

Participatory Democracy in Theory and Practice:

A Case Study of Local Government in South Africa

BREAKFAST, Ntsikelelo | MEKOA, Itumeleng | MAPHAZI, Nondumiso

Abstract

The idea of democracy is a curious one and puzzling. There is reason for this; everyone talks about democracy no matter whether their views are on the left, centre or right of the political spectrum. Various politicians, regimes, whether in Africa, Europe or America claim to be democratic; yet what each says and does is usually different. Democracy as a practice is supposed to bestow rules, laws and decisions that are justifiable on democratic grounds. Democracy also has evolved through social struggles. This article examines the practice of democracy within

the context of local government in South Africa, and is an attempt to explore the concept of democracy without escaping other historical aspects of the idea and practice. From a methodological standpoint, this article is based on a literature assessment. Lastly and most importantly, this paper has made a scholarly contribution to the scholarship of Political Science and Public Administration with regard to the nexus between democracy and public participation at local government level in South Africa.

Keywords: Democracy, Consolidation of Democracy, Public Participation, Local Government.

Introduction

Democracy is a system of a government based on the following key ideals: Citizens are free to choose, check and replace their leaders, the active participation of the citizen in politics and civic life, protection of the human rights of citizen, and a rule of law, in which the law is procedure to all citizens.

In furtherance to this, democracy is often defined as an opposite of other types of government:

- Monarchy – government of the ruler, *e.g.* king, queen, emperor;
- Aristocracy – government by noblemen;
- Theocracy – government by God (in reality, it means a government of religious leaders); and
- Dictatorship – government by the people that have seized power by force (Mekoa & Breakfast, 2011:1).

American former president, Abraham Lincoln (1807-1865), defines democracy as "*government of the people, by the people and for the people.*" As a political system, the concept of democracy has evolved since its inception in the middle of the fifth and fourth century denoting then the political system that existed in some Greek City-States. There is also no universal definition of democracy; though the historical origins of the concept are essential for understanding the concept of democracy. It is not the intention of this study to outline a detailed historical analysis, but an attempt to understand the practice of democracy.

It is however essential to mention that in spite of the evolution of the term, the basic ideals of the rights and the power of the citizens or ordinary people has remained sacrosanct (Dahl, 1998: 3). In a search to understand the concept of democracy, this article will examine various scholastic ideas of democracy and locate the debate later on within the context of local government; simply because local government is closer to the people on the ground as opposed to other spheres of government in South Africa. Lastly and most importantly, this article is meant to deepen the understanding of scholars with regard to the nexus between democracy and public participation. The next section will examine critically the theorisation of democracy.

Theoretical frameworks

There are two conceptual frameworks of democracy and they are discussed in the sub-sections below.

Procedural democracy

It examines the institutional arrangements of democracy. For instance, the holdings of elections, public participation, rule of law, and the supremacy of the constitution, *etc.* It is associated with liberal democracy and separation of powers. The conception of procedural democracy is associated with Robert Dahl's idea of polyarchy. This refers to how different racial and ethnic groups should participate in a democratic system. Dahl's central argument was that minority groups need to take part in deepen democracy (Dahl, 1971:3). This means that democracy is not only meant for the majority of people in society. There is a link between polyarchy and procedural democracy, in that both of them are advocating for the deepening of democracy.

The procedural conceptual framework finds most of its support in American Political Science scholarship (Mangu 2005:319). Procedural democracy is formal and institutional in nature. Sometimes political scientists refer to procedural democracy as a minimalist school of thought (Steyn-Kotze, 2011:101).

Procedural democracy makes it easy to measure the level of participation; hence it is relevant to this article (Breakfast, 2009:24). This theoretical perspective adopts a specific view which suggests that democracy can be effectively assessed by considering technocratic and institutional arrangements of a society. In this way, procedural democracy puts a greater emphasis on factors such as elections, the executive, and the legislature (Dahl, 1971:3, Prudhomme, 2004:9, Mangu, 2005:318-320).

Proponents of procedural democracy argue that true democracy means liberty, effective citizen control over government policies by citizen, good governance, honesty, transparency and openness in politics, informed and robust debates, maximum participation, and various other civic virtues. They claim that democracy implies that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the people who are to govern them. Freedom is central to the notion of procedural democracy. In fact, it is regarded as a corner stone of democracy. The debate around the issue of freedom lies at the heart of political philosophy. It is a normative issue; it is about values (Falcoff, 1990:67, Hadenius, 1992:15).

Dahl (1998:45) points out that democracy produces the following desirable outcomes:

- 1) Avoiding tyranny
- 2) Essential rights
- 3) General freedom
- 4) Self determination
- 5) Moral autonomy
- 6) Human development
- 7) Protecting essential personal interests
- 8) Political equality
- 9) Prosperity
- 10) Maximum participation

In this context, Dahl is spelling out the benefits of democracy. Democracy by definition, according to the procedural school of thought, means a government of the people. This therefore means that all citizens are eligible to choose a government of their choice. This right (the right to vote during elections) therefore can be through a 'medial authority', commonly known as legislature bodies like parliament which has representatives from various parties. South Africa is good example of a representative democracy. Representative democracy is designed in a way that makes political representatives to make certain decisions and policies after consulting their constitutions. However, it must be noted that varies political representatives have different policy choices due the diversity of ideologies that they subscribe to. Therefore, there is no simple formula for democracy that can advance popular preferences to political outcomes in a complex system of government. The danger is the fear that in representative democracies the majority could implement policies that would disadvantage the minorities (Mekoa & Breakfast, 2011:3). The following section will examine substantive democracy, which is embraced by the White paper of 1998 on local government in South Africa.

Substantive democracy

Firstly and most importantly, there is little scholarship available in Political Science and Public Administration with regard to the theorisation of substantive democracy. This is simply because substantive democracy is supported by few scholars of Political Science

and Public Administration. Substantive democracy is more socialist orientated in nature, precisely because it focuses on the socio-economic conditions of the people. The bulk of scholars of democracy tend to prefer procedural democracy due to the fact that they do not want to be associated with the ideology of socialism. To some scholars, socialism has a total disregard for the culture of human rights. Hence, substantive democracy has been criticised by other political theorists as not being entirely democratic in nature. Substantive democracy takes an ideological stand. The main argument is that political freedom without economic freedom is meaningless. The theory of substantive democracy is essentially about socio-economic changes. In addition, substantive democracy is an instrument to eradicate socio-economic conditions and promote equity (Kotze, 2004:30-32).

According to Mangu (2005:319) substantive democracy is also referred to as a maximalist school of thought within the scholarship of Political Science and Public Administration. As pointed out above, substantive democracy is supported by the White paper of 1998 on South African municipalities. According to the White Paper on local government (1998:12), the idea of developmental local government is about promoting local governments to work side by side with their citizens by growing the economy and promoting development. Therefore, the practice of democracy should produce an improvement on the lives of the people through job creation and the reduction of poverty. The following discussion will examine the ways and means of deepening or institutionalising democracy at local government level.

Consolidation of democracy

Consolidation of democracy is a process, not an event (De Villiers, 1993:45). It is a process of strengthening democratic institutions and allowing them to operate independently. Democratic consolidation is a process through which acceptance of a given set of constitutional principles becomes less directly contingent on immediate rewards and sanctions and increasingly widespread and routinized. In Philippe Schmitter's point of view, it is a transition of the institutional arrangements and understandings that emerged at the time of the political transition into relations of co-operation and political competition that are reliably known and regularly practiced (Haggard & Kaufman, 1995: 15).

In order to achieve consolidation of democracy, a level of autonomy and independence of civil-political society must further be embedded in and supported by the rule of law in society. This means that strengthening democracy requires a strong civil society through public participation on policy matters. In addition, different political actors; especially the democratic government and the state leaders must respect and uphold the rule of law. In this context, 'rule of law' simply means that everyone is equal before the law and that no one is above the law. The extent to which new democracies have become consolidated is of both practical and theoretical significance and has given rise to considerable scholarly debate in Political Science (Stepan & Linz, 1996:10, Diamandouros, Gunther & Puhle, 1995:3). All in all, consolidation of democracy refers to the deepening of democracy in society. This means that democracy becomes the only political system that is institutionalised in the different spheres of government, in particular at local government level. The next section discusses critically the concept of public participation in the light of local government.

Conceptualisation of Public Participation

Public participation is a process that provides individuals with an opportunity to influence public decisions and has long been a component of democratic decision-making processes. The roots of citizen participation can be traced to ancient Greece and Colonial New England. Before the 1960s, governmental processes and procedures were designed to facilitate 'external' participation. Citizen participation was institutionalised in the mid-1960s in the United States, when President Lyndon Johnson introduced his Great Society Programmes (public participation is the creation of opportunities and avenues for communities to express their views and opinions in matters of governance, either directly or indirectly (Cogan & Sharpe, 1986:283, Madlala, 2005:45).

Public involvement ensures that citizens have a direct voice in public decisions. According to Kotze (1997:37), the concept of people's or public participation lies at the core of the people-centred development approach and may refer to the following aspects: involvement; communication; a new attitude from government; or a reciprocal influence. Davids (2005:19-29) offers the following definition of public participation: 'an inclusive process aimed at deepening democracy through formal participatory mechanisms...' The idea of public participation should entail participation in decision-

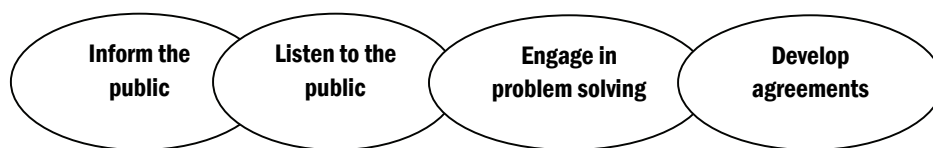
making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as sharing the benefits of governance and developmental outputs and outcomes.

Public participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in the implementing of programmes, and in efforts to evaluate such programmes. Public participation is the process through which public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision-making. It is two-way communication and interaction, the overall goal being better decisions that are supported by the public (Meyer & Theron, 2000:1, Creighton, 2005:7). Creighton (2005:7) summarises the difficulty of capturing the essence of public participation, noting that there are numerous definitions, as shown above. Most definitions include the following elements:

- 1) *'Public Participation applies to administrative decisions.*
- 2) *Public participation is not just providing the public-interaction, it's an important component.*
- 3) *There is an organised process for involving the public.*
- 4) *Participants have some level of impact or influence on the decisions being made.'*

Creighton (2005:8) notes that the word 'participation' has many different meanings and is best understood and illustrated as a continuum, reflected below:

Figure 1: Continuum of participation



Source: Creighton (2005:9)

Public participation in Policy formulation

Brynard (2006: 165) points out that while policy formulation and decision-making are not the same, decision-making plays a significant role in policy formulation. The following are essential stages that are widely recognized in the policy process:

- 1) Agenda setting,
- 2) Policy formulation,
- 3) Decision-making,
- 4) Policy implementation, and
- 5) Policy evaluation (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995:11).

Howlett and Ramesh (1995:11) define agenda setting as the stage where 'problems come to the attention of governments'. According to Roux (2006: 126), policy formulation is perceived as one of the key stages of the policy process, because this is the stage where government makes decisions on what they will do in response to the problem that has been identified. This stage involves designing plans around the action that has been decided upon by government and it involves setting up goals and objectives of the actions to be taken. Roux (2006: 136) emphasises that identifying goals and objectives is important to simplify actions that will be taken in response to the problem identified.

Once objectives and priorities have been identified, potential policy options to deal with the identified problem are developed (De Coning & Cloete 2006: 40). This process involves 'assessing possible solutions to policy problems' and assessment of different options of programmes and strategies to choose from (Howlett & Ramesh 2003: 143). The costs and benefits of the different options, including 'externalities ... associated with each option' are explored (Cochran & Malone 2005:52).

Public participation can broadly be divided into two main categories, namely the mere receiving of information by citizens from authorities about proposed actions; and the sharing of power with citizens to shape final decisions. It is, however, often argued that the mere provision of information cannot be regarded as participation, although the provision of information helps to empower and educate citizens, equipping them with participation tools. Tangible benefits can be derived from effective citizen involvement programmes (Bekker, 1996:41).

Public participation is a much broader issue than decision-making; it sets the scene for decision-making and continues during the decision-making process and beyond into the implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases. It therefore starts well before a decision is taken and extends well beyond it. Furthermore, acts of participation should not be viewed in isolation, but rather within a stream of interconnected acts (Bekker,

1996:41). Public participation is inextricably linked to democracy, and more specifically participatory democracy.

The term 'public participation' encompasses the notion of a two-way exchange of information between the people/communities and the legitimate government of the day. Public participation offers a multiplicity of benefits, including the provision of valuable information about the needs and aspirations of local people to public authorities in order to initiate and implement informed decisions (White Paper on Local Government, 1998:46).

Participation by citizens in local government affairs is the very backbone of any democratic form of government. The following discuss will examine the institutionalisation of public participation/democracy through the IDP process at local government level.

Public Participation in IDP

Section 35 of the Municipal Systems Act (RSA 2000) defines the IDP as the *"principal strategic planning instrument which guides and informs all planning and development, and all decisions with regard to planning, management and development in the municipality."*

The South African government associates public participation in the IDP process with democracy and governance (DPLG 2000: 14). It is described by the IDP Guide Pack 1 (DPLG 2001a: 38) as one of the ways of enabling "interaction between local government and citizens". Why is public participation important? The IDP processes and the above Guide Pack 1 give the following reasons for public participation in the IDP process:

- To ensure that development responds to people's needs and problems.
- To ensure that municipalities come up with appropriate and sustainable solutions to problems of communities in a municipality. The use of local experience and knowledge in this regard is helpful.
- To entrench a sense of ownership to local communities by making use of local resources and initiatives.
- To promote transparency and accountability of local government, by opening a space for all concerned to negotiate different interests (ibid).

The IDPs are reviewed over a five years period, they are by legislation the overall plans of municipalities that take precedence over other sectoral plans (DPLG 2000: 20) and they should guide all activities of a municipality (ibid). They are required to bring together outcomes of all the different planning processes of a municipality into one document, showing the linkages and intersections between them. They should also indicate the "budgetary implications of the different plans and policies."

The following are stages of drafting IDPs:

- *'Phase 1 – Analysis'*: This involves analysing the current context of the municipal area and identifying priority issues of the municipality.
- *'Phase 2 – Strategies'*: This is the stage of the IDP where strategies to meet the priority issues identified in Phase 1 are designed. During this stage, objectives and the vision of the municipality are established.
- *'Phase 3 – Projects'*: This stage involves identifying and designing actual projects that will be carried out by municipalities in response to the problems identified. These projects are accompanied by budget figures and *'business plans'* that explain how they will be done. Proposals from experts and "relevant stakeholders" are expected at this stage of the IDP process.
- *'Phase 4 – Integration'*: This involves the consolidation of all *'projects proposals'* by local and district municipalities.
- *'Phase 5 – Approval'*: During the approval stage of the IDP, the Council takes into account and integrates submissions that have been made concerning the draft IDP. Once the comments are integrated into the draft IDP, the Council endorses the IDP (DPLG 2001c: 6; 19).

With regards to the participation of Ward Committees in the IDP process, the DPLG (2001b: 24) recommends that the chairperson of the ward committee should participate in the IDP Representative Forum. Ward Committees are expected to play a major role in ensuring participation of citizens in the IDP process (SALGA and GTZ 2006: 69). They can do this by organising IDP participation processes at ward level – also called *'community based planning'* (SALGA and GTZ, 2006: 70). This kind of planning *'requires functional Ward Committees who develop plans for their own wards, and link ward priorities to the integrated development planning of the municipality'*. Together with councillors and

officials, Ward Committees have the responsibility of ensuring that plans of a municipality reflect the needs of its citizens (ibid: 63).

To enable this kind of participation, the Local Government: Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulations (DPLG 2001d: section 15(1)(a)), call for '*consultations ...with locally recognized community organizations, and where appropriate with traditional authorities*'. Where there is no '*appropriate municipal wide structure for community participation*', municipalities are required to 'establish a forum to promote participation of communities in the IDP process in South Africa. With regards to the exact mechanisms for participation in the IDP process, the Municipal Systems Act (RSA 2000) requires municipalities to establish 'appropriate mechanisms, processes and procedures, established in terms of Chapter four' of the same Act, to ensure public participation in the IDP process. Other than establishing mechanisms for public participation, municipalities are required to create conditions that would promote public participation in the IDP process (DPLG 2001a: 37).

The Buffalo City Municipality, for example, made use of mechanisms such as:

...the BCM Representative Forum; Budget Road Shows; the Mayoral Listening Campaign; and informal mechanisms such as notices in the press, at schools and at churches; information dissemination through the Buffalo City newsletter; publishing details of proposed policies in newspapers and in submitting copies to libraries and relevant interest groups; and publishing information on the municipal website, with contact details for councillors and officials (Yusuf 2004: 6).

The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (2000:30-34) defines community participation as follows: "A municipality must develop a culture of municipal governance that complements formal representative government with a system of participatory governance and must for this purpose encourage and create conditions for the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality, which includes:

- (i) the preparation, implementation and review of its integrated development plan in terms of chapter 5 of the MSA;
- (ii) the establishment, implementation and review of its performance management system in terms of chapter 6 of the MSA;

- (iii) the monitoring and the review of its performance, including the outcomes and impact of such performance;
- (iv) the preparation of its budget; and structure and political office bearers of the municipality, when appropriate; consultative sessions with locally recognised community organisations and where appropriate, traditional authorities; and report back to local community'.

When establishing mechanisms, processes and procedures in terms of subsection (2) of Municipal Systems Act, municipality must take to account the special needs of:

- People who cannot read and write.
- People with disabilities
- Women; and
- Other disadvantaged groups.'

Public participation in decision-making is an imperative for a democratic government (Gildenhuys, Fox & Wissink, 1991:124). According to Beierle (1998:99), six social values are served by various forms of community participation:

- 1) Educating the community.
- 2) Incorporating community values into policymaking.
- 3) Improving the substantive quality of community policy.
- 4) Increasing community trust.
- 5) Reducing conflict.
- 6) Achieving cost-effective community policy.

Clearly, public participation in local government is the foundation for the development of trust between communities and their municipalities. Public participation in local government is a key prerequisite for enhancing good governance. Local government must be at the forefront of involving citizens in local governance and development by providing them with practical, effective and on-going opportunities for participation. However, there is a perception that citizen participation may lead to a variety of (perceived) negative consequences, such as an increased workload, additional resource requirements, increased level of public scrutiny, negative media coverage, and increased level of apathy or distrust of government (Callahan, 2002:4). The next section will examine ward committees within the context of municipalities.

Ward Committees

Craythorne (1993:106) records that the ward system first emerged in South Africa in 1786 in the Cape Colony, following intense pressure by Cape Burgers for a greater share in the government of the Colony. This body was later given certain municipal and policing functions. Over the years, their role evolved into a form of contact between the people and the municipal commissioners. It was rejected and opposed by the majority of Africans as being illegitimate. The 'birth' of democracy in South Africa saw the entire country divided into wards. The new notion of wall-to-wall local government meant that every South African would have direct access to democratically elected representatives involved in the management of their local area through the functions and powers conferred on ward committees.

Ward Committees were first mentioned in the White Paper on Local Government (1998). In respect of their roles and responsibilities, the Municipal Structures Act (1998) states that Ward Committees may make recommendations on any matter affecting their wards to the relevant Ward Councillor and Municipalities. Ward Committees were given new meaning, roles and functions through Section 74 of the Municipal Structures Act, 1998, which stipulates that a Ward Committee –

- a) May make recommendations on any matter affecting its Ward –
 - (i) To the Ward Councillor; or
 - (ii) Through the Ward Councillor, to the metro or Local Council, the executive committee, the Executive Mayor or the relevant Metropolitan Sub-council; and
- b) Has such duties and powers as the Metro or Local Council may delegate to it in terms of Section 32 of the Act.

The then Minister of Provincial and Local Government, Sydney Mufamandi published a Notice entitled 'Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees' (Notice 965 of 2005), which presented the 'duties and powers' delegated to Ward Committees and emphasised that those powers did not include executive powers (Section 5(3)(d)), but rather focused on communication and mobilisation. This was made possible by legislation governing local government (Parnell, *et al.*, 2002:83).

According to Draai and Taylor (2009:117), there are four important expectations attached to Ward Committees:

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- The object of Ward Committees is to enhance public participation and consultation in matters of local government.
- Ward Committees are structured communication channels between local government and its communities.
- Ward Committee members, with the exception of the Ward Councillors, are community representatives who perform their duties on a voluntary basis.
- Although the Act (Municipal Structures Act of 1998) empowers municipalities to dissolve a Ward Committee that fails to fulfil its objectives, it does not provide for a monitoring and evaluation system to measure performance indicators.

Ward Committees are community elected area-based committees within a particular municipality whose boundaries coincide with Ward boundaries. Each Ward Committee is chaired by the relevant Ward Councillor and consists of up to ten people representing a diversity of interests in the Ward, with women 'equitably represented'. A Ward Committee is meant to be an institutionalised channel of communication and interaction between communities and municipalities (Bolini & Ndlela, 1998:116). Special efforts must be made to hear the views and issues pertaining to the most vulnerable through their representations to each and every Ward Committee. These groups include women, the youth, the elderly, the unemployed and people with disabilities (Meyer & Theron, 2000:51).

Although Ward Committees are not the only vehicle for public participation, they provide a structured model for public participation. They are clearly meant to enhance constructive interaction between municipalities and local communities. This interaction gives effect to Sections No. 4 and 5 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000), which gives citizens the right to contribute to the decision-making processes of municipalities and to complain or make representations if their needs are not met (www.hologram.org.za).

A further limitation is that the establishment of Ward Committees is not mandatory for municipalities. Legislation makes it mandatory for municipalities to develop mechanisms to consult and involve communities in governing processes. It must, however, be stated that most South African municipalities have chosen to comply with this requirement by establishing Ward Committees (www.idasa.org.za).

Ward Committees should, furthermore, consult regularly with Ward residents on matters relating to the Ward, and should develop and submit reports and recommendations on such matters, as and when required, via their Ward Councillors to the Council. According to *ANC Today*, a weekly web-based publication of the African National Congress (27 April 2001), a defining feature of the new system, which represents the final phase of local government transition, is the scope it offers to ordinary people to become actively involved in local governance. Residents have the right to contribute to their municipality's decision-making processes. They have the right to submit recommendations and complaints to the Council, and to the regular disclosure of the state of affairs of the municipality, including its finances (www.anc.org.za).

Ward Committees are, however, largely perceived to have been ineffective in advancing citizen participation at local government level. This ineffectiveness is caused by lack of capacity and lack incentives to pursue the betterment of their constituencies (Hicks, 2004:7).

Furthermore, Ward Committee structures were meant to represent formal, unbiased communication channels as well as co-operative partnerships between communities and councils and serve as mobilising agents for community action, in particular through integrated development planning.

Figure 2: Areas covered by Ward Committees and their linkages



Source: National Policy Framework on Public Participation (2005:8).

A Ward can cover a wide range of sectoral issues (see Figure 2), depending on the situation in the Ward. In order for communities to be active and involved in managing their development, claiming their rights and exercising their responsibilities, Ward Committees as legitimate structures need to be effective.

Some observation on the challenges of public participation at local government level

According to Ngwenya (2002: 2), 'uneven distribution of capacity' tends to hinder participation of marginalised groups of society in policy processes. Platforms for participation in the IDP process brought together participants with differing skills and capacity to participate in the drafting of the IDPs, thus advantaging the privileged members of society in the IDP process. A study by Mac Kay (2004: 69) in Cape Town alludes to this concern. The Public Hearing of Sub-Council Three, held in Durbanville, highlighted the different level of skills levels amongst the population of South Africa, for example, the two White participants asked pertinent questions relating to issues that inform the IDP whilst people from disadvantaged communities focussed on issues of social responsibility such as health, housing, roads, infrastructural development and electricity (Mac Kay 2004:69). Brinkerhoff and Crosby (2002: 78) conclude that lack of capacity has an impact on the quality of participation of a given group'.

A critique of public participation by Taylor (2003: 105) is that it may reinforce the power inequalities that already exist in society. While citizens participated in the IDP processes, there was limited participation by the privileged members of the society in the IDP meetings (Marais, Everatt and Dube 2007: 25; Houston *et al.* 2001: 253). Instead, these influential people used other means of participation by speaking directly to officials about issues of interest to them. '*The privileged residents tend to shun public meetings (except when they address safety and security issues), and prefer to raise matters directly with council and local officials via telephone calls or personal visits*' (Marais, Everatt and Dube, 2007: 25). Marais, Everatt and Dube (2007: 25) in their study in Gauteng, associate this practice with unequal access to government officials. The use of telephones to address concerns with officials is a luxury that can only be made by those with access to resources. The less privileged members of the community tend to be hindered from directly accessing government officials on their own.

Williams (2006: 210), writing about the Unicity of Cape Town, states that:

Other factors detracting from effective community participation in Cape Town relate to the fact that local communities are not well organised or are simply non-existent and, as a consequence, are often represented by so-called leaders without community consent.

Political power struggles destruct effective public participation processes. To illustrate this, Buccus *et al.* (2007: 18) stated that the perceptions by some members of the ward committee belonging to an IFP stronghold area in Sisonke Municipality were arguing that the ANC was disregarding their priorities and undermining public participation in the IDP process. This sentiment made civil society organisations in KwaZulu-Natal see little value in the IDP participation process as a whole (Buccus *et al.* 2007: 18). Trotter (2005: 6) agrees that "*political power games are a perpetual feature of the policy-making landscape.*" She argues that "*filters exist to ensure certain voices are not heard.*" The participation space of political parties in the IDP processes seems to have undermined public participation in the IDP process, rather than promoted it. The following section is meant to provide a policy advice on deepening democracy at local government level.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

Democracy means different things to different people. Suffice to say, it is essentially a contested phraseology (Breakfast, 2009:9). This paper has examined both procedural and substantive theories of democracy within the scholarship of Political Science and Public Administration. The common denominator in both conceptual frameworks is public participation. However, it must be noted that substantive democracy transcends beyond political participation. It advocates for socio-economic changes in society. With regard to municipalities, it can be concluded that public participation through the structures established for the IDP process is not that effective yet in the local government; whilst structures are there the practice is limited or non-existence. Although Ward Committees are not the only vehicle for public participation, they provide a structured model for public participation. They are clearly meant to enhance constructive interaction between municipalities and local communities.

Ward Committees are, however, largely perceived to have been ineffective in advancing citizen participation at local government level. This ineffectiveness is caused by lack of capacity and lack incentives to pursue the betterment of their constituencies

(Hicks, 2004:7). Lastly, Ward Committee structures meant to represent formal, unbiased communication channels as well as co-operative partnerships between communities and councils and should serve as mobilising agents for community action, in particular through integrated development planning.

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AUTHORS' CONTACT:

BREAKFAST, Ntsikelelo

Senior Lecturer
Dept of Political Science
Faculty of Military Science
Stellenbosch University
Email:

nb.breakfast@ma2.sun.ac.za

MEKOA, Itumeleng

Research Professor
School of Research and
Postgraduate Studies
North-West University
Email:

MAPHAZI, Nondumiso

Former Mayor, Nelson
Mandela Metro Municipality
Commissioner of Gender
Commission, South Africa
Email:

nmaphazi@hotmail.com