel (1998); Korten (1997); Kotze & Kellermine concur that participation is vital for the following reasons:

- The capacity of people to actively influence, direct and shape their own development is enhanced through participation.
- Participation implies the incorporation of different knowledge, insights, perspectives and expertise to tackle identified problems in a given situation.
- Applicable and relevant, political, cultural and institutional realities of a given scenario can be obtained through real participation.
- Emphasis on the intended beneficiaries ensures results-oriented development planning and programming for the desired change by beneficiaries to be realized.
- Through the process of participation, intended beneficiaries are empowered, resulting in power reversal control and initiative by and from the beneficiaries.
- Active involvement in decision-making results in innovation and creativity, which may lead to effective design implementation and the evaluation of development projects.

Brynard (1996) favors participatory planning by observing that participation is informative about local priorities, conditions, needs, desires and attitudes, while this information is crucial for the implementation of programs and projects; participation educates and involves the public; citizens are most likely to be committed to development plans if they actively participate in the formulation and implementation of such plans; participation democratizes the planning process, since it is the democratic right of citizens to participate; a creative potential resulting from divergence in thinking implies that the planning process is most likely to be enhanced and the notion of equality is fostered through participation in the planning process, since real participation implies equality in opportunities to influence the planning process.

The bottom-up approach implies characteristically appreciating and incorporating local people, their knowledge, skills, needs, and experiences (National Capital Development Commission: 1977; Hickey and Mohan: 2004; Tsing et al: 2005). However, Julia (2008) cautions that one should not fall into the danger of ‘romanticizing and essential singing the grassroots approach’. Critiques of this approach allude to tokenism (McIvor: 2000), myths of communities as coherent and cohesive (Nicolson and Schreiner, 1973) and ‘elite capture of local power’ (Crook: 2003) as pitfalls that may compromise the effectiveness of the approach.

**Pitfalls of participation**
Marsden (1991) warns that there is a cloud of rhetoric that surrounds the concept of participation. There is a danger in viewing participatory development as the new magic pill that will cure all the present development ills. Participation could be reduced to just a ‘window-dressing ritual’, where power-holders mask elite participation as community participation, thus reducing participation to a ‘Mickey Mouse game’ for the poor.

While communities could be hailed for their knowledge of constraints, be they social, economic, environmental, cultural or local conditions, communities themselves could be dominated by patronage-based relations or be ethnically fragmented. The high-sounding rhetoric of grassroots participation can then be subject to deep-seated exasperation and hostilities of the community elites towards the community poor. When the people’s bargaining power is weak, participation could also be a nightmare.

Chambers (1983) observes that the elite, if left unchecked, could actually become not only the champions of development but the only real beneficiaries of development meant for the ordinary members of the community, for whom interventions are initially intended. Chambers add that the elite may articulate the ‘village interest and wishes’, with their concerns emerging as the ‘village’s priorities’ for the development of the community. Moreover, the new focus on ordinary people and the local community could be turning a blind eye to structural inequalities, class contradictions, and local conflicts (Kothari: 2001, Cleaver: 2001).

Nelson and White (2001) opine that community as a concept is more often than not abused by the state and other organizations and not the locals themselves, since it has connotations of consensus on needs and priorities often determined by parameters set by outsiders (Nelson and Wright: 2001). Scenarios where village elites do not invite the very poor, and decisions which are made are tilted in favor of the village elites, must be avoided.

The local, as the site of empowerment and knowledge, has been challenged ‘when the reversal becomes complete’, with the individual agent becoming the key political site. Thus, in the politicization of the local, most aid-receiving governments have just paid lip service to participation in the name of good government for the sake of further loans (Ghana has been cited as an example in this case).

Government agents and NGOs may also ‘hijack’ the needs and priorities by deciding on their behalf in the name of desired change. Thus participation is not without controversies
and dilemmas. The challenge is to make participation genuine and real. Participatory development may actually be reduced to incorporating communities into top-down predetermined programs and projects. Participation efforts have also been viewed with suspicion as they are often undertaken in a top-down manner (De Beer & Swanepoel: 1998).

Communities are neither monolithic nor homogeneous entities, due to the existence of various socio-economic and political groups, as well as interest groups, implying that priorities, needs and power bases of such groups are not identical. Their involvement and interest in, and benefit from, projects may therefore vary. There is thus a need for a distinction to be drawn between direct and indirect beneficiaries and the losers from the implementation of the project (Kotze and Kellerman: 1997).

Even the southern NGOs that have been hailed as responsive, pro-poor, and therefore good enough to be the vehicles of participatory development, have been criticized for being too bureaucratic, politicized and staffed by indigenous elites, hence the need for NGOs to strengthen and capacitate the state in the quest for participatory development. After all, political will has always been vital for any development initiative to succeed. Zimbabwe is a case in point, where the government banned the activities of NGOs for some time.

Brokensha & Hodge, in De Beer & Swanepoel (1998), warn that there are false assumptions and fallacies in participation, which include the following:

- Communities have a unity, and shared interests; cooperation is natural for communities, even if it is not present now;
- Where there is a strong sense of community, community development will be easier and will have more immediate results than in areas which are disorganized or divided;
- Tradition generally inhibits progress and development; community development can free people from the traditional restraints and limitations of small community life;
- Communities have ineffable and enshrined sacred values;
- Tangible needs of a community exist, which can be discovered by examination and manipulation. What the people really think is meaningful;
- Each community has a clearly defined leadership or power structure, to use that unsatisfactory but popular term. If no community leader appears immediately, then a stranger must show the way; and
- Everyone desires a higher standard of living and welcomes change.
Such fallacies about communities show the confusion, if not contradiction, in thoughts on communities, as well as what their strengths and aspirations can be (De Beer & Swanepoel: 1998). Communities may be neither be monolithic nor homogenous entities, but heterogeneous, with sometimes competing and conflicting interests, which require careful management.

Participation could be confined merely to the ribbon-cutting ceremony or a mere public relations vehicle, or both. Cooptation and placation of the poor into rubberstamping advisory committees cannot be ruled out. It must also be noted that neither have-nots nor power-holders are homogenous entities. There could be a representation not only of different groups but divergent and sometimes conflicting views and interests. The concept of participation can lead to the creation of new political actors and political subjectivities (Biochip: 2001; Heller: 2001, Avritzer: 2002).

According to Mohan (2001) participation is not without challenges and demerits, since it is time-consuming and can be cumbersome, implying that it may be difficult to implement it if it is to make a significant difference; although it may be empowering to the intended beneficiaries the perceived losers of power and privileges may be hostile to the whole process, thereby frustrating the purpose for which it is intended; it may not be easily comprehended and accepted by those for whom it is intended and may therefore lack credibility to them; power and role reversals in favor of the previously marginalized may be a bitter pill to swallow; the whole process may be frustrated and hijacked by local elites, such that the real beneficiaries and the marginalized will not realize their potential and therefore remain the same. Facilitation participation and making participation real may be a challenge to both the beneficiaries and the benefactor.

The challenge of the institutionalization of participation and the reality of the exclusion of the poor and marginalized citizens, as well as challenges of inclusion and representation, could be stumbling blocks if they are not properly addressed. There is a danger of participation arenas becoming just ‘therapeutic and rubberstamping’ structures and the bias of communities as ‘consensual and harmonious’ and the ‘assumed homogeneity’ in communities could be to the detriment of participatory development (Mohan: 2001). While tokenism and manipulation could be rampant in communities, devolved power and citizen control could be useful. Participation could also be ‘phony’, as observed by the commission on poverty participation and power in the United Kingdom, where power relations may not
shift and rhetoric may not be a reflection of the reality on the ground (Gaventer and Cornwell: 2001). Power manifestations, configuration at the local level and the elite capture of the locals may militate against participatory development.

Critiques of participation argue that emphasis and focus on the local euphemizes not only power relations and local inequalities but even the broader national and transnational economic and political forces. Thus the politics of the local matters, since the politics in the use of the local by hegemonic and counter-hegemonic interests cannot be underestimated. Oakley & Marsden (1984:23) agree that participation can be ‘confined to the task at hand’, and there may be little evidence showing that the rural poor could have indeed ‘tackled their own problems’, thus leading to the maintenance of the system and the status quo, to the detriment of the poverty stricken.

Major obstacles to genuine and authentic participation include political will. Politicians, government officials, experts and elites must embrace participation and institutionalize participation in interventions targeting the poor. Centralized decision-making and implementation does not favor participation. Lack of skilled staff for effectively institutionalizing participation could also be a hindrance. What is fundamental therefore is not only a thorough examination of the political use of the local, but even the very conceptualization of a political imaginary as an antithesis (Mohan: 2000).

It has been reasoned that the very use of local as discreet places defies the logic of contemporary geography, which argues that places are not only constituted by socio-economic, cultural and political relations, but even by flows of information, commodities and people going beyond localities. Therefore the conceptualization of local as a discreet place defies ‘a global sense of place’. Participatory development should therefore overcome the binary opposites of local as well as global for pragmatic reasons, and for it to be real and meaningful not only in poverty eradication but for sustainable development.

**Research methods**

Triangulating qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, the present study aimed to criticize the extent to which integrated development planning is participatory. Triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative methods is very useful and can make vital contributions to effective policy and knowledge creation, hence the need for triangulation in
This was an empirically grounded study, based on the use of a combination of data collection methods, analysis of primary and secondary sources of data, including government documents, administering in-depth interviews to a range of informants within local government, and a questionnaire survey of a sample of two hundred research participants drawn from members of the community in the Amathole District Municipality. The in-depth interviews were held with purposefully selected local governmental officials directly involved in the formulation and implementation of the IDP. This was a case study based research, focusing on Amathole district in the Eastern Cape. The Amathole District Municipality's 1.7 million people account for 25.9% of the Eastern Cape population; 53% of the population are women, while 47% are men. A third of the population is below the age of 15. 60% are between 15 and 64. Only 5.6% are 65 and above (Global Insight: 2005).

The research was conducted under ethical principles of voluntary participation: no harm to participants, no deception of subjects, informed consent from respondents, privacy of respondents and assurance of confidentiality of information gleaned from the research (Babbie: 1998). The permission of the local authorities of the area under the jurisdiction of the research was sought and granted before fieldwork was carried out.

**Discussion of finding**

*Spaces for participation*

In the Amathole District of the Eastern Cape, regular representative forum meetings for drafting IDPs are held by the Amathole District Municipality. The planning cycle begins by placing advertisements informing interested parties to contact the ADM for drafting of the IDP and the budget. The draft IDP is taken to the community by road show events, to which they are mobilized by their ward councilors and ward committees. It is at these road show events that the summary of the IDP is presented to the communities in English and the local language (isiXhosa), for them to discuss and comment, with records being kept for discussion at intergovernmental forum meetings for the amendment of the IDP. It is apparent that this
process is largely flawed, since it is only those who have access to newspapers and roads who can participate and the literate who can read newspapers. The poor, who are illiterate and mostly live in very remote areas, are therefore excluded from such participatory spaces.

This process will be followed by a council open day during which members of the community and the ward committees will be presented with the amended IDP before final submission to council for adoption (Amathole District Municipality Integrated Development Plan Review, 2008/2009: 43). Moreover, there is ward-based planning done within the community for members of the community to raise issues that they want included in the plan. However, there seems to be conflict between traditional leaders and elected councilors, due to the contest for ‘turf’. Government must bridge the gaps between traditional leaders and councilors for traditional leaders to participate meaningfully in municipal governance.

In the present study, the survey in randomly selected villages established that some members of the community were interested in participating, but others were tired of people from government asking them for personal information, their views and making promises that were never fulfilled, without even coming back to them to give feedback. It was observed that respondents are loyal to the government and councilors, such that they do not want to expose them. This reflects the idea of ‘comradeship’, which makes incompetency, inefficiency and ineffectiveness difficult to unearth. This is to the detriment of those who are ‘covering up’.

In some cases, instead of responding directly to the question asked, the respondents would narrate their internal problems such as favoritism and corruption concerning councilors and ward committees. This meant that, while there are consultations with the communities in the form of meetings to ask their demands and their priorities, these are not effective. This is because they are ‘mere consultations which do not constitute participation’ (Theron, 1996). Cooke & Kothari (2001) found that participatory development can be naive, flawed, a new form of tyranny, and abuse of power by the elite and the better-placed in the community.

The survey showed that people consider forums for participation as platforms for grievance handling, problem-solving and lodging complaints. This implies that the structures for participation are ‘poorly designed’, such that even the communities which are meant to participate have a misconception of such structures (Harrison: 2001).
It was revealed that participation takes place before budgeting (IDP budget). After the budget people no longer participate in terms of changes in their priorities, but they do receive reports in the meetings. This shows that the government officials are preoccupied with spending money for the sake of it instead of ‘empowering’ the communities to participate meaningfully in the formulation and implementation of decisions affecting their communities (Theron: 1996). This implies that participation is reduced to a ‘Mickey Mouse game’ for the poor or a ‘mere window dressing ritual’, which confines participation to a ‘ribbon-cutting ceremony’ Marsden (1991). This is compounded by the fact that the IDPs are too technical for most of the villagers to understand, or to make useful contributions to their conceptualization (Harrison: 2001). This problem, coupled with poor participatory structures and methodologies, means that ordinary villagers are literally shut out of the policy decisions that affect their lives, meaning that they remain trapped in a vicious circle of poverty.

**Community participation**

Reflection on the views of the respondents on their participation in the IDP indicates that there was hardly any participation. While 64% of the respondents confirmed that participation is important in poverty eradication, the majority of respondents (81%), upon being probed by the interviewer, revealed that they had not participated, neither were they consulted nor involved, although neither involvement nor consultation mean participation but empowerment, as observed by Mohan (2001). A paltry 19% indicated that they had in some way participated in the IDP issues. This is worrying, because the capacity of people to actively influence, direct and shape their own development is enhanced through participation Swanepoel (1997); Chambers (1997); De Beer & Swanepoel (1998); Korten (1997); Kotze & Kellerman (1997). Due to participation and consultation, development programs and projects will not only be more inclusive, involving more and key stakeholders, but will also involve the traditionally disadvantaged, the poor and the marginalized. Effectiveness and sustainability can be achieved by institutionalized ownership of such programs.

**Ward committees**

Knowledge of the existence of ward committees is poor and consultative meetings on IDP reviews are unknown to community members. There is mere compliance instead of constructive engagement on IDP reviews and ward committee meetings. IDPs are highly controlled, while they are also paralyzed by rigid, ‘blueprint-style’ legislative frameworks,
effectively at variance with participatory development (Theron, 2002). The survey shows that knowledge of IDPs and its structures among the respondents is very low, with only 18% in the know, and an overwhelming majority of about 82% is acutely unaware. It is evident that the structures for participation are not only poorly structured, as noted in the literature, but they are unknown to the communities for which they are meant. The very existence of ward committees for community participation is, in some cases, unknown; there is therefore need for not only making communities aware of such structures but also empowering them so that they can participate meaningfully and influentially.

“Inaccessible” municipal offices

It has been observed that municipal offices are inaccessible to the people. Communities have difficulties when it comes to understanding local government work, while municipal perceptions differ from those of the community. It is against this background that Theron et al: online observe that participation must be authentic and empowering and not ‘soft and easy-fix, window dressing for business as usual’, while ensuring active citizenry. The degree to which people have a ‘say’ and the degree of their ‘influence is negligible if not non-existent’, while neither ‘informing’ them nor ‘consulting’ them entitles them to the ‘ownership’ of the ‘planning process and its outcomes’ (Theron et al: online).

There is a fallacy that communities are illiterate; therefore they cannot articulate their own issues. In a study of nine municipalities, one out of nine was commended for its full application of public participation principles. The local government structures such as ward committees and IDP forums are not effective because of ‘comradeship’, which means that ‘comrades’ cannot expose one another.

Accountability

It is apparent that some councilors are accountable to the political parties they represent and not necessarily to the communities they represent, while red tape and bureaucracy are serious stumbling blocks to service delivery. It has also been observed that municipal managers feel that communities become ungovernable once they are aware of their right to participation, such that they end up concealing information which is meant for meaningful and real participation. This is confirmed by Mohan (2001), who states that the whole process of participation may be frustrated and hijacked by local elites, and the real beneficiaries and marginalized will not realize their potential and therefore remain the same.
Operationalizing participation and making participation real may be a challenge to both the beneficiaries and the facilitator. This is why it is important to ask who owns the process of participation, because lack of ownership by the communities means that they may be routinely shut out of participatory spaces.

**Communication**

There is a gap in communication between municipalities and their communities. This is precipitated by internal politics and local politics, coupled with poorly designed participatory processes which constitute serious impediments to poverty eradication efforts by local government. It has also been observed in the literature that context-specific issues prevailing in the South African socio-economic political landscape include wide-spread illiteracy, language barriers, extensive municipal areas, coupled with patriarchal social structures and poor public transport services. All of these impede participatory development.

**Conclusion**

There is consensus on the idea of participatory development decision-making. In practice, however, the participation breed cynicism because of implementation dilemmas, even though participatory development has been the ‘watchword in local government circles’, as observed by Theron. The need for participation to be made real and not ‘phony’ can never be over-emphasized. The paper argues that the structures for participation are not only poorly composed but are unknown to the communities for which they are intended. Technical expertise for policy and planning in integrated development planning, coupled with the neo-liberal and globalization impetus, inhibit community participation. There is therefore a need for effective and efficient participatory methodologies, to enhance participation by communities and to make it real.

The dilemmas of participatory development raise key questions concerning the meaning of participation, people-centered development and the community; how participation should be reflected in policy and practice; the distinction between participation and engagement, involvement and consultation; control, ownership and responsibility for the process of participation in the IDP and the responsibility and authority for making participation real (Theron et al: on line). It is the lack of clarity and consensus on such issues which stifle the impact of participatory integrated development planning on poverty alleviation. Such succinct observations reflect the need for further research.
References


