

COMPREHENDING STAKEHOLDERS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING PROCESS AS A TOOL FOR IMPROVED COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

This study is primarily aimed at comprehending the key stakeholders, involved in applying the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process for improved community participation in the Tzaneen municipal area. It is argued in this study, that the IDP is centred on the priorities and desires of the communities. Communities have the opportunity to engage in identifying their most desired needs. The IDP process requires all stakeholders who live and do business within a municipal jurisdiction to partake in the design and execution of the municipal development plan, also known as the IDP. This study is grounded in the ladder of citizen participation theory, pioneered by Arnstein Sherry in 1969. Arnstein (1969)'s ladder of citizen participation theory talks about community involvement in the planning process in the United States. This empirical study was conducted in the Tzaneen municipal area, South Africa, and four hundred and ten (410) participants were sampled in the area through probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The study adopted a mixed-method research approach. The data was collected and analysed until saturation was reached. Data were collected using surveys, semi-structured interviews, and a review of existing literature. This study revealed that more than half (56 %) of participants indicated that they were not consulted and encouraged to participate in the IDP process as relevant stakeholders. Consultation of stakeholders is often inadequate. Most of the participants are dissatisfied with their representatives' manner and level of involvement, and they do not feel well represented. This study concludes by recommending that municipalities adhere to the Municipal Systems Act (2000) and the Republic of South Africa (1996) Constitution, both of which require municipalities to actively involve stakeholders in the planning process to provide services sustainably and satisfactory. The *Batho Pele* principles should be followed to guarantee a harmonious relationship between the municipality and its stakeholders. Stakeholders will have reasonable expectations regarding service delivery due to effective consultation.

Keywords: Community participation, consultation, integrated development planning (IDP), stakeholders, and Tzaneen municipal area, South Africa.

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1. Introduction

According to a study, conducted by [1] titled "A quantitative study on service delivery protests in the South African municipalities: A case of Tzaneen municipal area", there are rising service delivery protests in South African rural municipalities due to continued lack of community participation or involvement of relevant stakeholders in the municipal affairs. Again, [2] indicates that "the protesters frequently express dissatisfaction and frustrations for being excluded from local government businesses. This exclusion occurs even though section 16(1) of the Municipal Systems Act (2000) requires each municipality to develop a culture of municipal governance that complements formal representative government with a system of participatory governance. Municipal councils must encourage the involvement of the local communities in the decisions that directly affect them". [3] affirms that the right of community participation in the governance process is a constitutional obligation and protected by various policy frameworks, governing local govern-

ments. The community participation is meant to provide information and improve public decisions, programmes and projects. [4] concurs with the above scholars that “community participation is a severe challenge for democratic South Africa due to inadequate knowledge of communities on municipality’s powers and functions. The service delivery protests clearly indicate that participatory democracy is a severe challenge in democratic South Africa, resulting in poor public participation”.

Thus, the problem statement of this study is the continued lack of stakeholders’ participation or involvement in the IDP process despite constitutional provisions. The continued lack of public participation is also recently recognised in the study, conducted by [5], who indicates that there is “scant public participation in local government developmental matters, especially in land-use planning”, which form part of the integrated development planning (IDP). South African municipalities are congested due to a lack of public participation in land-use planning in the municipal arena. This is even though the Constitution requires active public engagement in questions of developing local administration. The challenge of inactive public participation endures throughout the IDP, and this is now perceived as a dream wish. Equally, [6] share the same sentiment with [4] and other scholars who posit that the challenge of inactive public participation also persists throughout the whole IDP. There is an ongoing deficiency of community involvement in municipal developmental affairs, although section 152 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 and section 25 (1) of the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) encourages the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders, such as communities and Non-government organisations. The IDP process is a complex process, which involves many stakeholders [7, 8]. Thus, [9] indicates that the nature of the IDP is an integrative and participatory process, which requires input from different stakeholders throughout the process. It is substantial to footnote, that the successful formulation and application of IDP prior to or during the COVID-19 pandemic depends on extensive stakeholder involvement. [10], cited in [11], opined that community participation involves discussion and dialogue among different stakeholders to make mutual and constructive decisions. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, most municipalities physically engaged with community members on critical issues like service delivery. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way things used to be done, but that does not prohibit municipalities from engaging community members in the IDP processes. Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic has also been recognised as a problem statement in this study because it influenced poor stakeholders’ participation from 2020 to 2022. This study questions which stakeholders are involved in the IDP process and their role and contribution in the IDP process for improved community participation.

This study aimed to comprehend the key stakeholders, involved in applying the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process for improved community participation in the Tzaneen municipal area. To achieve this study, the researchers outlined the materials and methods used, data collection tools, data analysis and the findings, discussion of the study, and strategic recommendations.

1. 1. Theoretical Framework

Ladder of Citizen Participation theory on Community Participation

This study adopted the ladder of citizen participation theory, pioneered by Arnstein Sherry in 1969. Arnstein (1969)’s ladder of citizen participation theory talks about community involvement in the planning process in the United States. “The ladder of citizen participation is one of the most widely referenced and influential models in democratic public participation. This theory describes how empowered public institutions and officials deny power to citizens and how levels of citizen agency, control, and power can be increased” [11, 12]. Also [12], in her study, further argues that community participation is a democratic process and to be classified as community involvement genuinely, it needs the redistribution of power. Similarly in [13], community participation implies the engagement of communities in policy-decision-making activities, which also involves the identification of services’ needs, budget prioritisation and preparation of the IDP.

Eight (8) steps constitute the ladder of citizen participation theory. These steps guide who has power when imperative decisions are made. Thus, formulating effective approaches to involve communities has become important. Hereunder is the ladder of the citizen participation model.

The Fig. 1 below depicts the ladder of citizen participation.

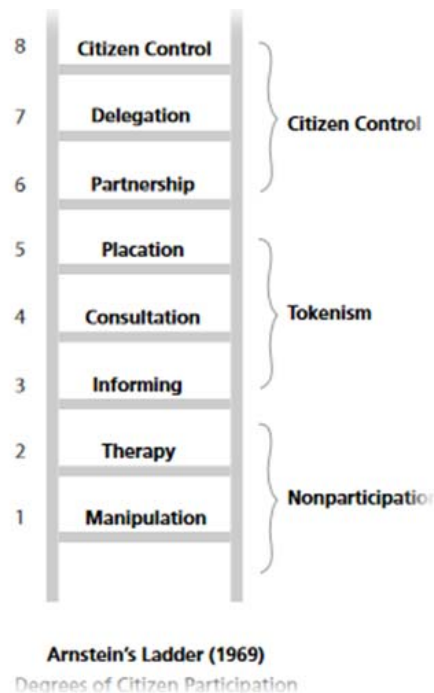


Fig. 1. Ladder of Citizen Participation. Source: Arnstein (1969)

By analysing these steps, the researchers will then be able to determine if the Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality uses the steps, acknowledged by Arnstein's theory of citizen participation, which are deemed significant. The steps, stipulated by the ladder of citizen participation theory, ensure that community participation is achieved. The citizen participation ladder theory is presented ascending from "manipulation, Therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegation and citizen control". Each ladder is explained below from Arnstein's theoretical perspective;

Manipulation and Therapy: "Both steps are non-participative. The aim is to cure or educate the participants. The proposed plan is best, and participation is to achieve public support through public relations. Instead of genuine citizen participation, the bottom step of the ladder indicates the distortion of participation in the public" [12].

Informing: "A most significant first step to legitimate community participation. However, the emphasis is on a one-way flow of information too frequently. There is no channel for feedback and no power for negotiation" [12].

Consultation: "This is also a legitimate step attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public enquiries. This further implies that inviting citizens' opinions, like informing them, can be a legitimate step toward their full participation. However, when the consultation process is not combined with other modes of participation, this step of the ladder is still a shame since it offers no assurance that citizens' concerns and ideas will be taken into account" [12].

Placation: "Participation as placation occurs when citizens are granted a limited degree of influence in a process, but their participation is largely or entirely tokenistic: citizens are merely involved only to demonstrate that they were involved" [12]. For instance, placation permits communities to advise or plan, but the authorities retain the power to judge the legitimacy or viability of the advice.

Partnership: "In this step, the power is genuinely redistributed over negotiation among citizens and powerholders. Therefore, planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared", for instance, through joint committees [12].

Delegation: “The citizens hold a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions. The public now has the power to assure accountability of the programme to them” [12].

Citizen Control: Participation as citizen control occurs when, according to [12, 14], “residents can govern a program or an institution, be in full charge of policy-making and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions, under which “outsiders” may change them. In citizen-control situations, for instance, public funding would flow directly to a community organisation, and that organisation would have full control over how that funding is allocated” [12, 14].

By analysing the steps of Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation, the researchers argue that communities should control the planning processes (IDP), thereby identifying service priorities. Giving communities a say in planning processes could lead to the successful implementation of local government programs like IDP. As much as community participation is a legitimate mandate, it should be maintained and not just for compliance as steps 3 and 4. Equally, as much as community participation is a legitimate mandate, it should be maintained and not just for compliance as per step three (3) of the model above. Step 3, which is informing, indicates that “informing is the most significant first step to legitimate community participation. However, too frequently, the emphasis is on a one-way flow of information. There is no channel for feedback and no power for negotiation” [11]. It can be argued, that step three (3) undermines community participation as cited by [11] who state that the municipalities often do not provide feedback to communities on municipal affairs. The municipalities are undermining the constitutional mandate to provide adequate feedback to communities. [15] indicate that there are “various methods that can be used to provide feedback to communities on the activities of the municipal Council and municipalities in general. Municipalities can use media announcements, public notices, ward committees, and ward meetings to provide community feedback”. The municipality should avoid manipulation (Step 1) of communities, a non-participation. Community participation should not be viewed as a compliance measure but rather a means of achieving desired results by encouraging interactive and consultative participation [11].

In addition, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, sections 152 (1) and 195 (1) states that “municipalities are obliged to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in municipal affairs, people’s needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making. The White Paper on Local Government (1998) distinguished developmental local government as “local government, committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic, and material needs and improve the quality of their lives” [7, 16].

In conclusion, the ladder of citizen participation theory is most relevant in this study based on its ground and elements that intend to guide municipalities to foster effective community participation. The theory also encourages municipalities to facilitate community participation and ensure that participation is genuinely and stakeholders’ opinions and inputs should be considered. Therefore, the researchers argue that if Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality follows these steps, the municipality will attain most of its objectives.

1. 2. Literature Review

The IDP process is a complex process, which involves many stakeholders. [9] indicates that, in nature, the IDP is a participatory and integrative process, which requires input from different stakeholders throughout the process. The municipality is the first stakeholder to ensure that communities participate in the IDP process. Similarly, [17] asserts that municipalities in South Africa are entrusted with recognising community needs through various channels, including public meetings, imbizos, ward committees, and petitions. All municipalities in the country are required by law to prepare and adopt such plans to effectively react to the requirements of their particular communities. As a result, for the municipalities to deliver those services successfully, they have to formulate a strategic development plan, formally known as the IDP. The municipality’s role in the IDP process is to consult communities and other stakeholders within their jurisdiction to un-

derstand their service delivery needs. The municipality is responsible for composite the municipal council, which constitutes of councilors from different wards. The council is mandated to approve the planning process and as well as the IDP document.

In addition, [18] assert that all the South African municipalities formulate the IDP. The municipality is liable for the coordination of the IDP and should involve other stakeholders who are directly affected by or benefit from developmental projects. The other recognised stakeholder in the IDP process is community members as the end-users of municipal services. [19, 20] opined that applying the IDP process involves different steps to yield the desired results successfully. In applying the IDP, neither prior to nor during the COVID-19 pandemic, community members are the primary stakeholders and beneficiaries of municipal services, reflected in the IDP, making it essential for them to participate throughout the IDP process. There is a need for community members to be involved in issues that affect them directly or indirectly. Community members participate in the IDP process to determine their service delivery needs and priorities. Thus, the municipality must conduct regular consultations with community members to ensure that all identified and initiated development projects and policies are undertaken by the municipality.

Again, Community representatives are also acknowledged as relevant stakeholders. There are many community representative bodies, according to [21], who are responsible for communicating with the municipality about service delivery requirements and challenges that affect community members. Such representatives include Ward Councillors, Ward Committee representatives, and traditional authorities as practical examples of such bodies. According to [22], Ward Councillors and Committee are responsible for “incorporate their wards into the planning process. Assist in the planning of public involvement and consultation events. Ensure that the IDP is related to and based on the yearly municipal budget and business plans”. [23] argues that traditional leadership is recognized in some municipalities in South Africa as a key stakeholder. He indicates that “traditional leaders have influence in municipal IDP”. However, [24] argue that even though, traditional leaders have influence as the stakeholder in the IDP process, “traditional leaders and their communities are not actively partaking or involved in the IDP planning process according to their study, conducted at Mahikeng in South Africa. The municipal officials, such as the accounting officer, are recognised as the key stakeholders of the IDP process in terms of the Municipal Finance Management Act (Act 56 of 2003) [25]. The accounting officer, also known as the Municipal Manager, is responsible for the coordination and compilation of the IDP document and its implementation. Lastly, the National and Provincial government departments also play an important role in the IDP process. [20, 26] assert that the government departments provide support and guidance, monitor the formulation and application of the IDP and facilitate the coordination and alignment of IDPs with the strategies and programmes of government departments. However, municipalities are advised to take control and play a leading role in the coordination and overall management of the development planning process.

2. Materials and methods

A mixed-method research approach was used to investigate and comprehend the stakeholders, involved in the IDP process, and their roles. A mixed-method research approach is defined as quantitative and qualitative research approaches [27]. A mixed-method research design was used because it allows the researcher(s) to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the stakeholders’ involvement in the IDP process for improved community participation, while also achieving balanced results by combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research designs. By merging both qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher(s) ensured reliability and validity in data analysis through analytical, descriptive, comparative, and statistical analysis. These designs were considered the most appropriate because they addressed the research problem.

2.1. Study area

The Fig. 2 depicts the Tzaneen municipal area map where the study was conducted.

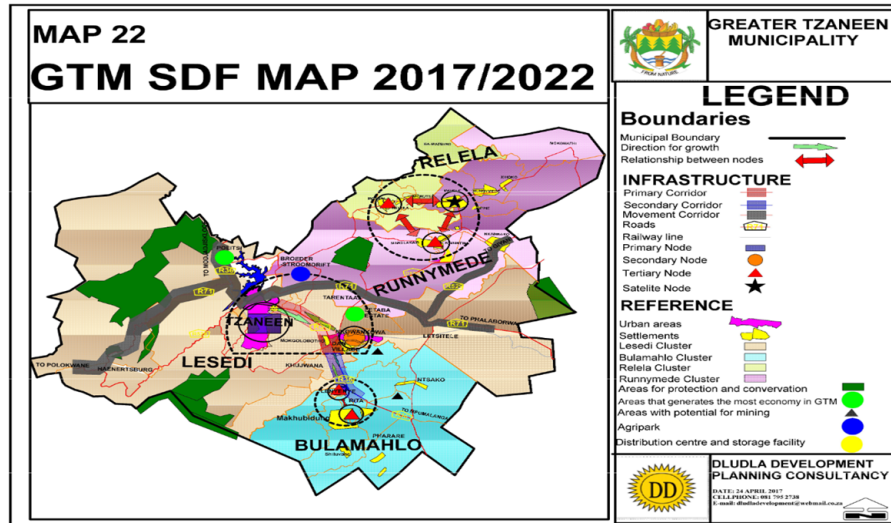


Fig. 2. Study area map. Source: Greater Tzaneen Municipality IDP (2021)

This study was undertaken in the Tzaneen municipal area in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. According to [28], “the Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality is a Category B municipality, situated in the eastern quadrant of the Limpopo province within the Mopani District. Greater Letaba borders it to the north, Lepelle-Nkumpi to the south, Ba-Phalaborwa and Maruleng to the east, and Polokwane to the west. It is one of the five municipalities in the district. It contains 125 rural villages, with almost 80 % of households, residing in these villages. It is characterised by extensive and intensive farming activities and considerable untapped tourism potential. The area comprises two cities/towns: Haenertsburg and Tzaneen”. The study was undertaken in the rural and urban areas under the jurisdiction of Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality and at the municipality’s offices. The researcher(s) selected this municipality since it is one of the South African municipalities, facing a huge service delivery backlog due to poor community participation [1].

2. 2. Target Population

The target population is “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalise the results of the research” [29] cited in [30]. Due to the nature and scope of this study, the target population was community members from the Tzaneen municipal area and key informants, which include the IDP Manager and Ward Councillors/Committee members who deal with the IDP process and improved community participation from the Tzaneen municipal area. Targeting this population leads to timeliness and effectiveness when collecting and analysing empirical data.

2. 3. Sampling

[31] pointed out that the term “sampling” refers to a group of typical units, allowing data or conclusions to be generalised to the entire population. It is important to understand, that there are two sampling methods: probability and non-probability sampling. The researcher(s) adopted both probability and non-probability sampling techniques based on the nature and scope of this study. Probability sampling is preferred as a method whereby a large group of people has a preferable chance to participate in a study [32]. Simple random sampling was used to randomly select respondents to participate in the study in probability sampling. Therefore, several four hundred (400) online questionnaires (surveys) were randomly distributed electronically and completed by the community members of the Tzaneen municipal area. The four hundred (400) community members were selected through the probability sampling technique. While non-probability sampling is a method, in which the researcher selects units that represent the population-based on his professional judgment [33]. As a result, the researcher(s) interviewed ten (10) key informants from the Tzaneen municipal area for this study using the non-probability sampling technique. The researcher interviewed this population be-

cause they believed they would provide concrete, contextual, in-depth, and significant information. The sample size in this study was four hundred and ten (410) participants within the Tzaneen municipal area.

2. 4. Data Collection Process

Data collection in this context is seen as the precise, systematic gathering of information relevant to the research purpose or specific objectives, questions, or hypotheses of a study [34]. For this study, the researcher used multiple data collection techniques, deriving from primary and secondary data. The study adopted a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Thus, the primary data in quantitative empirical data was collected using electronic closed-ended questionnaires/surveys. In contrast, qualitative empirical data was collected using a face-to-face semi-structured interview guide. The secondary data was also collected through a review of the literature and published documents from February 2021 to April 2022.

2. 5. Data Analysis

Given that, this study adopted both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. In this manner, empirical data, gathered through electronic closed-end questionnaires, were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistical data was used to analyse the data. Thus, frequencies, tables, bar graphs, and pie charts were used to present and interpret the results. On the other hand, qualitative data, collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, were analysed, utilising the thematic content analysis method and NVivo. Data collection and analysis were done until saturation was reached.

2. 6. Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance was obtained prior to collecting empirical data for this study. The researcher(s) received an ethical clearance certificate [21PMG9912] from the University of Johannesburg, College of Business Research Ethics Committee on June 30th, 2021. The researcher(s) confirmed all the necessary research ethics and integrity requirements. Informed consent was also obtained from study participants. Participants were provided with an explanation of the aim and objectives of the study. Participants were also asked to read and sign the consent form if they were willing to participate.

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

3. Empirical Results

3. 1. Presentation of Quantitative Results

The objective of this study was to comprehend the key stakeholders, involved in the IDP process, as a utensil for improved community participation using Tzaneen municipal area as a case. This objective is intended to discover and understand the nature, role and level of the stakeholder involvement in the developmental planning process of the Tzaneen municipal area. Some questions or themes are analysed below;

Knowledge and understanding of your Role in the IDP process

The question, asked to participants in this section, was whether community members do know and understand their role in the IDP process. Thus, **Table 1** shows communities' knowledge and understanding of their role in the IDP process.

Table 1

Knowledge and understanding of the role of community members in the IDP process

Knowledge and understanding of the role of community members	Frequency	Percent
No	184	46.0
Yes	216	54.0
Total	400	100.0

According to **Table 1**, out of the 400 sampled participants, it is found, that the majority of the respondents, which amounts to 216 (54 %), indicated that they fully understand their role in the IDP process. In contrast, the minority of the participants, which constituted 184 (46 %), indicated that they do not know their role in the IDP process.

In this context, most residents in the Tzaneen municipal area may be assumed to be aware of and understand their involvement in the IDP process. The researcher(s) encourages the municipality to give a roadshow about the IDP for individuals with little or no information and comprehension, as revealed above, so that participation can be economical, effective, and efficient. Applying the three “Es” will mean that the municipality is compliant with the public administration principles.

Consultation of relevant stakeholders

The second question asked was whether the municipality has consulted all the relevant stakeholders when formulating and implementing the IDP. In this regard, **Fig. 3** shows stakeholders’ involvement in the IDP process.

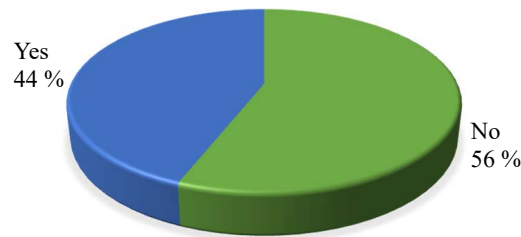


Fig. 3. Stakeholders’ Consultation

The figure above indicates that most of the respondents, which amounted to 224 (56 %), probed for ‘No’, which means they are not consulted in the IDP process. In contrast, the minority of the respondents, 176 (44 %) probed for ‘Yes’, which means that they are consulted by the Tzaneen municipal area in the IDP process.

In this sense, it is possible to conclude, that not all-important or relevant stakeholders are consulted, as required by law, such as in the White Paper on Local Government (1998). “Citizens should be consulted about the amount and quality of public services they receive and, when feasible, should be given a choice about the services delivered,” states the White Paper on Local Government (1998) [16]. However, according to research, performed by [35], many South African municipalities do not follow this, who states that “projects are implemented without community engagement”. Furthermore, [36] express a similar perspective, stating that municipalities engage communities after making decisions and enact policies on their own without the involvement of key stakeholders.

Responsible Leader

The other question, asked of the participants, was to indicate who was responsible for leading the IDP process in their community. Thus, the **Fig. 4** intends to understand who was responsible for leading the IDP process in the Tzaneen municipal area.

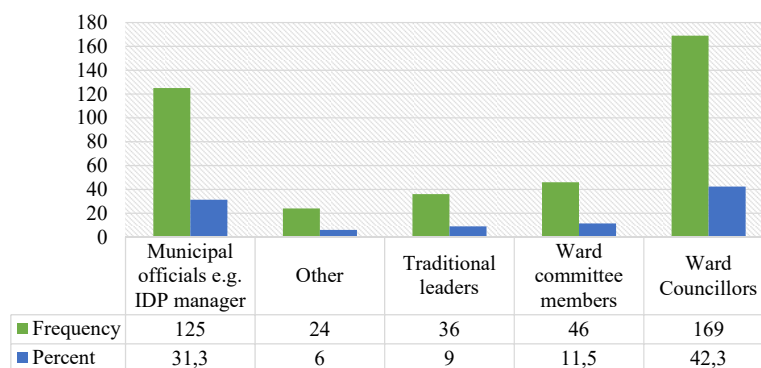


Fig. 4 Responsible leader

Fig. 4 indicates that a majority of the respondents, constituting 169 (42.3 %), stated that the Ward Councillor was responsible for leading the IDP process in the Tzaneen municipal area, and

125 (31.3 %) of the respondents indicated that the municipal officials, e.g., the IDP manager, was responsible for leading the IDP process. 46 (11.5 %) of the respondents indicated that the Ward Committee Members led the IDP in their area. In contrast, figure 10 also indicates that the minority of the respondents, amounting to 36 (9 %), indicated that their traditional leaders led them, and the remaining 24 (6 %) of the respondents indicated that others led them.

Community involvement is a fundamental component of our democracy. It allows individuals to get involved in how their communities are governed by the local municipalities, as stated by the [37]. Municipalities ought to create methods or structures to consult communities and community organisations, while executing their responsibilities and exercising their rights, according to the Municipal Structures Act (1998) [38]. Ward Committees serve as a key link between Ward Councillors, the community, and the municipality. They enable residents to have a say in municipal planning by influencing it to serve their needs best. As a result, Ward Committees and Councillors are often guiding the IDP process in their particular community wards. According to [37], “they are representing the community on the formulation and execution of the IDP”.

The researcher(s) claims that community members are unaware of administering and directing the IDP process in their areas. The study also considered that participants were just guessing who they felt was in charge of the IDP. As a result, it is safe to say, that community members were not actively involved in the IDP process.

Stakeholders’ satisfaction with leaders’ role

In this section, the researcher(s) asked the participants, as relevant IDP stakeholders, if they were satisfied with the municipal officials, Ward Councillors, and Ward Committee members’ role in fostering public participation in your area. Therefore, **Fig. 5** below indicates whether different stakeholders are satisfied with the level of engagement by their municipal officials, ward committees, and Councillors.

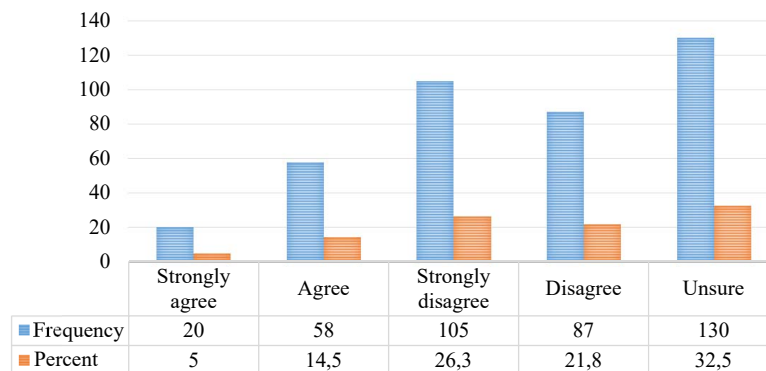


Fig. 5. Stakeholders’ satisfaction

Out of the 400 sampled participants from the Tzaneen municipal area, the majority of the respondents, which constitute 105 (26.3 %), strongly disagree, and 87 (21.8 %) disagree that they are not satisfied with the role of the municipal officials, Ward Committees, and Councillors in fostering community participation. In contrast, 130 (34 %) of the respondents are unsure of the role of the abovementioned players. In contrast, the minority of the respondents, which constitutes 20 (5 %), strongly agree, and 58 (14.5 %) of respondents agree that they are satisfied with their municipal officials, Ward Committee, and Councillors play in the Tzaneen municipal area.

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded, that the communities are dissatisfied with their degree of engagement in municipal affairs. Municipal officials, Ward Communities, and Councillors are all said to under-involve the communities in the IDP process, even though the Municipal Structures Act (1998) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) both require municipalities to actively involve communities in the planning process in order to provide services sustainably and satisfactorily [7, 38]. However, the Ward Councillors and Ward Committee representative roles need to be satisfactory. According to [39], “the IDP allows Councillors and

Ward Committees to make decisions based on the needs and aspirations of their constituencies”. Therefore, they must foster effective community participation as it is the cornerstone of democracy.

3. 2. Presentation of Qualitative Results

The objective of this study was tested through qualitative. The objective of this study was to understand the key stakeholders, involved in the IDP process, for improved community participation using Tzaneen municipal area. This objective intends to understand if the key informants are aware of the different stakeholders that they should involve in the IDP process. The ten key informants were interviewed to test this objective. There are themes or sub-themes, which emanate from the objective of this study. The results are presented and carefully analysed below.

Stakeholders

The IDP process involves different stakeholders. The theme that was posed to the key informants was to identify and justify different stakeholders, involved in the IDP process. The researcher(s) wanted to know who the stakeholders, involved in the IDP process, are and their various roles in the IDP process.

In responses to the above, all the key informants concurred with the following stakeholders and their roles as justification;

“Community-Based Organisations: they understand their community’s needs, Councillors: they represent the community’s aspirations and needs, and Senior Management: they integrate the community’s needs across all spectrums, Municipal Manager: ensures the compilation and implementation of the IDP, and Sector Departments: to lobby for funds and resources, Organised business people: to facilitate the public-private partnerships in service delivery, and Ward Committees: they ensure contact between the municipality and the community. They establish formal communication channels and cooperative partnerships between the municipality and the community within a ward and Council. They also adopt and approve the IDP, and lastly, Different local communities: they participate in identifying their most essential needs”.

In this context, it can be established, that all key informants are aware of and are familiar with various stakeholders who should be encouraged to engage in the IDP process. All stakeholders who reside or do business in a municipal area are welcome to participate in the IDP formulation and implementation process, according to the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) [8]. Furthermore, [10] indicate that community participation entails discussion and dialogue among many stakeholders to reach mutually beneficial decisions. As a result, it is critical to recognise each stakeholder’s role in developing their municipal area.

External and internal support from stakeholders

The IDP process to be conducted effectively requires different support and inputs from external and internal stakeholders. The theme that the researcher(s) asked the key informants was to indicate if they did receive support from external and internal stakeholders about the formulation and application of the IDP. The responses are indicated below.

From a theme posed, only one key informant was able to answer this with confidence. The key informant indicated that;

“Yes, the support is being received, although sector departments have poor participation due to no specific person, assigned to deal with planning”.

While the other Ward Councillors/Committee members indicated that;

“No, since they believe we are campaigning, our villagers are hesitant to engage in the IDP process. Others state that communities have lost faith in us, and they say we do not adequately represent them in the municipal councils. When public meetings are held, fewer members of our communities and traditional leaders show up”.

According to the data above, there is no universal agreement since some respondents’ state that they receive assistance from various stakeholders, while others state that they do not. An IDP, according to the researcher, is an integrative and participatory process that incorporates a wide range of stakeholders from start to finish in order to be effective and credible. As a result, the IDP, as stated in the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) [8], cannot be implemented in organisa-

tional silos since it needs the participation of many stakeholders. In addition, the Intergovernmental Relations Act (Act 13 of 2005) defines processes and mechanisms for collaboration among all three spheres of government [40]. According to [41], occasionally, district municipalities do not cooperate with local municipalities, while developing the IDP, which has a substantial influence on service delivery backlogs and can sometimes lead to a conflict of interests.

IDP Stages of participation

To be effective, an IDP ought to be an integrative and participatory process, involving several stakeholders from the initial stage to the end. The theme that was asked related to the participation of relevant stakeholders was whether stakeholders participate from the initial stage to the last stage of the IDP process. The responses are indicated below.

The key informant, in short, indicated that;

“Yes, they participate in all the phases of the IDP, from the analysis to the approval phase. Because it is a legal obligation, all key stakeholders are urged to participate in the IDP process. Stakeholders are invited to register on the municipal database prior to each fiscal year and are encouraged to attend meetings. However, participation from stakeholders is always low. Our Ward Councillors and Ward Committees have excused this low attendance by stating that most individuals do not have access to transportation to meetings”.

On the other hand, the Ward Councillors/Committee members concurred that;

“Yes, all stakeholders are encouraged to take part in the IDP. However, successful involvement in the IDP process varies depending on the stakeholders’ interests. For instance, community members frequently exhibit interest only in service delivery meetings, whereas organised business people frequently show an interest only in business and tenders related problems”.

In this regard, the researcher(s) contends that it is critical to remember that the municipality is required by law to include all applicable stakeholders in the IDP process from the beginning to the end to ensure that all inputs are consolidated from various perspectives.

Role understanding

The other theme of the key informants was whether they were convinced that all the relevant stakeholders in the IDP process fully understood their specific role. The theme is intended to understand from the key informant’s perspective if they believe that different stakeholders fully understand their specific role in the IDP process or attend the IDP meetings because they are encouraged or invited.

The responses from the key informants were that;

“No, I don’t think so. The IDP process is structured in phases, but community stakeholders will often comment or ask a question during a different phase. They always raise needs even though it has already been captured. The other thing is they do not understand the cooperative governance”.

In this regard, the researcher(s) believes that municipalities should give a roadshow, so that residents are aware of their unique duties and expectations. This will help to encourage effective and active involvement and is also reinforced by legislation, which states that all South African municipalities must adopt an IDP process, which is a municipality’s strategic development plan, and ensure that community members are actively involved, as per section 25(1) of the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000), and 152(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, (1996) [7, 8].

Transportation of stakeholders to the IDP meetings

The researchers’ theme for the key informants was whether the municipality organised transportation for the IDP meetings. The responses are indicated below.

In response to the above, the one of the key informant indicated that;

“Yes, transport is organised to IDP Representative Forums because many stakeholders are not working. This also incentivises them to participate”.

The Ward Councillors/Ward Committee members indicated that;

“No, because there is no funding, communities or stakeholders are not provided transportation to IDP meetings or other public meetings. The meetings are held in conveniently located community halls”.

In this regard, the results show no consensus among the respondents. Therefore, the researcher(s) emphasises that the Tzaneen municipal area needs to urge communities to participate in municipal development affairs actively.

Areas that need to be improved in the IDP process

The researcher(s) asked all the key informants to outline any specific areas in the formulation and implementation of the IDP process that needed to be improved.

Only one key informant could answer this question with confidence in response to the question above. The key informant indicated that;

“There is a need to educate the communities on their roles and functions in the IDP process and an oversight role in the project management”.

The researcher(s) contends that education should be prioritised to ensure active and effective community participation in the IDP process. In the Tzaneen municipal area, the Greater Tzaneen Municipality IDP 2021/2022 indicates that most of the citizens in the area do not advance significantly in terms of education and that it limits their knowledge and understanding of development [28]. At the same time, the study, conducted by [42] at Ticklyline Village in the Tzaneen municipal area, found that schools are in a poor state, and there is no access to health education. Furthermore, [42] indicates that the level of education of the beneficiaries is one of the factors that shape active community participation. Thus, it is argued, that a roadshow should be provided to encourage active and fruitful community participation.

4. Discussion

This section is intended to provide an extensive discussion of empirical and theoretical results. The continued lack of stakeholders' participation is a great challenge in the 21st century. According to the conceptual study, conducted by [5], community participation is a “scant in local government developmental matters, especially in land-use planning and holistic, integrated development planning”. In this study, it was found, that 56 % of the four hundred (400) participants believed that they had not been consulted in the IDP process, while a minority of the participants, amounting to 44 %, believed that they had been consulted. The persistence of a lack of consultation with relevant stakeholders undermines democracy. Different pieces of legislation are not upheld even though they recommend stakeholders' involvement in municipal development planning. For instance, “section 28 of the Municipal Systems Act requires that the stakeholders should be consulted on the planning process and should also be informed once the plan is officially approved” [8, 43] According to [42] study, the challenges of participation are influenced by officials who make decisions on behalf of communities and believe that communities are less capable of making independent and fruitful decisions about their projects. [36] further share the sentiment in their study that policies and decisions are enacted and made without stakeholders' involvement. The study by [44] revealed that “community consultations do not have enough of an impact on development priorities and decisions.” This problem is emphasised where scholars argue that the IDP process normally extends over 8 to 10 months, but that stakeholders' involvement happens only at a few discrete points during this period or not at all”. [45], cited in [43], caution that participatory techniques will fail if stakeholders consider they are being used to legitimise already made decisions or the outcomes of their efforts will be insignificant in the long term. Similarly, it is revealed by [41], that “consultation is not adequate and it is often done wrongly. Thus, it is further empirically found, that communities' opinions in the preparation and implementation of the IDP process, especially at the initial phase and identification phase, are generally not valued, and communities often isolate themselves from effective participation” [41].

It is also found, that there is low participation of stakeholders in the IDP stages or phases due to a lack of transport to meetings. The result above concurs with the study, conducted by [46]. To understand the meeting attendance level or manner in the IDP, meetings are attended by “a very small number of people”. Therefore, it can be affirmed, that there is a lack of interest or knowledge of community participation processes [46] cited in [11]. However, it can be argued, that a lack of interest or participation occurs because communities have little knowledge of these meetings, and the municipalities are not even educating the communities. Equally, the above study's findings by [46] can be compared with the results

of this study. In this study, it is found, that the majority of the participants, amounting to 21.8 %, disagree, and 26.3 % strongly disagree that they are not satisfied with the degree of engagement in the IDP process. Therefore, it can be concluded in this study, that there is an under-involvement of stakeholders in the IDP process. There is also a poor understanding of the communities' roles in the IDP process. Stakeholders have lost faith in their representatives because they believe that their representatives only care about them during elections or campaigns. It is further found, that there is little if no external and internal support from different stakeholders. The key informant indicated that no responsible person is assigned to deal with the IDP process at provincial departments through the Intergovernmental Relations Act (Act 13 of 2005) requires collaborative and participative governance [40].

Limitation and Prospect Studies

This study was limited to the areas under the Greater Tzaneen Municipality's (GTM) jurisdiction. However, the findings of this study are applicable to other South African municipalities because there is poor community participation in many municipalities. Many empirical and theoretical studies have been conducted on the IDP process and community participation across the world, including in South Africa, to understand the correlation. In other words, this study is certainly not a new contribution to the focus area. However, what makes the study unique and interesting is that it was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic where public participation was impossible to many rural municipalities. Another limitation, encountered in this study, was the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced the researcher to use electronic closed-ended questionnaires to collect empirical data. For future studies, it is recommended, that a similar study be conducted in other South African municipalities to have more information and knowledge on the application of the IDP process for improved community participation. The proposed further study can go to an extent to assess the challenges, faced by local government practitioners in effectively implementing an IDP.

5. Conclusion

This study has comprehended key stakeholders, involved in the IDP process, as a utensil for improved community participation using the Tzaneen municipal area. This study emphasises how difficult it is to design and implement the IDP process. A consultation process should be promoted to support meaningful design and execution of the IDP process. A consultative approach necessitates the active participation of several important stakeholders at numerous levels of analysis and decision-making. The IDP process must guarantee that all stakeholders are included when and where needed. Based on the findings of this study, the study recommends the following;

– The study recommends that municipalities always adhere to different pieces of legislation, governing local government, when designing and implementing the IDP process. For instance, the Municipal Systems Act (2000) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) require municipalities to actively involve stakeholders in the planning process to provide municipal services sustainably and satisfactorily.

– It has been discovered, that the majority of the respondents are not satisfied with the manner and level of their representatives. Therefore, there is a need to elect ethical and proactive leadership to prioritise stakeholders' needs and aspirations without any compromise and bias towards other stakeholders.

– The study also recommends that the *Batho Pele* principles be applied to all municipal functions and operations. The *Batho Pele* principles may guarantee a harmonious relationship between the municipality and its constituencies. Stakeholders will have reasonable expectations regarding service delivery due to effective consultation and other *Batho Pele*. For instance, communities should be treated with courtesy to feel belonging and entitled to the municipality's decisions.

– It is found, that there is low participation of stakeholders. Thus, municipalities should acclimate to the new era or risk being left behind to ensure community participation in the IDP process. Municipalities should acclimatise to the emergency of the 4IR and COVID-19 pandemics, which have changed how things used to be done.

– The municipalities should provide the roadshow to promote effective, timely participation and understanding of the whole consultation and approval process of the IDP. The roadshow should also educate different stakeholders on municipal functions, such as the IDP.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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