



Original Research

Examining Community Engagement Strategies in South African Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality

Lusanda Beauty Juta, North West University, South Africa

Kazeem Oyedele Lamidi, North West University, South Africa

Received: 04/03/2023; **Accepted:** 11/20/2023; **Published:** 12/18/2023

Abstract: This study examines community engagement strategies with a view to exploring whether they have contributed to either satisfaction or dissatisfaction by the municipality residents in South Africa. The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality was selected as a case study because of evidence-based examples of the community engagement strategies used during policy and decision-making processes for community needs. It draws a case study from six Cities of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality. The study adopts a qualitative research approach using focus group discussion as a data collection method and content analysis for data analysis using tabular presentation. The study finds that the purpose of community engagement strategies in public policy and decision-making is not about anticipated and unanticipated results but about the community members being engaged in the affairs affecting their lives. The study concludes that the community engagement process should be open and transparent within each South African community.

Keywords: *Community Engagement, Municipality, Community Engagement Strategies, Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality*

Introduction

Community engagement is an essential pillar for building and sustaining governance throughout the world. It creates a platform for critical engagement between the citizens and the government. Prior to 1994, according to the Public Service Commission (2018, 12), the practice of critical engagement was described as follows:

Looked down upon by an insular and self-perpetuating state. The apartheid-led Government stifled public participation and excluded the vast majority of people from governance and service delivery matters. With the democratic transition beginning in 1994, there was a clear commitment to consultation and engagement of citizens as service users of the public service. (Public Service Commission 2008, 12)

Community engagement is also about enhancing the democratic legitimacy of local government and developing community leadership. Community engagement is an exercise

that enables people to influence policy decisions and participate in the actions that affect their lives. Albert and Passmore (2008, 5) indicated that “community engagement goes beyond public policy decisions by including initiatives from outside that arena, such as community-led initiatives. It includes action as well as political influence. It also encompasses the need for governance systems and organizational structures to emphasis effective policy and decision making at community level.”

Community engagement strategies in South Africa “follow a process of inclusive participation that supports mutual respect of values, strategies, and actions for an authentic partnership of people affiliated with or self-identified by geographic proximity, special interest, and similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of the community of focus” (Bredow 2015, 21). Community engagement strategies can also be viewed “as a core element of any effort involving communities in the municipalities” (Thompson et al. 2021, 443). Beyond community involvement in decision-making, the strategies can also be examined with a view to understanding the benefits and impact of policy- and decision-making at the municipal level. It thus forms the focus of this article. It is imperative to evaluate whether the community engagement strategies have contributed to either the satisfaction or the dissatisfaction demonstrated by the municipality residents in South Africa. The expected outcome is therefore to simplify the model of community engagement in terms of human interaction to aid public policy formulation.

The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality was selected as a case study and the research was conducted in six areas: Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Durbanville, Mitchell’s Plain, Phillippi, and Nyanga East, which are under the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality. These areas have evidence-based examples of the community engagement strategies used during the decision-making process for community needs. This study aims to produce new knowledge through the development and recommendation of a community engagement model. This model would facilitate the improvement of community engagement strategies in public policy- and decision-making by placing a strong emphasis on positive relationships and partnerships to be built by both the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality and community members. To achieve this goal, this article examines strategies applied to community engagement to determine whether there exist benefits and impacts of community engagement strategies in the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality.

Community Engagement: Values and Consequences

Community engagement promotes societal inclusion in processes of policy formulation. One of the reasons for favoring community engagement is a decline in societal trust in terms of the motives of industrial and regulatory actors, with regard to both policy formulation and policy implementation. By the same token, it facilitates an increased societal demand for transparency and inclusivity in processes of decision-making that play decisive roles. Emery,

Mulder, and Frewer (2015, 11) suggest that “proponents of community engagement believe that consideration of a broader range of expertise for assessing several options for policy formulation could provide better outcomes because the evidence is strengthened.” Community engagement includes joint fact-finding, policy dialogues, negotiated rulemaking, blue-ribbon commissions, summits, community partnerships, and co-management of projects or programs. Engagement should represent interested groups in cases of partnerships or co-management of projects so that stakeholders with local knowledge might be included (King and Cruickshank 2010). Despite the optimistic estimations about the possibilities of engagement, Thompson et al. (2021), in an extensive review, have shown that engagement bears advantages and risks. Among the advantages of engagement are mutual trust in decisions; integration of various interests and opinions; optimum implementation of plans and projects; and public acceptance of the decisions.

Montevecchi (2011) notes that many individuals use the term community or public engagement to mean different things and thus advocate that the term community engagement be used more effectively and appropriately. Therefore, it is important to be clear about what community engagement means in a particular circumstance and to plan and implement engagement processes carefully. Although it is commonly agreed that citizens’ participation in decision-making processes is dynamic, when policies are formulated between different levels of government, civil society institutions and community leaders still need help finding ways to meaningfully engage with the citizens they represent (Friedline, Wood, and Morrow 2022). However, government alone cannot solve policy issues; instead, the whole community needs to be engaged in the process of decision-making in multifaceted issues that needs multidimensional solutions (Mirza, Vodden, and Collins 2012).

Lenihan (2012) suggests that organizers, both in government and the public sector, should view community engagement as a multi-level model using a variety of forms. This includes engagement in policy formulation partnerships in planning local services and engagement with initiatives. In addition, community engagement can also be considered a new process between the government and communities to promote clear collaboration and an inclusive, transparent, accountable, and bottom-up approach (Lenihan 2012).

Gwynn (2013) suggests that community engagement empowers communities when provided with the opportunity to engage with their council and other municipal officials with regard to the community’s vision, including the types of services that should be provided to them. Consequently, it is also an avenue through which community members engage in policy formulation and decision-making. Gwynn (2013) also states that community engagement means the community’s involvement in decisions based on services to be delivered and related policies and strategies. Robertson (2015), supporting Gwynn’s position (2013), notes that in community engagement, it is believed that people should have and want to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. Community engagement is a process of

collaboration with groups of individuals by geographic closeness aimed at addressing similar issues that affect them.

Community Engagement Model

Effective community engagement will largely assist the government in making more informed decisions and enable an improvement in the quality of services since communication and collaboration with the municipality will improve (Robertson 2015). During community engagement, municipal officials get a platform to use the mechanism of collaboration to share which services are available. The municipality prioritizes its policies according to its own determination (Friedline, Wood, and Morrow 2022). Moreover, community engagement provides a way of strengthening current practices and democratic institutions to bring meaning to people's participation and promote a two-way dialogue between citizens and the government. In this way, the quality of decisions will improve due to understanding and the receipt of diverse perspectives and potential solutions from community engagement.

Furthermore, Robertson (2015) provides the following criteria in regard to meaningful community engagement:

- **Clarity of Purpose:** A clear provision on the role to be played by participants during the engagement process should be considered. Participants should understand when and how their role will influence and change planning on action policy development. The time invested by all participants should be valuable. Opportunities for participation should be flexible, appropriate to the scale of the action item or planning effort, and responsive to the needs of the participants (Montanini and Ngubelanga 2023). Community members should be conscious of and understand the tangible benefits of their participation.
- **Reflective of Diversity:** During community engagement, demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, ability, socioeconomic status, and place of residence can affect interests and values (Robertson 2015). A community engagement process should represent the community's demographic diversity and make tangible efforts to allow for that diversity to be reflected.
- **Based on Credible, Balanced Information:** Participants must be provided with balanced information concerning major elements of any issue so that they can enhance their standpoints, voice their points of view, and better understand the points of view of other stakeholders (Babaei, Locatelli, and Sainati 2023). Community engagement efforts provide an opportunity for the community to influence the policies and plan content that will play an essential role in state agency decisions.

- **Organized and Facilitated:** To maintain a meaningful community engagement through consultation and involvement processes, the facilitator should be someone whose role is to encourage participation that is respectful and equitable (Robertson 2015). This will enable discussions on important issues by participants to stay focused and provide sufficient time.
- **Communication of Results:** Feedback and results must be shared with the community. Communication should also reflect and include experiences shared during learning and multi-directional problem-solving, as well as reasons for the decision taken (Lofton et al. 2022).

This can be achieved only when clarity is provided on the purpose of engagement and the limits of what the process is intended to achieve. Robertson (2015) suggests, therefore, that community engagement is a process that identifies the value of creating ongoing long-term relationships for the benefit of the greater community. Community engagement thus provides the opportunity to incorporate an interactive, collective problem-solving element into the process, capitalizing on the collective strengths of various stakeholders.

Strategies of Community Engagement in South African Municipalities

Babaei, Locatelli, and Sainati (2023, 450) asserted that “community participation in decision-making is fundamental to enable people to exercise their democratic rights.” In South Africa, Plessing (2017, 75) noted that “the right to participate in community activities is entrenched in the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.” Section 19 of this 1996 Constitution declares that:

Every citizen is free to make political choices and participate in political processes. Citizens’ rights in a democracy are counterbalanced with the responsibilities of citizenship. This balance is the essential responsibility to uphold the policies designed by Government. Once voted into power, Government is expected to deliver the services it has promised. Community engagement is critical to this process. (Republic of South African Constitution 1996, 108)

South Africa has drawn increasingly on notions of engagement, focusing on opening up, widening, broadening, and extending opportunities for citizens to be engaged in deepening democratic practice. Rhetoric is replete in policy spaces and political spaces or arenas (Kim 2022). Community engagement requires “increasing control over and access to resources and regulative societal institutions on the part of individuals and groups previously excluded from such control. Participation should be an end in itself in deepening South Africa’s democracy and empowering its citizens” (McEwan 2005, 970). Community engagement is described as:

The involvement of citizens in a wide range of activities that relate to the formulation and implementation of policy, including the determination of levels of service, budget priorities, and the acceptability of physical construction projects to orient government programs toward community needs, as well as, build support and encourage a sense of cohesiveness within society. (Babooa 2008, 17)

South Africa has introduced the “People first” model of *Batho Pele* principles that were established in the 1997 White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery. The document epitomizes the evolution of public participation in South Africa. Therefore, since 1994, the South African government has taken several initiatives to effect community engagement (Friedline, Wood, and Morrow 2022). These include community engagement strategies such as “Ward Committees meetings, Ward Councilors meetings, Open Council Meetings, Izimbizo, Exco-meets the people, Public hearings, Community Development Workers, Citizen Satisfaction Surveys (CSS), IDP Forums, Premier excellence awards (PEA), media related and Citizens Forums (CF), and Non-Governmental-Organisations (NGOs) activities” (Public Service Commission 2008, 27). All these various methods are facilitative of practical implementation in community engagement and, furthermore, created a platform for critical engagement between the government and local communities. These community engagement methods are explained as follows:

Ward Committees

In South Africa, most municipal areas are demarcated into wards with councilors for local government elections. Robertson (2015, 5) noted that “local Government is the sphere of Government that interacts with ordinary people most directly.” It is for this reason that the Constitution (1996, section 19) stipulates that:

All municipalities must encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the affairs of Local Government to address the need for structured public participation, the council can be combined with either the ward or sub-council participatory system of Government that enables public participation in the affairs of local Government. (Municipal Structures Act, 117 section 74 (a) 1998)

The ward committees are statutory bodies created under the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998. The purpose of ward committees is to assist the democratically elected ward representative (the councilor) in carrying out his or her mandate. Ward committee members are members of the community representing the needs of the people in the areas where they live. Chapter 4 (part 4) of the Act “requires that municipalities must establish ward committees, with the objective of enhancing participatory democracy in the local Government” (Public Service Commission 2008, 27). Also, community development workers (CDWs) are “community-based resource persons who collaborate with other community

workers to help fellow community members obtain information and resources from government departments. The aim of CDWs is to facilitate community participation in government initiatives” (Public Service Commission 2008, 27).

The ward engagement system of municipal government in South Africa allows for “the establishment of ward committees to facilitate community engagement. Ward committees can also improve communication between the municipal council and local communities, identify community needs, and tune municipal programs to accommodate local conditions. This gives residents a more direct voice in their governance” (Santiago and Ivery 2020, 198). It enables community engagement in municipalities “by providing a vehicle for local communities to highlight their views and needs to be acknowledged by the municipal council” (Department of Provincial and Local Government 2005).

Ward Councilors

Thornhill (2008, 503) notes that:

Ward councilors are trusted to represent the interests of the communities in the council and promote the involvement of community groups in the design and delivery of municipal programs. Council members at the municipal level are also in charge of making sure that the way public services are delivered aligns with the desires, interests and preferences of the communities to whom they are required to be offered.

Additionally, the ward councilors are therefore required “to promote participation from important role-players and stakeholders in their particular portfolio committees” (Kim 2022, 10). Ward council members are also prepared to speak with stakeholders and other relevant key local players on socioeconomic planning procedures and political restrictions.

Open Council Meetings

Local Government, Section 19: Municipal Systems (2000) (Act 32 of 2000) stipulates that:

Council meetings and their committees should be open to everyone concerned and the media. The Municipal Manager is expected to be transparent to the local communities by providing notice of the time, date, and venue of every ordinary and special meeting of the council to the local communities. Opportunities must also be accorded and transparent about how stakeholders and role-players are engaged and contribute to the council’s planning processes. Montanini and Ngubelanga (2023, 9) illustrate that “When the Municipality invites the local community to submit written comments or representations on any matter before the council, it is the responsibility of the Municipality to state in the invitation that any person who

cannot write may come to the offices of the Municipality where an official will assist that person to transcribe comments or representations.” Monthly newsletters could also be preferred to emphasize and communicate key decisions taken by the council. The council may, additionally, lobby local newspapers to run regular columns on council affairs and community matters. Regular briefings on the council’s challenges, priorities, constraints, and decisions could be implemented to promote the dissemination of information and community engagement.

According to Section B (1.3) of the White Paper on Local Government (1998), municipal councils play a central role in promoting local democracy.

The *Izimbizo*

The *Izimbizo* implies:

Political leadership of Government, including national, provincial, local Government, and bureaucratic officials holding public meetings to engage with communities on government policies and service delivery issues. Cabinet ministers also conduct their ministerial *Izimbizos* wherein national ministers and provincial members of executive councils (MECs) embark on public meetings to engage citizens on matters of their respective portfolios. (Public Service Commission 2008, 27)

The Executive Committee (EXCO)

The executive committee “is a provincial initiative undertaken by the premier and executive council members. It comprises community engagement on government policy and service delivery issues” (Public Service Commission 2008, 26). Again, the public hearings method is “a different type of communication that is organized by other organs of the state. The organs are Parliament and the National Council of Provinces (NCoP), supposedly to involve the general community in policy and service delivery objectives.” (Public Service Commission 2008, 27)

Citizen Satisfaction Surveys

Citizen Satisfaction Surveys (CSS) are used as follows:

To engage with citizens and to establish their views and expectations on service delivery. It is a means of collecting citizens’ feedback on the quality and adequacy of public services directly from the service users. Furthermore, CSSs provide a thorough basis and set a proactive agenda for citizens and the Government to engage in dialogue to improve service delivery to the communities. (Stuart 2022, 6)

Most departments apply CSSs to solicit feedback from the citizens on the quality of the services they render. The Public Service Commission (2008, 27) notes that “since 2001, it has been instrumental in obtaining citizens’ views on an annual basis with its launch of citizens’ satisfaction surveys.”

Citizens Forums (CFs)

Citizens Forums (CFs) are a “mechanism to facilitate community engagement in public service. The overall purpose of CFs is to evaluate the delivery of particular services throughout the country and to enable the active involvement of people affected by government programs in service delivery improvement processes” (Public Service Commission 2008, 27). Bredow (2015) affirms that community engagement focuses on the interactive relationship between policy professionals and community residents. Bredow (2015), furthermore, cites the Arnstein’s (1969) “ladder of participation” as a benchmark for policymakers and practitioners promoting community engagement (Tritter and McCallum 2006). Arnstein (1969) posits that citizen participation is the mechanism through which “haves-nots” take decision-making control from the “haves.” Minkler (2012) postulates that focusing on the inclusion of community engagement in decision-making pays more attention to who is at the table, whether that is those who live in the affected area (Minkler 2012), and overlooks certain groups that are underrepresented in political activity (Bloemraad 2006).

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs in South Africa play important educational roles in the democratic arena. NGOs educate community members about their rights to engage in policymaking decisions. The 1995 coordination between the South African National Non-Governmental Coalition (SANGOCO) and NGOs contributed to “ensuring the contribution of civil society (community) engagement in policy formulation by the Government. South African Non-Governmental Organization Coalition is viewed as the leading umbrella body of NGOs in the Southern African region” (Simpson 2010, 5). SANGOCO is “a body that represents diverse organizations from a range of developmental fields” (Public Service Commission 2008, 27). Local democracy is now being practiced by NGOs in South Africa as follows:

- The Electoral Institute of Southern Africa (EISA) is “an organization that took responsibility for putting in place a local government program” (Kim 2022, 9). The entity in charge of implementing a local government program is the EISA. The organization facilitates residents’ participation in life-affecting decision-making processes. (Thompson et al. 2021);
- In South Africa, the Open Democracy Advice Centre (ODAC) is “a division of a non-profit organization. The promotion of transparent democracy is the primary

goal. It promotes an accountability-focused business and governmental culture. Additionally, it helps South Africans exercise their human rights” (Montanini and Ngubelanga 2023, 11);

- The Centre for Public Participation (CPP): This organization wants “to create communities that are knowledgeable and capable. This would actively interact with government procedures and institutions that are responsible and accessible. This would therefore lead to the sensible conception and execution of sensitive public policies” (Babaei, Locatelli, and Sainati 2023, 449); and
- Democracy Development Programme (DDP) is “a nonpartisan group which helps to develop the ability of both urban and rural communities. This is to guarantee that both levels have the necessary tools to participate meaningfully in the social change of South Africa” (Lofton et al. 2022, 17).

It is acknowledged that in order to lessen disparities in the allocation of power and services, local governments must provide opportunities for community involvement. This promotes receptiveness to the requirements of the community. One may argue that municipalities are the most accessible means of fostering community involvement (Santiago and Ivery 2020). Thus, community members can feel the need to be empowerment and immediately engaged. Municipalities should be open to allowing community members to practice their rights and the opportunity to act on issues affecting their lives. Community-wide recognition of the ability to deliberate on the most important issues facing a community is necessary.

Municipal authorities also rely on community members’ feedback to remain up-to-date on community concerns and to understand community members’ preferences. Decision-makers continue to engage the community because they rely on its members for information and opinions. Community people must be made aware of the services provided by municipal authorities (Montanini and Ngubelanga 2023). In South Africa, developing municipalities and building positive relationships between themselves and the community is a critical function of responsible and accountable municipal leaders.

The House of Commons (2013) suggests that during community engagement in policy formulation, the government must manage its expectations about community engagement. The community’s involvement in policy formulation is to modify the relationship between the government and the community through ideas. Community engagement can bear several advantages for policymaking, including strengthening the democratic legitimacy of policy by ensuring that citizens can take and influence the decisions that affect their lives; by increasing the accountability of government by ensuring that citizens are aware and can respond to the decisions that government takes; and improving the quality of policy by ensuring that the broadest possible range of knowledge, views, and values are present in the process as well as that policy is in harmony with public values (House of Commons 2013).

Creighton (2008, 4) notes that “community engagement is the process by which public concerns, needs, and values are incorporated into Government and corporate decision-making. It is a two-way communication and interaction with the overall goal of improving decisions supported by the public.” According to Head (2008), systems of representative government focus on the electoral process and the ongoing competition by parties for public office. This formal process of institutionalized democracy is no longer regarded as sufficient by many groups of citizens and leaders of NGOs. There has been a renewed focus on dialogue between the government and citizens and deliberation among stakeholders in deciding priorities and actions (Stuart 2022). Governmental decision-making has always taken account of organized elites, but the new approaches emphasize processes for the inclusion of broad constituencies and disadvantaged groups (Head 2008).

Community engagement is not something that can be done half-heartedly but requires total commitment and partnership. It is not good enough for government to talk about the importance of open and trusted partnerships only to hide its funding decisions behind complex bureaucracies, necessitating the freedom of information request to reveal them (Briggs 2010).

Methodology

The study approach selected the qualitative method, and its techniques used only focus group interviews to gather in-depth information from Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Mitchells’ Plain, Phillipi, Nyanga East, and Durbanville in the Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality. Hence, the research used focused samples to collect data. The sample included six City officials who had knowledge of the case investigated in this study and twenty wards from Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Mitchells’ Plain, Phillipi, Nyanga East, and Durbanville. This approach is a method of inquiry employed in many different academic disciplines, like the social sciences.

This study’s target population was Khayelitsha (thirteen wards), Gugulethu (five wards) and Mitchell’s Plain (seven wards), Durbanville (one ward), Nyanga East (two wards), Phillipi (two wards), and the six City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipal officials who are responsible for the municipal legislative and policy formulation. Sampling was selected from Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Durbanville, Mitchell’s Plain, Phillipi, and Nyanga East areas of the City of Town Metropolitan municipality, which clearly defined the entire population of the study (Mouton 2008). In the focus group procedure, eighteen wards, including ward committees, participated. In fifteen focus group interviews, the researcher maintained ten interviewees, while in three focus group interviews, the researcher maintained nine, seven, and eight interviewees. All of the wards selected in the sampling are part of the population and affected areas regarding the case investigated in this study.

Focus group interviews were employed to generate discussions and reveal the meanings people read into the discussed topic and how people negotiated those meanings. Focus group

interviews generated diversity and differences, either within or between groups (Wassenaar 2008; Stuart 2022). Furthermore, the researcher believes that focus groups effectively produce data on a group's cultural norms and generate broad outlines of issues of concern to the subgroups represented. Therefore, the researcher employed focus group interviews to collect primary data for the study from Khayelitsha, Gugulethu, Mitchell's Plain, Phillipi, and Nyanga East, including their informal settlements and Durbanville. This necessitated the presentation of data in the different sections where the interviews were conducted. Any scientific research will inevitably have limitations. In the social sciences, when researchers are closely linked with the topic they are studying, this is frequently utilized. There were several instances of rescheduled interview sessions in this research project. In order to include participants of the chosen research groups, the Focus Group Discussion sessions were rescheduled as well. The accomplishment of the study's goals has not been hampered by these restrictions.

Tracy (2013) highlighted that in qualitative analysis, the researcher has a responsibility to transform data into findings and involves recording, transcribing, and organizing the information collected from interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials in order to derive meaning from it. To analyze data in this study, data coding was employed. Data coding is the process of labeling, compiling, organizing, and sorting data. Data coding allowed the researcher to summarize and synthesize what is happening on data with consideration of research objectives. In linking data collection and interpreting the data, coding became the basis for developing the analysis (Centre for Evaluation and Research 2012). Tables were also used in the study to examine data from various City of Cape Town Municipality wards.

Results and Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis focused on data obtained during focus group interviews in the selected wards from different areas, including Khayelitsha, Mitchell's Plain, Phillipi, Gugulethu, Nyanga East, and Durbanville in the City of Cape Town Municipality. Three pertinent questions guided this process of data collection: (1) At what stage does community engagement take place during the formulation of public policies? (2) What is the benefit of these strategies used by the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality to the wards? (3) What is the impact of these strategies on community engagement in your wards? The qualitative analysis was based on the responses gathered from the three questions.

Interviewer: Question 1—At what stage does community engagement takes place during the formulation of public policies?

Responses from Khayelitsha focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: At the implementation stage. Some of the decisions taken, like projects, take place without community knowledge.

- Focus group 2: The draft is prepared and sent to communities at the draft stage. It is only that time the community is allowed to engage.
- Focus group 3: At the implementation stage. The partial community engagement is always about the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipal officials, not to benefit communities.
- Focus group 4: At the drafting stage.
- Focus group 5: At the developing stage.
- Focus group 6: At the drafting stage.
- Focus group 7: Drafting stage.

Responses from Gugulethu focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: At the drafting stage, there needs to be more consistency at times.
- Focus group 2: Draft stage.
- Focus group 3: At the drafting stage.

Responses from the Durbanville focus group (ward committee)

- Focus group: Draft stage, but no inputs from the community are considered.

Responses from Nyanga East focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: Development stage. There is no community engagement in the formulation of public policies.
- Focus group 2: Draft stage.

Responses from Phillipi focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: At the last stage, the community strikes against the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality.
- Focus group 2: Draft stage; the City of Cape Town Metropolitan does not use any community engagement during public policy formulation. As a community, we see policies being passed without our knowledge.

Responses from Mitchel's Plain focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: To our knowledge, community engagement is supposed to take place during the draft stage. In our areas, community engagement takes place during the implementation stage in the form of complaints from the community.
- Focus group 2: Community engagement does not take place in your area. The respondents further said that community members get to involve ourselves when activities take place in our community.
- Focus group 3: We are not engaged at any stage. The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality does not involve us in public policy formulation.

Analysis

Table 1 suggests that community engagement takes place during the development stage of the formulation of public policies. The table also reveals that other focus groups responded differently by saying it takes place during the implementation stage. Such respondents additionally noted that the City of Cape Town implemented projects that the community members were unaware of since they were not included during the drafting stage of public policy formulation. It was also noticed that communities do not really take part in drafting policies, as expected.

Table 1: Stage of Community Engagement

	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
<i>Khayelitsha Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Implementing stage Exclusion in decision-making	9 of 10
Focus group 2	Draft stage	8 of 20
Focus group 3	Partial engagement at the implementation stage	10
Focus group 4	Drafting stage	10
Focus group 5	Development stage	10
Focus group 6	Drafting stage	8
Focus group 7	Drafting stage	9 of 10
<i>Gugulethu Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Drafting stage	10
Focus group 2	Drafting stage	10
Focus group 3	Drafting stage	9 of 10
<i>Durbanville Focus Group</i>		
Focus group	Drafting stage Community input is not considered	9
<i>Nyanga East Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Development stage	10
Focus group 2	Drafting stage	10
<i>Phillipi Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Last stage	8
Focus group 2	Draft stage, not engaged	10
<i>Mitchell's Plain Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Implementation stage	10
Focus group 2	No community engagement	10
Focus group 3	No community engagement at any stage	10

Interviewer: Question 2—What is the benefit of these strategies used by the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality to the wards?

Responses from Khayelitsha focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: Benefits are limited due to a lack of community engagement.
- Focus group 2: There are no benefits. When strategies are properly applied, ward committees will gain knowledge about issues regarding our communities and be able to address the community members accordingly.
- Focus group 3: No benefits. Sometimes, community leaders fight with community members resulting from limited information from poor community engagement.
- Focus group 4: There are no benefits at all.
- Focus group 5: There are no benefits. Community members are not gaining any useful knowledge and empowerment as expected.
- Focus group 6: We benefit nothing.
- Focus group 7: No benefit at all.

Responses from Gugulethu focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: There is no benefit.
- Focus group 2: There are limited benefits and no proper strategies to communicate between the councilors and the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipal officials.
- Focus group 3: No benefit.

Responses from the Durbanville focus group (ward committee)

- Focus group: Limited benefits. We could benefit if proper strategies were used, including proper communications.

Responses from Nyanga East focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus groups 1: No benefits. If strategies were used, it would result in the empowerment of the community members and access to information.
- Focus group 2: There is no benefit since the strategies used are not even effective.

Responses from Phillipi focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: There is no benefit because we are still facing the same challenges that we faced five years ago.
- Focus group 2: No benefit at all.

Responses from Mitchel’s Plain focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: No benefits since our councilors do not understand the policies; therefore, the implementation is limited.
- Focus group 2: There are limited benefits.
- Focus group 3: We benefit nothing. The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality needs to prioritize community engagement.

Analysis

In Table 2, focus group responses maintained that there are no benefits since there is no proper application of the strategies. Councilors do not have proper information due to a lack of communication between the councilors and the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipal officials. If the strategies were applied inward, they could benefit the community by enhancing their knowledge and enabling the ward committees to provide accurate information to community members. The responses suggested that benefits are negative because even their leaders do not understand the policies and the strategies used.

Table 2: Benefits of Strategies

	Comments	Respondents
<i>Khayelitsha Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Limited benefits	10
Focus group 2	No benefits	10
Focus group 3	No benefits Fights caused by limited information	10
Focus group 4	No benefits	10
Focus group 5	No benefit No knowledge and empowerment	10
Focus group 6	No benefit	8
Focus group 7	No benefit	10
<i>Gugulethu Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	No benefit	10
Focus group 2	Limited benefit Improper implementation of strategies	10
Focus group 3	No benefit	9 of 10
<i>Durbanville Focus Group</i>		
Focus group	Limited benefits	9
<i>Nyanga East Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	No benefit	10
Focus group 2	No benefit; Challenges are still the same	10

<i>Phillipi Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	No benefit; Challenges remain	7
Focus group 2	No benefit	10
<i>Mitchell's Plain Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	No benefit	10
Focus group 2	Limited benefit	10
Focus group 3	No benefit	10

Interviewer: Question 3—What is the impact of these strategies on community engagement in your wards?

Responses from Khayelitsha focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: In most cases, community engagement strategies have a negative impact, which leads the community members to go on strike and cause division. The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality does not work together with the communities they represent.
- Focus group 2: There is always dissatisfaction due to the Democratic Alliance and African National Congress conflict.
- Focus group 3: The impact is negative.
- Focus group 4: There is a negative impact; community members, in most cases, fight with the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality.
- Focus group 5: There is a negative impact. The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality needs to respond better to community members.
- Focus group 6: There is a negative impact.
- Focus group 7: There is no positive impact.

Responses from Gugulethu focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: There is a negative impact because there is always a conflict between community members and City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipal officials.
- Focus group 2: The impact is negative.
- Focus group 3: There is no impact that can change our lives.

Responses from the Durbanville group (ward committee)

- Focus group: There is a negative impact since it does not bring any change to the community.

Responses from Nyanga East focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: The impact is only positive when the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipal officials communicate with ward councilors and respond well to the demands of the citizens.
- Focus group 2: The impact is negative since there is no change.

Responses from Phillipi focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: In our community, it has a negative impact; the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality only prioritizes areas of White people.
- Focus group 2: There is a negative impact. We wish the Mayor could be removed.

Responses from Mitchel’s Plain focus groups (ward committees)

- Focus group 1: There is no impact in their community.
- Focus group 2: There is a negative impact.
- Focus group 3: There is a negative impact; hence community members turn to violent protests.

Analysis

As shown in Table 3, the responses suggested that the strategies used have a negative impact since there is always a conflict between the Democratic Alliance members and African National Congress members. The impact is visible only when the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipal officials maintain good communication with ward councilors. The responses revealed that the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality has preferences when it comes to different areas of Cape Town.

Table 3: Impact of Strategies

	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
<i>Khayelitsha Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Negative impact No partnership between the Municipality and community members	10
Focus group 2	Always dissatisfaction The conflict between Democratic Alliance and African National Congress	9 of 10
Focus group 3	Negative impact	10
Focus group 4	Negative impact	10
Focus group 5	Negative impact	10
Focus group 6	Negative impact	8
Focus group 7	No positive impact	9 of 10

<i>Gugulethu Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Negative impact The conflict between official and community members	10
Focus group 2	Negative impact	10
Focus group 3	No impact to change lives	10
<i>Durbanville Focus Group</i>		
Focus group	Negative impact	8 of 9
<i>Nyanga East Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Limited positive impact	10
Focus group 2	Negative impact	10
<i>Phillipi Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Negative impact	7
Focus group 2	Negative impact	10
<i>Mitchell's Plain Focus Groups</i>		
Focus group 1	Negative impact	10
Focus group 2	Negative impact	10
Focus group 3	Negative impact	10

Discussion of Findings

The study found that community engagement strategies involve initiatives that suit the interests of both the policymakers and the beneficiaries. This concurs with Bredow's treatise (2015). Most of the respondents concur that there are concerns over the range of practices put in place for community engagement processes to bring an understanding of what constitutes meaningful community engagement. The study also found that there need to be more opportunities for community members to devolve responsibility. Community engagement is a legitimate right that advocates for community members to be involved in working in partnership with their government to be empowered. This view is supported by (Kerahroodi 2012; Mothepu 2013), who posit that deliberate and participatory democracy is essentially needed during public policy formulation. The study also found that good public policy formulation demands that all affected stakeholders, irrespective of their categories, must be considered using community engagement strategies to be able to evaluate the results. Booth and Seligson (2009) concur with this view by indicating that community engagement offers important benefits to the public policy formulation process and implementation. Furthermore, the study found that community engagement improves public understanding of the issues and implications of different choices. As a result, community engagement creates additional alternatives for the actions to be taken and decisions to be made in policies (Stuart 2022).

The study found that community engagement inputs can be translated into genuine contributions if community members have been involved in the decision-making that affects their lives. This view aligns with Thereson and Carlile (2011), who argue that local municipalities are bound to engage the community in all community affairs. Hence, the study reveals that community engagement in the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality needs to be improved. The community members need to have information about decisions taken regarding their communities, thus, the lack of understanding. The study also found that when community engagement is not correctly implemented, it delays the transformation, advancement, and development, affecting the lives of the community members.

Plessing (2017) noted that in order to achieve productive community engagement in public policy and decision-making processes, policymakers need a proper plan to obtain the desired results. The position concurs with the findings of this study. The study revealed that the purpose of community engagement strategies in public policy and decision-making is not about anticipated and unanticipated results but about the community members being engaged in the affairs affecting their lives. Even though it requires time and additional effort, it is important for policymakers to provide feedback to community members after any strategy of community engagement has been deployed (Thompson et al. 2021). This is done to ensure that all parties involved are made aware of the methodology of decisions taken and their potential to change their lives. The community engagement process should be an open and transparent process within each community. The study noted the importance of having a clear design of community engagement when formulating public policy to support flexibility during the implementation. The study has shown that practices and strategies of community engagement are not well followed in the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality. The style of meetings is not clear in terms of the outcomes and fails to accommodate cultural diversity while meetings are inaccessible (Friedline, Wood, and Morrow 2022). Another finding is that the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality needs to be more inclusive. For example, during the meetings, blind and deaf people are not attended to, and neither are the language requirements of different tribes. This view is supported by Robertson (2015). The respondents expressed the need for mutual understanding and trust between the communities and City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipal officials as part of community engagement.

Conclusion

The study examined strategies applied to promote and improve community engagement in public policy formulation in the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality. The responses to this objective reflected similar opinions. Some respondents suggested that if the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality could appropriately apply strategies of community engagement, positive results and benefits could be achieved. Given the way community engagement strategy is taking place in public policy and decision-making,

community service delivery cannot be improved. During public policy and decision-making, the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality inform the community about their progress and achievement in planning for the communities with very little contribution from the affected communities. Therefore, the communities feel that the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality only provides information, rather than engaging the communities in affairs that directly affect their lives. The responses also suggested that the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality needs to apply a two-way exchange of ideas since community engagement expresses the perception of communities as beneficiaries and addresses the possibility of community members being agents of change in their communities. It was further acknowledged that the quality of community engagement depends mainly on the community members since there are always disturbances that occur during community engagement.

This study recommends a model of community engagement that can promote the centrality of public policy formulation. The evidence obtained from both primary and secondary data presented in the study has influenced the recommendation of this model. The model indicates how the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality can improve community engagement in public policy and decision-making. This model can be used with the existing community engagement strategies applied in the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality. The model adopts simple community strategies, namely, informing, consulting, involving, and collaborating. It identifies that government cannot make policy decisions alone, thus highlighting the need for several stakeholders to be involved in public policy and decision-making. The model thus recommends the inclusion of two approaches, deliberate and participatory democracy. The characteristics of inclusiveness obtained in these two approaches will assist local authorities in realizing how community engagement in public policy affects decision-making and outcomes.

AI Acknowledgment

Generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were not used in any way to prepare, write, or complete essential authoring tasks in this manuscript.

Informed Consent

The author has obtained informed consent from all participants.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Albert, Albert, and Passmore Eleanor. 2008. "Public Value and Participation: A Literature Review for the Scottish Government." <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2008/03/public-value-participation-literature-review-scottish-government/documents/0057753-pdf/0057753-pdf/govscot%3Adocument>.
- Arnstein, Sherry R. 1969. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation." *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35 (4): 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>.
- Babaei, Ata, Giorgio Locatelli, and Tristano Sainati. 2023. "Local Community Engagement as a Practice: An Investigation of Local Community Engagement Issues and Their Impact on Transport Megaprojects' Social Value." *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business* 16 (3): 448–474. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-10-2022-0224>.
- Babooa, Kumar. 2008. *Public Participation in the Making and Implementation of Policy in Mauritius with Reference to Port Louis' Local Government*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Bloemraad, Irene. 2006. "Becoming a Citizen in the United States and Canada: Structured Mobilization and Immigrant Political Incorporation." *Social Forces* 85 (2): 667–695. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2007.0002>.
- Booth, John, and Mitchell Seligson. 2009. "Legitimacy and Political Participation in Eight Latin American Nations." Presented at the Midwest Political Science Meeting, Chicago, April 2–4, 2009.
- Bredow, Lowerson. 2015. "Practicing Community Engagement: Engaging Contradictions in Inclusion and Exclusion in Collaborative Planning and Policymaking." PhD diss., University of California.
- Briggs, Robert. 2010. "International Affairs." *Royal Institute of International Affairs* 86 (4): 971–981. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40865006>.
- Centre for Evaluation and Research. 2012. *Review of Ethics Principles and Guidance in Evaluation and Research*. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/DFID-Ethics-Principles-Report.pdf>.
- Creighton, Isiah. 2008. "What Is Public Administration?" <https://068057211nov98.xn--80adakaf4bu.xn--p1ai/?dclid=CKbsws-5joMDFeIOBgAdXWMPgA>.
- Department of Provincial and Local Government. 2005. *Ward Committee Resource Book: Best Practices & Lessons Learnt*. East London, South Africa: Arfesis-Corplan.
- Emery, Steven B., Henk A. J. Mulder, and Lynn J. Frewer. 2015. "Maximizing the Policy Impacts of Public Engagement: A European Study." *Science, Technology & Human Values* 40 (3): 421–444. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0162243914550319>.
- Friedline, Terri, Anna K. Wood, and So'phelia Morrow. 2022. "Financial Education as Political Education: A Framework for Targeting Systems as Sites of Change." *Journal of Community Practice* 30 (4): 463–481. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2022.2140737>.

- Gwynn, Ellen. 2013. *Community Engagement Policy, Leader, Ceredigion County Council*. RLIM. Cardiff, United Kingdom: Ceredigion Press.
- Head, Brian W. 2008. "Community Engagement: Participation on Whose Terms?" *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42 (3): 441–454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361140701513570>.
- House of Commons. 2013. *Public Administration Select Committee Public Engagement in Policymaking: Second Report of Session 2013–14*. London: The Stationery Office.
- Kerahroodi, Khaleghi. 2012. "Meaningful Community Engagement in Public-Private Partnerships: A Case Study of Manhattan's Downtown Redevelopment Project." PhD diss., Northwestern University.
- Kim, Kyohee. 2022. "Community Experiences and Aspirations of Young Syrian Newcomers in a Neighborhood in Amsterdam, the Netherlands." *Journal of Community Practice* 30 (4): 418–438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2022.2137873>.
- King, Christine, and Margaret Cruickshank. 2010. "Building Capacity to Engage: Community Engagement or Government Engagement?" *Community Development Journal* 45 (2): 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsq018>.
- Lenihan, Don. 2012. *Rescuing Public Opinion: The Case for Public Engagement*. Ottawa: Public Policy Forum.
- Local Government, Section 19: Municipal Systems (2000) (Act 32 of 2000). Cape Town, South Africa: South African Government Printing Press.
- Lofton, Saria, Marjorie Kersten, Nanyombi Lubimbi, and Angela Odoms-Young. 2022. "How Community Capacity Building in Urban Agriculture Can Improve Food Access in Predominantly Black Communities." *Journal of Community Practice* 30 (4): 395–417. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2022.2138667>.
- McEwan, Cheryl. 2005. "New Spaces of Citizenship? Rethinking Gendered Participation and Empowerment in South Africa." *Political Geography* 24 (8): 969–991. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2005.05.001>.
- Minkler, Meredith. 2012. *Community Organizing and Community Building for Health*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mirza, Raisa, Kelly Vodden, and Gail Collins. 2012. *Developing Innovative Approaches for Community Engagement in the Grand Falls-Windsor—Baie Verte—Harbour Breton Region*. Department of Geography Memorial University, March 2012. Newfoundland, Canada. <http://ruralresilience.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Community-Engagement-Brief-Apr4.pdf>.
- Montanini, Marta, and Xolisa Ngubelanga. 2023. "'Entrance Fees': Black Youth and Access to Artistic Production in Gqeberha, South Africa." *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* 16 (1): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.5130/ijcre.v16i1.8249>.
- Montevecchi, Gioia. 2011. *Literature Review for Central Newfoundland Community Engagement Framework*. St. John's, Canada: Rural Secretariat—Executive Council.

- Mothepu, Tau. 2013. "Citizen Participation in Policy and Planning Process in Local Government in Lesotho: A Case of Qacha's Nek." Master work, University of South Africa.
- Mouton, J. 2008. *How To Succeed in Your Master's & Doctoral Studies: A South African Guide and Resource Book*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Plessing, John. 2017. "Challenging Elite Understanding in South Africa." *Politikon* 44 (1): 73–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002083451706700404>.
- Public Service Commission. 2008. *Report on the Assessment of Public Participation Practices in the Public Service*. Pretoria: Public Service Commission.
- Republic of South African Constitution. 1996. *South African Republic Constitution*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Parliament Press.
- Robertson, Timothy. 2015. *City of Kamloops Public Engagement Handbook*. Business and Client Services. [Olmstead Implementation Office for CE 2A, CE 1A, CE 1B, and OV 3A]. Kamloops, Canada: Olmstead Press.
- Santiago, Anna Maria, and Jan Ivery. 2020. "Removing the Knees from Their Necks: Mobilizing Community Practice and Social Action for Racial Justice." *Journal of Community Practice* 28 (3): 195–207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2020.1823672>.
- Simpson, Deborah. 2010. "South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO)." In *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society*, edited by Helmut K. Anheier and Stefan Toepler, 1471–1472. New York: Springer.
- Stuart, Paul H. 2022. "From the Archives: Jesse Frederick Steiner Assesses Community Organization in 1922." *Journal of Community Practice* 30 (4): 359–377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705422.2022.2140999>.
- Thereson, Kelvin, and Cecilo Carlile. 2011. *Connected Communities: The New Approach to Citizen Engagement*. Colima, México: El Colegio de Mexico.
- Thompson, Vetta L. Sanders, Nicole Ackermann, Kyla L. Bauer, Deborah J. Bowen, and Melody S. Goodman. 2021. "Strategies of Community Engagement in Research: Definitions and Classifications." *Translational Behavioral Medicine* 11 (2): 441–451. <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibaa042>.
- Thornhill, Christopher. 2008. "The Transformed Local Government System: Some Lessons." *Journal of Public Administration* 43 (3): 492–511.
- Tracy, Sarah. 2013. *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Tritter Jonathan and Alison Mccalum. 2006. "The Snakes and Ladders of User Involvement: Moving beyond Arnstein." *Health Policy* 76 (2): 156–168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthpol.2005.05.008>
- Wassenaar, Desmond. 2008. "Ethical Issues in Social Science Research." In *Research in Practice: Applied Methods for Social Sciences*, edited by Martin Terre Blanche, Kevin Durrheim, and Desmond Painter, 60–79. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lusanda Beauty Juta: Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration and Local Government, School of Government Studies, Faculty of Humanities, North West University, Mahikeng Campus, South Africa
Email: Lusanda.Juta@nwu.ac.za

Kazeem Oyedele Lamidi: Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Public Administration and Local Government, School of Government Studies, Faculty of Humanities, North West University, Mahikeng Campus, South Africa; Senior Lecturer, Department of Local Government and Development Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
Corresponding Author's Email: 53508777@nwu.ac.za; akandekande@oauife.edu.ng