Exploring the role of the community in decision-making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng Local Municipality, South Africa

T.D. Moholi

orcid.org/0009-0003-3815-0725

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Promoter: Prof MP Molope

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DECLARATION

I, Teboho Daniel Moholi (student number 41321154), hereby declare that this doctoral thesis, titled Exploring the role of the community in decision-making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng Local Municipality, South Africa, is my own independent work and has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. This study was conducted under the supervision of Professor Mokgadi Molope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Social Sciences with Development Studies in the Faculty of Humanities at the North-West University, Mafikeng Campus.

DEDICATION

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my late Mother, Busisiwe Constance Moholi, whose belief in hard work and education made me understand that nothing in life is impossible. At my master's degree graduation ceremony in 2015, she and I made a commitment to enrol, complete and obtain a Ph.D. You are an angel that kept me going. We did it!

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ABSTRACT

Community participation is regarded as the cornerstone of local government democratic decision-making processes. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa charges elected and appointed local government authorities with the responsibility of facilitating decentralised decision-making processes regarding the identification and prioritisation of development needs of the communities in line with the democratic governance system. In enforcing this constitutional role, local government legislation and policies require these authorities to consider inputs from communities such that they become meaningful role players in the decisions that affect their local municipality. The purpose of this study was to explore ways in which the community is involved in decision-making processes in the Dihlabeng Local Economic Hub and Sivukile Youth Agricultural Co-operative.

The study employed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to gather data, which were supplemented by document review. There were 23 participants in the study who were purposively selected. These participants included the municipal representatives, ward committee members and community members in two Dihlabeng Local Municipality wards. Data gathered from these participants and document analysis were thematically analysed. Two themes that emerged were community involvement in decision-making processes and the absence of a community participation strategy in the Dihlabeng Local Municipality.

The findings of the study revealed the absence of pertinent voices such as those of communities. The development-related decisions taken by the Dihlabeng Local Municipality authorities did not incorporate the community's inputs. While community members had access to various participatory mechanisms such as community meetings, written requests submission, print media and social media platforms through which they could make suggestions, they were not given the opportunity in the two selected development initiatives. It is for this reason that they felt that the municipal authority overlooked their inputs, thus becoming unresponsive to local realities. All these seem to emanate from the prioritisation of political party interests, absence of a

system to incorporate community's inputs and unclear community participation processes.

The platforms for community participation in decision-making, therefore, end up serving the purpose of endorsing pre-decided upon development initiatives. Community inputs in conceptualising, designing, planning and implementation of development initiatives were ignored despite the legislative requirements that compel the local municipal council to make it possible for community members to be active participants in local development matters rather than uncritical acceptance of decisions taken elsewhere. This demonstrates that decision-making processes are not truly inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community. Lack of a set of well-defined community participation guidelines revealed a vacuum in both communication and participation. This vacuum implied a mismatch between the provision of the Constitution and the reality of shared decision-making at local government level.

Since the Dihlabeng Local Municipality does not have documented community participation guidelines, this study recommends that an inclusive public participation guideline be developed and used to ensure meaningful, purposeful and effective decision-making processes in local development initiatives**.** The guidelines will be for elected and appointed officials, council and community representatives and they should be made accessible to all stakeholders. The community members will thus be empowered to participate fully and be involved collectively in decision-making processes in development activities as provided for in local governance policies. A proposed six-step guideline will ensure that these co-decision makers discuss, negotiate and deliberate on development activities in the local municipality in accordance with the provision of the legislation.

Keywords*: Community participation; community decision-making processes; municipal development initiatives; Dihlabeng Local Municipality, local government authorities. Sivukile Youth Agricultural Co-operative.*

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CBO	Community-Based Organisation.
CDW	Community Development Worker.
COGTA	Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs.
CP	Community Participation.
CR	Community Representatives.
DLM	Dihlabeng Local Municipality.
DLEH	Dihlabeng Local Economic Hub.
EFSIN	Eastern Free State Issue Newspaper.
FG	Focus Group.
ICT	Information and Communications Technology.
IDP	Integrated Development Plan.
IPPG	Inclusive Public Participation Guidelines.
LED	Local Economic Development.
LOCP	Ladder of Citizen Participation.
MFMA	Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2003.
MM	Municipal Manager.
MSA	Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000.
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation.
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation.
NPPM	Normative Public Participation Model.
NWU	North-West University.
PB	Participatory Budgeting.
PD	Participatory Development.
PP	Public Participation.
PPF	Public Participation Framework.
PPO	Public Participation Office.
PPS	Public Participation Strategy.
PPU	Public Participation Unit.
RCD	Role Classification Document.
RSA	Republic of South Africa.
SALGA	South African Local Government Association.
StatsSA	Statistics South Africa.

SYAC	Sivukile Youth Agricultural Cooperative.
WC	Ward Committee.
WPLG	White Paper 1998 on Local Government.

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction.

One of the most important roles of the local government authorities is to ensure that efficient and effective service delivery is maintained and provided to all community members irrespective of their political affiliation (Ndou & Sebola, 2016; Zwane, 2020). De Vries and Ile (2021) emphasise that community members are not just to be treated as recipients but as important partners in development and service delivery objectives. This means that it is morally imperative that communities are involved in the identification of service delivery needs, as well as development initiatives within local governance. This idea is supported by Haricharan et al. (2021) who states that democratic South Africa requires decision-making processes to move away from centralised approaches to a more decentralised system. The approach is intended to facilitate a community-centred way of decision-making that ensures that the realisation of the constitutional right to participation is not infringed upon along with building on the assertion of developmental local government.

The expectation is that local government authorities; appointed or elected and the community members will both identify development needs and build strategies to address them, within the confines of the law. This expectation is fully supported and features prominently in numerous legislative frameworks in South Africa, such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996), Municipal Systems Act (MSA) 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000), The White Paper 1998 on Local Government (WPLG) (RSA, 1998b) and the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a). All these accentuate the fact that local government authorities ought to fully consult with communities regarding social and economic needs (Petunia & Selepe, 2020). However, Molepo and Maleka (2018) with Masuku and Molope (2020) indicate that over recent years local municipalities have struggled to implement the set legislations, which provide space for meaningful involvement of communities in the discourse about how development can be

facilitated in their locality. Similarly, Thebe (2016) argues that local government authorities underplay the fact that the control and influence of decisions by the community must be appreciated as the key components in sustaining the democracy upon which these legislations are based. In support of Masuku and Molope (2020), Thebe (2016) points to the power struggles amongst the authorities, within the local municipalities as one of the main reasons that deter the ability of community members to have meaningful contributions on local development matters.

Despite the legislative and policy frameworks guiding active community participation (CP) in decision-making processes regarding local government matters, meaningful and actual involvement in decisions-making remains a huge challenge (Ngamlana & Coopoo-Afesis-Corplan, 2018). This results in a lack of trust in local government authorities, which can be seen and experienced through the explosion in service delivery protests, poor quality services and provision of irrelevant development interventions (Msenge & Nzewi, 2021). These are both the cause and outcome of failures of local municipal authorities to involve communities constructively and in meaningful conversations concerning matters relating to development in localities. Most importantly, community involvement in decision-making processes is safeguarded by the laws of the national government, thus making it a prerequisite for all development-related decisions that are taken at the local government level affecting livelihood of communities directly and indirectly (Petunia & Selepe, 2020). Therefore, adherence to the legislative frameworks is a requirement for the local municipal authorities. Ignoring these laws hinders community development that is a key pillar in strengthening democracy in South Africa.

Tshoose (2015) concludes that despite these laws in place that guides CP decision-making processes, many local municipalities in South Africa fail to live up to these legislative requirements. Section 152 of the Constitution of the RSA requires that local municipal authorities establish a conducive environment where community members can fully participate in the legislative and other processes of the

legislation. Community participation in decision-making processes within the local government is not only a duty but a right that needs to be exercised by all citizens (Sebola, 2017). Therefore, non-participation of community members in decision-making, due to the failure of local government authorities to facilitate the process, goes against the rights of the community members. Tshoose (2015) stresses the point that governments are traditionally in place to protect the rights of the people. Therefore, they should not contravene the law but implement it unconditionally and without reservations.

According to Sibanda and Lues (2019), the meaningful contributions made by community members in decision-making initiatives are essential in ensuring and limiting the outbreaks of service delivery protests. This ultimately guarantees that there is ownership of the municipal development programmes and projects within local municipalities, thus, maintaining harmony and peace in the local government. Marzuki (2015) further emphasises that community participation (CP) strengthens the relationship between community members and municipal authorities in that the proposed development initiatives will enjoy full support from all the concerned stakeholders. The author believes that from the public point of view, an invitation to participate in the decision-making process is an acknowledgement of the key role the community plays in local governance. Therefore, it is within the communities' interest and local governance structures to allow CP in the decision-making processes from the early stages to ensure that the inputs of the whole community on development initiatives will represent their needs (Molepo & Maleka, 2018). This places CP central to the sustainability of decisions made in the local government because decisions made by local municipal authorities without the views and inputs of communities may simply result in many significant service delivery challenges.

The democratic government system emphasises that communities have a role in holding the government accountable for service delivery and its responses to their needs (Madumo, 2023). However, over the recent years, local government has been characterised by service delivery protests, political interferences and lack of integration of the community members in the decision-making process. This

according to Mashiachidi and Moeti (2016) is triggered by the inadequate local governing structures that are supposed to facilitate the participation of community members in decision-making. Once community members feel that they are an important part of the decision-making processes in the municipality, they build trust and belief in their municipality. CP is one of the important fundamentals of good local governance (Wiyaboon, 2018).

The advantages of CP include enhanced accountability, transparency and sustainability of development initiatives, as well as full inclusion of the local community members in the development processes. This inclusion enhances sustainable development which is key to developmental local government (Dinbabo, 2003; Sebola, 2017). The White Paper on Local Government (1998) states that local authority role is to engage communities on matters affecting their lives. So that through this meaningful participation the initiatives can receive support through buy in. Therefore, it is vital to development and the progress of the identified initiatives and community development (RSA 1998b).

Community participation should be marked by inclusivity across several strata. It is constantly the marginalized and those living in poverty who face lack of involvement in the decision-making processes. On numerous occasions, these people have lost trust in their municipal authorities, as their voices are apparent weak and illegitimate. Swanepoel et al. (2016) states that they are intentionally left out of decision-making processes as some of the local government authorities prefer their passiveness. Tshoose (2015) further elaborates that those entrusted with facilitating community involvement in decision-making do not often act in accordance with the mandate, which means that they are neglecting their constitutional role of maximising democratic decision-making. This suggests that the approach taken by local municipal authorities in decision-making processes is a top-down approach as the role of community members is undermined.

Local municipal authorities should have channels where community members can participate thoroughly in matters relating and affecting their livelihoods and the improvement of the quality of their lives (Nene, 2016; Davids et al., 2022). The development of such channels ensures that communities can partake actively in the decision-making processes. This puts the decision-making processes within the powers of both community members and local municipal authorities. In the context of this study, the Dihlabeng Local Municipality (DLM) indicated in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) 2019/2020 that the DLM authorities consult the community through ward committee meetings, the IDP community forums, through different stakeholder engagements, and community outreach programmes. However, the Eastern Free State Issue Newspaper (EFSIN) perceived this as a purposeless exercise because decisions about communities' livelihood were decided before community engagement meetings (Anon b, 2022).

Reutener (2015) affirms in Msenge and Nzewi (2021) that these recognised CP channels and platforms such as Imbizos, public hearings, ward committees (WCs), and mayoral roadshows have continued to be just ceremonial and not afforded community members any meaningful opportunity to fully and actively participate in decision-making processes in the South African municipality context. Similarly, Petunia and Selepe (2020) states that these community engagements measures are just mere tick box exercise to achieve the legislative frameworks and lacks any sort of accountability. This raises questions relating to how local municipal authorities decide on the needs of the community. The central argument of this study is that despite the legislative frameworks and policies that guide community involvement in decision-making processes in development initiatives, community dissatisfaction regarding the manner in which development-related decisions are taken in local government persists. This necessitates the need to explore ways in which communities are involvement in development-related decision-making processes.

It is against this background that this qualitative study aimed at exploring the role of the community in the decision-making processes in selected development initiatives in the DLM in the Free State Province.

1.2. Problem statement.

The Constitution of the RSA Act 108 of 1996 provides the right for all the citizens to participate in the decision-making processes in local municipalities. However, measures to evaluate and monitor whether inputs from the local community are considered when making decisions regarding identification, conceptualisation, and prioritisation of the local development needs and interventions seem not to be clearly articulated. Therefore, the responsibility to put in place measures to involve communities in decision-making remains a constitutional duty assigned to a local government structure such as the Dihlabeng Local Municipal authority.

The local government system in South African as provided in the legislative framework is organised in such a way that the governance structures are easily accessible to communities to enhance their involvement in development activities and allow municipal authorities to perform this constitutional obligation. Despite the provision, the DLM community has persistently and continually expressed dissatisfaction regarding the manner in which decisions regarding development initiatives are made through the process that excludes them. Madzivhandila and Maloka (2014) explain that in post-apartheid South Africa communities simply endorse pre-designed and pre-recorded development interventions in a sphere of government that is highly politicised with mandates of political parties at the forefront of any development initiative. This practice contravenes the Constitution of the RSA (1996), the Local Government MSA 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000), the WPLG (RSA, 1998b) and the Local Government Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a), which require municipalities to consult with communities in the decision-making processes on development needs. The real question ends up being whether the communities such as Dihlabeng get the opportunity to engage local government on their needs or make any input on decisions taken by the local

municipal authorities on their development. Therefore, this practice warrants an investigation into the nature and extent of their participation.

Studies conducted by Khuzwayo (2009) and Mashiachidi and Moeti (2016) on CP local government revealed that those in power in the local municipalities chose to serve what they regard as their political mandates rather than focusing on overall community needs. Such mandates do not always mirror the needs, demands and interests originating from their communities. Msenge and Nzewi (2021) in their study on citizen participation and public trust make an assertion that community members should have authority over municipal decisions as a core component of development initiatives. Despite this recommendation that is relevant to Dihlabeng, its local municipal authority has not yet heeded the call. While this is the case, researchers have not yet paid attention to the concerns regarding community involvement in decisions on development activities.

In 2022, service delivery concerns and administration challenges prompted the Free State Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta) to oversee the operations in the DLM. However, underlying community-orientated decisions were not resolved because EFSIN (Anon, 2022a) reported that the DLM was to be placed under administration due to amongst others, the lack of community involvement in local governance that provided space for improper functioning and maladministration. It is for this reason that an investigation into how this local municipal authority executes its constitutional regarding CP responsibility required in-depth exploration. Such an exploration stands a chance to establish if the local authority's decisions are reflective of community engagements.

1.3. Aim of the study.

The overall purpose of this exploratory qualitative study was to explore ways in which the community in the DLM was involved in the decision-making processes in selected development initiatives. There were two development initiatives chosen

for this study, the Dihlabeng Local Economic Hub (DLEH) and the Sivukile Youth Agricultural Co-operative (SAYC). In ensuring that the aim of the study was accomplished, the following six research questions were posed.

1.4. Research questions.

The following research questions provided guidance for this study.

1.4.1. Which mechanisms do the DLM authorities use to involve the community members in decision-making processes?

1.4.2. How do community members respond to efforts made by the local authorities to engage them in decision-making?

1.4.3. What do community members do to ensure that they take part in decision-making in the DLM?

1.4.4. How are the community members involved in identifying, analysing and prioritising their needs in the DLM?

1.4.5. How do community members take part in the implementation of community development initiatives in the DLM?

1.4.6. Which guidelines are relevant to the DLM authority to enhance community involvement in the local government decision-making processes?

1.5. Significance of the study.

Local government is a sphere of government that is closest to the people than the national and provincial levels. Its major role is to ensure that regular and quality service delivery is offered to the residents continuously. It plays a critical representative role in practices of involving community members in determining specific local community needs and eventually providing solutions on how these needs can be satisfied (Madumo, 2011; Osborne et al., 2021). It should be noted that the government exists because of the people; hence, its mandate is to ensure that the needs and aspirations of the communities are fulfilled. However, many local municipalities have not achieved this and it is for this reason that in a democratic system, the local government is

mandated to ensure full participation of the community members in its decision-making processes. Such decisions need to be documented as representative of the community members' inputs. This builds up on the importance of this study as it investigated the processes of decision-making within the DLM and its findings may be utilised to strengthen CP strategies in this municipality. Moreover, it contributes to the body of knowledge on local government decentralised decision-making processes and CP.

There are several studies such as Sebola (2017), Tshoose (2015), Molale (2019) that have been conducted around the participation of the community members in local government affairs, however only a few focused on the decision-making process itself. The study by Sebola (2017) is limited to how local authorities communicate with the community member but does not focus on the specific steps of the community involvement in decision-making and how local development interventions should unfold. While, the study undertaken by Tshoose (2015) engages in the significance of public participation (PP) in development initiatives and it does not include the processes it takes to achieve that significance. It is vital that there is a body of information on strengthening the processes in the local government in relation to decision-making. Molale (2019) also recommends the need for further investigation into municipal planning and decision-making processes to which the current study deliberately paid attention.

Section 16 (1) of the Local Government: MSA, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000) states that a local municipality must establish a norm of CP by enabling a suitable environment for local communities to participate in the local decision-making processes. The conditions are such that local communities will be able to make inputs on local developmental needs based on their experiences. However, over the years, local municipal authorities have not performed this role as expected and in the DLM, the situation is no different. This study, therefore, was intended to reveal how community engagement in decision-making unfolded. The outcome of this investigation was meant to provide an opportunity to propose an inclusive public participation guideline that enhances the involvement of communities in decision-making processes in development initiatives

in the DLM in the Free State Province. This public participation targeted approach is deemed a necessity for the function of the municipality.

1.6. Delimitation of the study.

The study explored ways in which the community in DLM was involved in decision-making processes in selected development initiatives, drawing on the lived experiences of the appointed and elected municipal authorities, community members and their representatives in the local municipality. The DLM is one of the six local municipalities in the Thabo Mofutsanyane District Municipality in the Eastern Free State, with 20 municipal wards. It occupies 7550.4910 square km geographical area of the Free State Province. This municipality situated around 250 km from the capital city of the Free State province, Mangaung. It is a category B municipality, i.e. a local municipality as demarcated by the Local Government Municipal Structures Act 1998. The study was undertaken in two wards within the local municipality, ward 16 and 17. The community members in this municipality rely on agricultural and private businesses for their livelihoods. These are two of the dominant economic sectors in the area.

1.7. Structure of the dissertation.

An overall structure of a study provides a synopsis on the manner taken by the researcher to ensure that the study aim is met in a structured and concise manner. This section provides the structure used to organise this study content in six chapters.

Chapter One: Orientation of the study.

The chapter provides an orientation to the study and outlines the research problem, aim and significance of the study. The chapter also provides the research questions employed in this study. It further highlights an overview on the delimitation of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature review

The chapter provides a detailed discussion of the literature review pertinent to the municipal decision-making processes regarding community involvement in development initiatives. Its focus is the literature related to the mechanisms used by the local authorities to involve community members in decision-making processes and the measures taken by the community to ensure their participation in such processes. In addition, the literature presents the manner in which community members respond to the efforts by local authorities to involve them in decision-making processes as well as the identification, analysis and prioritisation of community needs and implementation of development initiatives and the models adopted by local authorities in decision-making processes.

Lastly, the chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study, which is an important part of the knowledge base for this study. The chosen framework, i.e. Participatory Development (PD) theory, is explained as it substantiates and supports the arguments of the study.

Chapter Three: Research methodology

The chapter presents in detail the research methodology and design undertaken in this empirical study. It also reflects the view of the researcher which provides the reasoning for the choices of the selected qualitative approach to the research study and the process of collecting and analysing data.

Chapter Four: Presentation and discussion of the findings

The research findings generated from the focus group discussions and interviews with the participants are presented in this chapter. In addition, the data collected, analysed and interpreted in the study are also reflected. Finally, the chapter also provides discussions of the research findings.

Chapter Five: Inclusive public participation guidelines proposed for decision-making processes in the Dihlabeng Local Municipality.

Based on the findings of this study, the chapter presents an inclusive public participation guideline that may followed by the local authorities on community involvement processes in decision-making process. If adopted by the DLM authorities it may enhance, strengthen and safeguard the constitutional right of the communities to participate in decision-making processes in local development initiatives.

Chapter Six: Summary of the research findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The chapter provides a summary of the findings regarding the role of the community in decision-making processes in the DLM. It further reflects the insights on the manner in which communities in DLM is involved in local decision-making processes and the relevant recommendations for the improvement of the decision-making processes within the local municipality. In addition, the chapter presents suggestions for further studies for scholars exploring similar topics in Development Studies and local government discourse. The chapter concludes with the final reflections of the study.

1.8. Chapter summary

Chapter one of this report provides an orientation to the study by outlining the legislative and policy frameworks that guide the participation of communities in local government matters. This is followed by the presentation of the research problem, the aim of the study together with the research questions employed for fulfilling the aim of the study. Furthermore, the chapter presents the significance of the study and the implications of the findings of the study on the DLM and its contribution to the body of work on community participation in development initiatives. Lastly, the chapter provides the structure to the report. The following chapter presents the literature reviewed for this study to contextualise the research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Presented in this chapter is the relevant literature is reviewed for this study to explore whether communities are provided with a conducive environment for their involvement in decision-making processes in development initiatives in local government matters. The chapter is organised into three sections and begins with the definition of concepts pertinent to the study. A discussion of the mechanisms taken by the local authorities to involve communities in decision-making processes in development initiatives and the responses of community members to these efforts initiated by local government authorities follows. The next part of this section covers the measures taken by community members to ensure that they participate in the decision-making processes in development initiatives in their local municipalities. Furthermore, the processes of identification, analysis, prioritisation and implementation of development initiatives as well as participatory models in local government are presented. Lastly, the chapter reflects a discussion of the Participatory Development theory as the theoretical framework guiding and leading the arguments provided in this study.

2.2. Definition of concepts

a) Community

The concept of community is defined as a knit group of people with shared experiences and identity within the same geographical location who engage in a common development purpose (Kamberi & Baliqi, 2018; Kimengsi et al., 2016; Mapuva, 2024; Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2023; Ngunjiri, 2023; Rijal, 2023; Riswan, 2021). Development practices place great emphasis on active community involvement in the decision-making processes in local government development initiatives. To determine this active involvement in decision-making processes, it is crucial to have a clear understanding and definition of a community to avoid any ambiguity that may hinder such involvement. In this study, a community is defined as members of a ward located in a local municipality who may share the same interests and development needs and goals. These community members can take part in the decision-making processes

regarding socio-economic agenda and as such enjoy participation in local development processes.

b) Community participation (CP)

Community participation in this study refers to a process through which the community members actively influence the identification, conceptualisation and prioritisation of development initiatives through robust continuous engagement with the local government authorities. This is because CP plays a significant role in safeguarding and promoting sound democratic principles particularly in development-related decision-making processes (Enaifoghe & Adetiba, 2019; Hofer et al., 2024; Neshkova & Kalesnikaite, 2019; Sinxadi, 2020; Yende, 2023). Even though it is clear from these scholars that CP is a cornerstone in the functioning of local sphere of government, Msenge and Nzewi (2021) and Rafique et al. (2023) asserts that community involvement in local government affairs remains a concept on paper for most community members. This implies that CP is often an afterthought process in decision-making by local government authorities. The continuous dissatisfactions of community members with decision-making processes in local government provides testimony to this notion.

In local government, CP serves as a communication bridge that brings authorities and community together in community development (Mwesigwa, 2021; Shetunyenga, 2023). Both parties intentionally discuss ways to address development needs within the confines of local government laws. It is through this process that community members play an active role in development-related decisions in development initiatives (Mapuva, 2024; Selepe, 2023). Thus, CP contributes meaningfully in development planning in the local government (Wiyaboon, 2018). In return, it confirms that decisions taken on development initiatives are legitimate and sustainable. The idea is not to collapse the bridge as any breakdown in communication often leads to lack of trust in local authorities, consequently hindering CP in development initiatives.

Wiyaboon (2018) and Veta (2021) state that CP is an active process through which communities guide and influence the way development activities are conceptualised and implemented in local government. It improves the effectiveness of local government authorities in responding to the development challenges experienced by the communities in their jurisdiction (Hartaman et al. 2023; Rijal 2023; Rosilawati et al.2022). Local government authorities therefore have an obligation to be responsive to the needs and voices of communities (Igbokwe et al., 2024). In this way, communities are empowered to make and contribute to development-related decision-making processes. Moreover, by taking an active part in local governance, communities are able to get to work with their elected and appointed local government authorities for the achievement of community-centred development.

c) Decision-making process

Kamberi and Baliqi (2018) define the decision-making process as the participation of different community groups of interest in a given issue on local policies. Similarly, Pennington et.al (2018) views decision-making as an active involvement of community members in local government affairs on matters that protect, maintain and enhance their socio-economic conditions. The socio-economic aspect of participation is also cited by Tshoose (2015) when he states that decisions regarding livelihoods of community members must be taken with their consent. This study argues that local decision-making processes have a direct impact on community participation and sustainability of development initiatives in local government. In this study, decision-making refers to a strategy and a process used by the local authorities to consider, assess, and choose appropriate community development plans, strategies, and initiatives with the intention of facilitating good governance in this study. The process encapsulates the views and opinions of a wide range of shared development aspirations of community members.

Community involvement processes are highly protected by local government legislations and policies that guides local authorities on the implementation of decentralised community centred development. Masiya et al. (2021), Mamokhere and

Meyer (2022a), and Ndaba and Ngcobo (2023) cite the Provision of the Constitution of the RSA Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996) which mandates community participation and states its vital role in local governance. In fulfilling this constitutional obligation, the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a), MSA 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000), The Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) 56 of 2003 (RSA, 2003) and the WPLG (RSA, 1998b) strengthen the involvement of communities in decision-making process. This ensures that there is a well-documented and community participation in local government decision-making processes.

The decentralised model of local government brings decision-making processes to the grassroots level for understanding of communities' development challenges (Ayenagbo, 2023; Ibrahim, 2024). Decision-making powers are shifted from national and provincial government to local government where participation of communities in such processes is central (Arkorful et al., 2021). Scholars such as Mulanda et al. (2024) and Rauf (2024) state that in a decentralised environment the local government authorities' work with communities in shaping development initiatives that are meant to improve local livelihoods. Dick-Sagoe (2020) and Fuseini et al. (2025) conclude that the premise of decentralisation marks a responsive local government to the needs of the people through negotiated decision-making processes. It is through decentralisation that communities are favoured in local decision-making processes on matters relating to their wellbeing and community development.

Community involvement in decision-making at the local government level reassures communities that authorities have their best interest in the development discourse. Mokoena and Molepo (2024) argue that trust between the authorities and communities is maintained through CP as this leads to transparent and accountable decision-making processes. The identification, conceptualisation and implementation of development initiatives are open to community input. Support from communities promotes ownership of decisions that breeds peace and stability in the local municipality. Moreover, collaborating with communities is a sign of upholding democracy (Mamokhere & Meyer, 2023b). Therefore, it can be concluded that not allowing community members participation in local government decision-making

process is a deliberate attempt by local authorities to undermine democratic principles of the country as set out in the Constitution.

d) Good governance.

In this study, good governance implies the ability of community members to direct and lead development through participation, consensus, co-ordinated decision-making process in development initiatives and activities affecting their lives. It is therefore necessary for the local government authorities to create a conducive and transparent environment for public participation. This is achieved by initiating participatory spaces that respect and guard community views in development. Good governance is characterized by specific attributes such as participation, collaboration, transparency, responsibility, consensus, equality, and accountability (Auriacombe & Sithomola, 2020; Mankuebe & Manicom, 2020). These elements transform local government into a developmental state.

The attainment of good governance in local government context requires placing community members at the centre of the emergence of development initiatives. Dube et al. (2021) and Kanyane et al. (2022) state that good governance is the ability of local community members to influence decision-making processes. Therefore, there is a need for both local government authorities and community members to work together for the benefit of the local populace in improving CP and good governance. The involvement of community members in local governance renders development-related decisions legitimate because it ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, fosters a sense of ownership among communities and promotes accountability and transparency in decision-making processes. The promotion of good governance therefore is closely tied to maximum participation of members of communities.

According to Mamokhere and Meyer (2022a), good governance is a primary tool for community development. Dinbabo, (2003) and Buye (2021) who define community development as a process of empowering individuals and groups to work together to address social, economic and political issues that affect their livelihood. This collaboration entails the involvement of communities in decision-making processes regarding development matters and aspects that affect and improve their livelihoods (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2020; Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2023; Riswan, 2021). The shift in the decision-making paradigm from top-down to bottom-up is a key aspect in a democratic developmental government. It is for this reason that community development cannot take place outside the communities it is supposed to serve.

Doran et al. (2024) argue that it should be common knowledge that at the centre of any successful community development project is community involvement. However, the failures of many local community development projects indicate a disregard this important practice in sustainable community development initiatives from the local government authorities (Veta, 2021). Absenter low CP in decision-making regarding community development initiative is a mark of poor governance (Ndunge, 2020). This is because while local municipalities are provided with CP framework and tools, most of them treat the participation of community members as a once-off activity rather than a continuous process. While, in good governance, CP is a continuous processes of inputs and discussions between local authorities and community members to solicit ideas that influence local development matters (Dube et al., 2021).

One of the most important elements of good governance is the engagement with community organisations in the decision-making process as explained by Wiyaboon (2018). This provides better opportunities for people to participate in development work in the localities through local constituencies. Mankuebe and Manicom (2020) argue that local authorities should be in a position to understand these local community organisations which usually act in the interest of their communities in local government matters, inclusive of the development initiatives budgeting processes. These organisations advocate for and promote the keen interests of communities in

municipal decision-making processes through documented and undocumented CP mechanisms.

The goal in good governance is to reassure communities that their voices are heard in local development discourse thereby ensuring that development initiatives are aligned to their needs and aspirations. This is to ensure that local authorities are responsive to the needs to the people. Beshi and Kaur (2020) state that communication and being open to communities on local governance issues are building blocks to good governance. According to Handayani et al. (2023) good governance is one where transparency, accountability and public trust is maintained by the local authorities. The expected results should be the deliberated and negotiated development initiatives marked by community buy-in. In addition, upholding the democratic system of governance that requires local authorities to allow community the liberty given to them by the Constitution and local governance policies to take part in decision-making processes points to good governance.

A study conducted by Leta (2017) indicates that most of community members participate in the development processes through labour and financial gains rather than deliberations. This renders them passive in their development process by being recipient of predefined decision rather than deliberately setting the tone for the development needs in the communities. Wiyaboon (2018) and Msenge and Nzewi (2021) believe that there should be a collective agreement between the local authorities and community members to achieve representation of community needs. The decisions on which development initiatives to implement and focus on must mirror the needs of the community. Sibanda and Lues (2021) attribute this to the Agenda 2030 for sustainable development that places community members as main contributors to their development. Therefore, there is a need to create known community involvement mechanisms and build capacity among community members on their role in local government decision-making processes to ensure sustainable development.

Community members ought to have the knowledge and skills necessary for them to participate actively in local government affairs, especially since these decisions affect their livelihoods. Therefore, education forms an important factor in community participation by ensuring that communities are empowered to influence development initiatives. This is to guarantee that they can critically share their views and opinions on matters relating to their development needs in municipalities with the local authorities (Leta, 2017). This is an important process that entails grassroot development are tailored and led by the communities (Tshoose, 2015). Through education, local knowledge in development initiatives such as DLEH and SYAC is employed as the foundation of development practices in local government.

Community members ought to be aware of and informed about local participatory processes and how their inputs will be filtered into the development initiatives (Molepo & Maleka, 2018). The misalignment of the services rendered and needs of the communities are due to the lack of knowledge on how to participate in local governance. This leads to communities playing a passive role in local government matters and authorities ending up detached from the realities of the communities (Bakre & Dorasamy, 2018; Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022b). Therefore, it is important to explore the extent to which communities are afforded a role in decision-making processes related to development initiatives to close the gap that exists in community involvement and participation. Henceforth, instilling the awareness by providing information on the participation therefore becomes a pre-requisite for shared decision-making.

2.3. Mechanisms used by the local authorities to involve the community in decision-making processes

Local government authorities are required by legislation to ensure that participatory mechanisms are in place for the involvement of community in decision-making processes. The MSA 32 of 2000 (RSA,2000), states that these authorities must ensure that the available mechanisms encourage a culture of active involvement of communities in local governance, especially development-related decisions (RSA,

2000). These mechanisms must be clearly communicated in an appropriate language, be friendly to special needs people and the previously marginalised community members (RSA, 2000). However, Selepe (2023) argues that the principle of having local authorities manage their own processes and mechanisms poses challenges, as these authorities are expected to foster and evaluate their own processes. This leaves accountability issues as singularly control processes that lacks transparency.

Sinxadi (2020) observes that there seems to be no existence of adequate measures to ensure that CP framework is in place within the main metropolitan municipalities. According to the scholar, many of the district and local municipalities seem to be susceptible to the same shortcomings. The same challenge is evident in some of the local municipalities in the Free State Province such as observed by Ramodula and Govender (2021). It is possible that the failures of these metropolitan and district municipalities manifest in local municipalities such as the DLM. Ramodula and Govender (ibid) recommend a differentiated approach for CP and community-based planning in municipalities for the effective response to the local development challenges and good governance. These scholars argued that it is through this approach that local government authorities can implement municipal-specific CP mechanisms relevant to their locality.

Several studies, conducted in countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Kenya and the United States of America revealed that community meetings are commonly used participatory mechanisms in many local municipalities. For instance Mamokhere and Meyer (2022b) report that in the Tzaneen municipal area in South Africa, public consultative meetings are a primary tool used by local authorities to engage the communities in government matters. Almeida et.al. (2023), Asamoah and Ile (2024) and Lokaimoe et al. (2021) also indicate that public and town meetings are frequently used as community involvement strategy. Given the mandate of such gatherings, they afford the locals an opportunity to hold their municipal authorities accountable in decision-making processes (Cornwall, 2017). These kind of spaces enhances community trust in the local governance system because they are easily accessible to

local communities as they take place in their respective wards (Molepo & Maleka, 2018).

Public meetings according to Molepo and Maleka (ibid) are very important platforms where community members engage local authorities in matters relating to development activities. This is where community members provide inputs on development planning and receive adequate feedback from the authorities. However, Petunia and Selepe (2020) believe that the majority of these meetings are not fully attended by local community members and poor attendance limits the ability to contribute meaningfully in local government matters. Mamokhere and Meyer (2022a) recommend that there is a need to relook at community meetings as public participation strategy (PPS) to ensure that communities enjoy their constitutional right to participation. Matloga et al. (2024) argues that poor attendance arises from the disregard of community voices by local authorities.

The current study argues that community meetings strategy needs to be re-evaluated because participation of community members in the meetings seems not to translate into development initiatives. There is a need to explore if these meetings translate into meaningful participation in local municipalities. Ramodula and Govender (2021) as well as Tshoose (2015) observe that public meetings are just ceremonial platforms for community members to support decisions already made by local authorities in some municipalities. The focus on DLM ensures a meaningful and clear understanding of community meetings as a participation strategy considering the community outcry on exclusionary decision-making processes.

Even though these community meetings might have less than expected outcomes, there are still some positives to be taken out of them according to Cornwall (2017).The scholar argues that where people get an opportunity to participate is where democracy is protected as they learn more about governance, which makes them curious to engage in local governance matters. However, Correia et al. (2023) maintain that this mechanism lacks a differentiated approach to attract the uniqueness that exists within

communities in relation to integrated development planning. This limitation suggests a need for a targeted approach that takes into consideration the realities of communities. While community meetings form an integral part of democratic governance that affords an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, targeted inclusive approach guarantees that decisions are transparent and collaborative.

Asamoh and Ile (2024) believes that community members attend these meetings with the aim of elaborating on their needs and providing inputs on the development initiatives. This process according to Sebola (2017) ought to take place in an environment where all can freely exercise their constitutional rights of being consulted and contribute to decision-making processes. Essentially, meaningful involvement in decision-making process as builds an element of faith in local municipal authorities in communities (Guragain, 2024). This a central feature in good governance that protects a country's democratic system. It is envisaged that local government as the closest sphere of government to the people will afford community members an opportunity to participate actively in development decisions affecting their livelihood.

Inviting community members to a consultative, collaborative and participatory meeting builds trust between the local authorities and community members. The gesture is an acceptance of the important role that the people play in decision-making (Mapuva, 2024). However, Nemakanga and Mashamaite (2024) argue that these meetings are not serving the purpose of active and meaningful PP as they are time consuming and deliberately exclude some community members out of decision-making processes. The authors further recommend the use of online participation as an alternative to physical meetings. This to ensure that there are multiple participatory channels for communities who are unable to attend public and town meetings physically.

Nemakanga and Mashamaite (2024) and Milz et al. (2024) states that on online participation through information and communication technology (ICT) is key to enhancing democratic principle of community participation. The authors share the sentiments when they cite that national disasters, such as Coronavirus and floods,

have required local authorities to be more flexible in their approach to CP. Online participation has become a fundamental characteristic of local governments in Australia (Potts & Webb, 2023) and African countries such as South Africa, online participation is equal to democratic governance. However, online participation should not be replacing face-to-face meetings but enhance community participation processes (Munyede & Machengete, 2020). Therefore, an integrated approach should be advocated to maximise participation.

The national lockdown in 2020 posed restrictions on physical gatherings that led to members of communities being unable to fully and actively participate in the physical contact decision-making processes (Munzhedzi & Phago, 2020). In 2022, the KwaZulu Natal province in South Africa experienced floods that destroyed roads and infrastructure, which made it difficult for community members to interact physically with the local authorities. These are some of the challenges that necessitated the fast tracking of the implementation of ICT in South African local government participatory processes (Okeke-Uzodike & Dlamini, 2019). This type of participation includes the usage of social media platforms, online group discussions and the internet to enhance CP in the fast paced technologically-improved local government environment (Davies & Procter, 2020; Enwereji & Uwizeyimana, 2020; Marzouki, et. al., 2017).

Virtual community participation is also supported by Oni et al. (2020) when they state that ICT has the potential of reaching more community members regardless of their locality with the potential of affording more community members an opportunity to share their development ideas, inputs and debates. Further, Uddin (2019) states that local authorities are able to afford multitude of community members an opportunity to participate in local governance. However, the author questions the level of such engagement in ICT platforms given countries such as South Africa with high concentrations of rural communities that experience ICT challenges due to lack of access to internet connectivity and electricity. Therefore, the existence of digital divide cannot be ignored as it has direct impact on participation.

ICT can ensure that communities are fully consulted and contribute to decision-making processes when employed in an accountable and transparent manner (Okeke-Uzodike & Dlamini, 2019). Many local municipalities have embraced technology that provides community members with an opportunity to report and contribute to local governance (Ardigo et al., 2019). However, there seems to be a gap in human resources that consolidate inputs and provide feedback to communities. Currently, there is no evidence that inputs provided by the community members through these participatory processes translate to any development initiatives (Mankuebe & Manicom, 2020). Again, this concern raises challenges in relation to the consolidation of inputs and suggestions provided through online platforms.

The digitalisation of participatory process provides much relief for community members who are unable to attend physical public meetings (Mokgotho & Mokoele, 2025). Nevertheless, many community members in rural areas are still in need of being educated on the utilisation of such platforms to communicate their opinions to local authorities. The study conducted on water projects in Migoring County attests to the lack of education and knowledge as factors that influence the ability of locals to practise their legislated participative rights (Arieko & Kisimbii, 2020). This has the potential to exclude communities systematically in decision-making processes. It remains unclear as to who consolidates and provides feedback to communities and how these inputs influence local government decision-making in development initiatives.

Maleka and Moeti (2021) state that communities are unaware and uninformed of online participatory mechanism, as they are not well educated to use them. The author argue that local authorities lack strategies that would ensure that communities are adequately enabled to understand their role in the technological advanced environment. Kariuki (2020) also states that there is lot to be done to ensure local governments are technologically inclusive for communities. Moreover, local authorities need to ensure that they achieve meaningful CP if they are to sustain such faith in development planning (Msenge & Nzewi, 2021). Based on this limitation an inclusive

public participation guideline closes the gap in development planning as a municipal community involvement strategy.

In local government, development planning is a collaborative process that is legislated in policies and frameworks. This planning process is based on the realities of the local communities and their development aspirations (Fourie & Van der Waldt, 2021). Scholars, such as Mamokhere and Meyer, (2022b) and Munzhedzi (2020a) state that developmental planning processes is strengthened by integrated development planning (IDP) as one of the participatory mechanisms used by the municipality. The development interventions emanating from this process are expected to end up as part of the municipal strategic planning document meant for community development (Asha & Makalela, 2020; Ramodula & Govender, 2021). The implication is that the IDP mirrors collective discussions, negotiations and deliberations on development initiatives and interventions that address development challenges in communities.

The process of integrated development planning is legally mandated by law to be participatory because the involvement of communities legitimises development-related decisions (Nzewi et al., 2019). Masiya et al. (2019) point out that local authorities are required to ensure that a conducive participatory environment is available as set in local government acts and framework, such as the MSA 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000), The Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a) and the WPLG (RSA, 1998b). Moreover, the MSA 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) was promulgated to ensure that local authorities are mandated to be responsive to the needs of community members through the implementation of the IDP in a community-centred approach development (Molale, 2019). During the planning process, community members and community-based organisations (CBOs) are expected to provide their needs and wishes to be considered and addressed in the local municipality by the local authorities (Matyana & Mthethwa, 2022). The IDP is a crucial tool in grassroot public participation.

A mixed method study, conducted by Petunia and Selepe (2020), on the community and local government authorities in the Mbombela Local Municipality found that the

existence of insufficient community involvement in the planning sessions has far-reaching effects on the IDP. In fact, inadequate involvement of community members renders the IDP process ineffective because the planning does not embrace CP and fall short of its development role. The IDP process should be led by community involvement from drafting to implementation stages of development activities (Mashiachidi & Moeti, 2016). There is a need to explore whether the identification of development initiatives accounts for the realities of the community members and is a thorough joint process. This is because there are constant dissatisfactions of the members of the communities regarding their involvement in development-related activities in local government.

Researchers such as Fourie and Van der Waldt (2021) as well as Arieko and Kisimbii (2020) consider integrated development planning as a vital consultative mechanism in development discourse. In the study undertaken by Fourie and Van der Waldt (ibid) for example in eleven local, districts and metropolitan municipalities the findings revealed that most participants indicated that the integrated development planning process was by the local authorities to consult them on their development needs. Similarly, Arieko and Kisimbii (2020) believe that community members are able to negotiate their needs in IDP decision-making processes and even monitor the implementation of development initiatives. However, these studies are unable to attest that the negotiations and deliberations during the integrated development planning process are reflected in development initiatives planned and captured in the IDP strategic planning document.

The integrated development planning process is not without its challenges and have been noted by researchers such as Asha and Makalela (2020) and Mpolweni et al. (2024). The authors stated that community members often do not attend IPD processes and therefore do not reflect the needs and aspirations of communities. Furthermore, Petunia and Selepe (2020) state that participants regard political interferences as a common norm in the process that limits the participation of communities in decision-making. Dube et al. (2021) argues that these planning and consultative sessions are not community friendly as they are pitched at the level that

community members are not able to comprehend the process and subsequently not able to fulfil their role. Community members end up as spectators rather than active participants in an environment that is legislated to be consultative.

In addition to the integrated development planning process, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) introduced the ward committees (WCs) to enable grassroots participation of communities in local governance. Section 73 of the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a) provides the objectives of these committees as one of the mechanisms to enhance participatory decision-making processes in development planning (Nemakanga & Mashamaite, 2024). The MSA Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) refers to the committees as community involvement vehicles used as a transportation tool that informs the elected and appointed authorities of community needs conducted through ward assessments (RSA, 2000). The aim of the committees is to ensure that the voices of the communities including the marginalised and less heard are taken into consideration in decision-making processes in development initiatives by the local authorities (RSA, 2005; RSA, 2007a; Taylor, et.al. 2020).

The introduction of WCs was a way to close the communication gap between local authorities and community members (De Vries & Ile, 2021; Molepo & Maleka, 2018; Thusi et al., 2023). In return, promoting the implementation of decentralised decision-making processes in local government where community voices are heard in development-related planning (Mamokhere & Meyer, 2023a; Selepe, 2023) Tshishonga, 2022).The WCs are required to act as an interface between the local authorities and community members (Yende et al., 2024). This structure is supposed to fill the critical gap that exists between local authorities and communities, thereby ensuring that communities enjoy the liberty given to them by the Constitution and local governance legislation and policies to take part in the decision-making processes. These committees are expected to play a role in ensuring that the local government authorities hear communities' voices.

The ward committees strengthen the participatory practices in decision-making processes (RSA, 2005) because they comprise community members from the local ward. However, this can only be achieved when this participatory mechanism is used correctly in that community members are considered as development partners in local government (Auriacombe & Meyer, 2020). The committee must be an active structure with the focus on ascertaining community-based planning. The committee has the potential of being a good participatory structure for CP, however several limitations exist, Modise (2017) argues that these committees are often distracted by the tyranny of the majority and cohesive leadership that misguide their legal mandate. Moeti and Mokoena (2017) use the same argument by stating that those who are expected legally to participate in extensive discussions in these structures are left to the spectator role. This means that the committees are failing to ensure that community members participate in local government matters. It is clear that WC's are interfaced with officials who are legislative not required to facilitating CP in local government.

Dube et al. (2021) argue that WCs are often highly polarised by politics and censorship, even though the operations of these committees are guided by local governance laws. The composition of the WCs can be diluted with members of political parties who ensures that community voices are not heard but those of their political structures (Nene, 2019). This reduces CP in decision-making as a mere compliance exercise and not a genuine process of empowerment that protects community voices in development activities. Yende et al. (2024) also point out that WCs are just an extension of political dominance on local communities that hinders the involvement of communities in decision-making processes in local government matters. These views points to the dysfunctionality of the system due to political influence, which renders the ward committees ineffective.

In addition to political interferences in the administration of the WCs, researchers argue that the reporting system poses a challenge to the effective representation of community members in decision-making processes. For instance, Phago and Molosi-France (2018) reports that the operations of the WCs are hampered by the fact that they are surrounded by political spaces, as they report to the ward councillor and Office

of the Speaker, who both are political appointments. Mngomezulu (2020) further believes that with the deteriorated confidence in local government political environment, the proximity of committees to the political office bearers hinders any faith that community members may have in their functioning. As such there is an indication that the independence of WCs is compromised by reliance on political offices, which has been identified as a censorship to participatory environment space.

Although Auriacombe and Sithomola (2020) argue that these committees are building blocks to participatory governance, Gumede (2021) and Kuhlengisa et al. (2025) argue that WCs have failed to be a mouthpiece for communities in council decision-making processes. The interferences on mandate objectives and the absence of decision-making powers of the WCs limit their effectiveness in the local wards. The only way the WCs would be able to deliver as per objectives in CP is through their independence so that participatory approach to development can be achieved.

In strengthening the role of WCs in community participation, Bakre and Dorasamy (2018) state that an efficient, effective, well-trained ward committees are key to achieving community goals and provision of quality and development initiatives aligned with community ambitions. WC members should be empowered on council decision-making processes, which will ensure they are effective, inclusive, transparent and participatory (Modise, 2017). However, the same local government authorities viewed as distracting the system from its legal mandate cannot be the same that will explore measures to empower the structure. The disarray in the functioning of the WC system as a mechanism of decision-making influence has led the WCs to be an extension of ward councillors rather than an impactful committee that influences decision-making processes (Brooks, 2017).

In addition to the WCs, in 2003 the RSA government introduced the Community Development Workers (CDW) programme whose main objective is to bring government services closer to communities (Modise, 2017; Moeti & Mokoena, 2017). The aim of the programme is to enhance CP by ensuring that communities participate

in local government participatory structures. There is a clear indication of the cross functioning of CDWs and WCs in the local sphere of government. Moeti and Mokoena (2017) refer to the CDW as participatory change agents in that they foster the active involvement of community members in local government matters, ensuring that grassroot voices shape development initiatives. However, the overlap of functions of CDWs and WCs often confuses community members as both are based within the same wards in the municipalities with minimal distinctions (Nene, 2019). The lack of clear segregation of duties affects community participation in a negative way because often these structures do not know their expected outcomes.

In addition to the lack of segregation of duties mentioned by Nene (2019), the absence of guidelines on the desired CDW deliverables is another obstacle to the successful implementation of the CDW programme (Gray & Lombard, 2024). Further, CDWs lack the expertise and understanding necessary to carry out their part in community involvement processes (Hart & De Beer, 2022). Instead of collaborating with communities on development concerns that encourage community engagement, they continue to be susceptible to political and private goals of local government officials. The political environment and systematic challenges in local governments hinder their effectiveness in active public participation and undermine important role of community participation in the programme.

The Constitution of the RSA, Act 108 of 1996, (RSA, 1996) makes provision for the involvement of community based organisations (CBOs) in local governance (RSA, 2005). The provision also enables local authorities to facilitate and implement decentralised decision-making processes in line with the democratic system of governance. The MSA classifies community organisations alongside community members that participate in local governance (RSA, 2005). These organisations include traditional and religious groups, business forums and NGOs (Tshoose, 2015). Berkvens et al. (2024) confirm that such community organisations are likely to influence local government democracy through their ability to mobilise community members.

Community involvement according to Molepo and Maleka (2018) takes place at the level of an individual and organisation stakeholders in local communities. Thebe (2017) emphasises that parties such as CBOs and business forums with vested interest in local governance must participate in decision-making processes on development initiatives in the interest of democratic governance. These stakeholders are civil society organisations that are concerned with community members and groups wellbeing in local government. Fourie and Van der Waldt (2021) agree that these stakeholders represent ideas of community members in the IDP process. Similarly, Mamokhere and Meyer (2022a) believe that community members must develop their independent community organisations to serve as an intermediary between themselves and authorities on matters relating to their needs and aspirations. This according to the author is due to the failures of local authorities to initiate participatory platforms that enable the voices of communities to influence decision-making processes.

The need for local government authorities to be open to different stakeholders to play a significant role in decision-making processes cannot be overemphasised. Zwane and Matsiliza (2022) state that local authorities must be in contact with both internal and external environments as they foster transparency and accountability in participation. The author further state that these stakeholders are key to service delivery programmes of the local municipalities due to their keen interest in community development. Mankuebe and Manicom (2020) and Marzouki, et.al. (2022) maintain that through CBOs, community members are able to influence decision-making processes in local government structures and complement the decentralisation process. Likewise, Leon-Guerrero (2018) refer to this strategy as a social action campaign where community organisations aim to influence local government decision-making processes.

Section 23 of the Municipal Finance Management Act (RSA, 2003) stipulates that local government authorities must implement Participatory Budgeting (PB) as one of the community participation mechanisms (Masiya et al., 2019; Thebe, 2016). The Act encourages community members to actively participate in the budgetary processes to

ensure that their views are incorporated in fiscal planning (Molepo & Maleka, 2018; Ndou & Sebola, 2016). PB provides finance assurance for negotiated development initiatives (Abbasov, 2025; Kraai et al., 2023; Uddin, 2019), in fact, through PB, community members are able to influence the financial structuring in local governance (Jurlina Alibegović & Slijepčević, 2018). Such participation plays a critical role in the prioritisation of funds for local specific development initiatives.

In European countries, much progress has been made in the involvement of communities in budgeting processes such that there is increasing participation in local government financial planning (Jurlina Alibegović and Slijepčević, 2018). The same is found in Asian countries as reported by Uddin (2019) who states that local government budgetary processes is anchored on the views of the communities. Even though these countries have moved to attract communities in financial transparency in local government, the South African local government remains behind as Malemane and Nel-Sanders (2021) observe that it is a norm in the country's local government that financial decisions related to development initiatives exclude communities' inputs. The Local municipalities struggle with empowering the local communities with the ability to make constructive and meaningful budgetary and this limitation affects communities ability to participate in municipal finance-related decisions (Tshishonga, 2024).

Masiya et al. (2021) and Mamokhere and Meyer (2022a) recommend and emphasise continuous education of community members role in decision-making processes. This will in turn assist them in holding local government authorities accountable for financial mismanagement affecting their development initiatives. Masiya et al., (2021) state that lack of participation in local government budget processes is a deliberate act of municipal authorities to involve communities in PB. These failures of the local government authorities are in contradiction to their roles and responsibilities as stated in Chapter 4 of the MSA Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000). This contradiction has major policy implications on local government decision-making processes (Einstein et al., 2019).

It is important that local authorities employ multiple channels to involve communities in decision-making processes as Einstein et al. (ibid) states. Further, it is necessary to create a locally developed participation strategy in line with the dynamics in local government. Adebayo and Butcher (2021) argue that a well-documented local participatory mechanism strategy can ensure that active participation is achieved to mitigate the undesirable outcomes. This strategy according Uddin (2019) enhances feedback processes that enable local government authorities to evaluate community development initiatives. In addition, Brooks (2017) states that these mechanisms must afford community members an opportunity to fully understand and appreciate the results of their participation.

2.4. Communities' response to efforts made by local authorities to engage them in decision-making

The White Paper on Local Government (WPLG) 1998 places emphasis on CP in local governance. The paper stipulates that local government authorities must engage and encourage communities to participate in addressing matters related to the improvement of their livelihoods (RSA, 1998b). It is through these actions that communities should utilise the available participatory mechanisms to engage local authorities on their development challenges, needs and desired outcomes. However, their interests and willingness to use these measures are dependent on several factors such as transparency, accountability and empowerment of communities in development planning and processes (Nyama & Mukwada, 2023).

Neshkova and Kalesnikaite (2019) argue that community interest in local government matters rests on the experience of a corruption free participatory environment as corruption has the potential of limiting community voices in local governance. Msenge and Nzewi (2021) because that community members are purposefully left out in decision-making for the benefit of a few elite members of society. This hampers the responses from the community members as they view local decision-making as singularly handled rather than a collaborative process characterised by sufficient communication channels (Modise, 2017). Local government authorities according to

Msenge & Nzewi (2021) are compromised to support and favour their own objectives as a result the authors conclude that development activities end up as a role for individuals who are politically connected to the elected and appointed local government authorities.

The lack of response and motivation of communities to participate in local governance can attributed to the perception that their involvement has no bearing and influence on development initiatives (Guragain, 2024). This is because communities might have the view that local development initiatives do not reflect the discussions that took place during the Public Participation (PP) processes. Hence, Hofer et al. (2024) report that community participation would only be accomplished through open and clear deliberations on development needs and priorities. This would ensure that community presence in development discussion forums is not a mere appearance. For improved response to local government community initiatives, communities must feel heard in decision-making processes in community development activities which will foster ownership of development initiatives (Zhang, 2024).

The studies by Sibanda and Lues (2021) as well as Odoom et al. (2021), revealed that communities feel powerless in public spaces meant for their involvement in decision-making processes. Tshoose (2015) holds the view that such powerlessness is a result of the conduct of local authorities which makes them controllers rather than enablers of an open environment where inputs and discussions on development should be encouraged. Such authorities strip away power from the local communities through pre-existing decisions which community visibly should have deliberated by collaboration and participation. Hence, local municipalities are congested with dissatisfied community members who have no idea of the development initiatives that are taking place in their local wards and eventually resort to civil protests associated with service delivery.

Power imbalances experienced during the PP processes often lead to unequal participation (Guragain, 2024; Sebunya & Gichuki, 2024). The key point to active and

effective participation is shared and equitable participatory power among all the participants (Mathebula,2016). Empowering those who are excluded from decision-making processes, usually the marginalised, enables them to participate in collectively influencing development planning practices for their benefit (Munyede & Machengete, 2020). However, it has become a norm for systematic exclusion of those perceived powerless in decision-making processes. It is for this reason that scholars such as Sibanda and Lues (2021) state that those who determine power determines who is involved in decision-making in local government.

In many cases, most opportunities provided for consultations and deliberations on development planning are seen by community members as symbolic rather than significant (Sibanda & Lues, 2021). They provide pseudo involvement rather than active participation, which has led to trust in the local government authorities deteriorating overtime (Dube et al., 2021; Mkhize & Mutereko, 2022; Msenge & Nzewi, 2021). This makes many community members reluctant to show up when invited by local authorities, as their participation bear no impact on development activities. Tshoose (2015) states that attendance at these meetings has not guaranteed that any of the inputs of community members are included in the development initiatives in local municipalities. As a result, the author maintains that community members remain unimpressed by the invitations to participate in local governance discussions.

There is an existing indication that the increased levels of trust in local government authorities provide an opportunity for higher level of CP (Dayadi et al., 2024). The low level of trust in local government authorities has the potential to encourage disillusionment and discouragement that results in the lack of interest in local governance matters. This weakens the democratic state of local government contrary to the provisions of all the legislations that point to participation (Ibrahim, 2024). Sibanda and Lues (2019) argue that for the local authorities to increase their community trust, they must achieve community development initiatives transparently. A transparent PP process can act as a catalyst to a community's trust in local government (Ardanaz et al., 2023).

In many local municipalities, CP remains rhetorical, communities are involved in the process of decision-making on development initiatives on paper, while the final product indicates political decisions (Thebe, 2016). It is for this reason that there is usually a low turnout when members of the community are invited. The response rate to CP would remain insignificant to make any impact on decisions and development practices as opportunities for meaningful engagement are shaped by unconsidered community inputs (Amal, 2025). Meaningful inclusion of community members in the development policies and plans enables ideas that are reflective of community inputs (Munyede & Machengete, 2020), which would ensure that communities become interested in local governance.

There is a need to enforce gender mainstreaming in local government decision-making processes and development practices for example, women in Nepal face marginalisation when it comes to meaningful and active participation regardless of the law supporting their involvement in these processes (Dahal, 2021). In Nigeria, cultural practices have limited women participation in decision-making processes in development initiatives as the role of women is seen to taking care of their husbands (Veta, 2024). Research by the cited author implies that women are intentionally overlooked in decision-making processes to fit the narrative that participation in local government decision-making processes is based on gender. They are also required to compete for participation spaces against their male counterparts. Thus, women end up viewing development as a specialised involvement for men especially if they are allowed to compete.

Several studies such as those by Ara et al. (2024); Hanif et al. (2023); Olayode, (2016) as well as Rutaremara (2018) noted that patriarchy is prevalent in which women are viewed caregivers rather than intellectual contributors to their development affecting their ability to influence decision-making processes. Akala (2018) believes that the roles of women, especially black women, are subjected to minimal undertakings in decision-making practices. Gender disparity remains an elusive discussion in development practices especially in rural municipalities. These areas are known for their patriarchal practices, where women are subjected to homebuilders who lack any

involvement in government decision-making processes. As a result, many of these experiences lead to women's apathy and low turnout in community engagement efforts from the local government authorities.

Researchers such as Akala (2018), Arieko and Kisimbii (2020), and Ara et al. (2024), state that men are preferred partners in participatory practices than women. This limits women in addressing matters affecting their community wellbeing, which challenges their full participation in decision-making processes and hinders their potential in contributing to the shaping of development initiatives. Development of any municipality, according to Dahal (2021) bases its processes on the combined utilization of its resources, inclusive of human capital, both men and women. Molale (2019) recommends further engagements and research on the non-participation of women in key decision-making processes. The arguments provided by these scholars is that women's responses is low in community participation, as men appear to be preferred partners in development planning environments.

In addition to women's role on local government decision-making processes, youth seems to be another category of the local community whose involvement in decision-making is not prioritised (Nxumalo & Matsiliza, 2020). Despite legislative, policy and framework guidance, their participation, their needs and interest are not catered for in development-related decision-making processes (Maphosa & Moyo, 2024). It is evident in the number of development initiatives in local government that are not youth specific. In cases where youth are afforded an opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes, their participation has no influence on the documented development initiatives (Munyede et al., 2021). This leads to youth that is reluctant to provide input in development-related decisions as their involvement has no meaningful impact on local government development projects. In some instances, they end not showing up when they are invited to participate in development activities. Titigah et al. (2023) states that this class of community members were not always aware of development initiatives in their local municipalities due to being excluded in the development-related decisions.

There is an observation from the locals that participation in local governance is a political activity. Therefore only certain and elite members of a specific political organisation can have their voices heard (Mkhize & Mutereko, 2022; Sibanda & Lues, 2021). This highlights one of the major challenges that hinders the response of communities in efforts taken by local authorities to engage them as political intrusion. Leta (2017) indicates that the lack of involvement by community members in decision-making processes is due to political factors. These political intrusion becomes a barrier to meaningful involvement of communities in municipal authorities attempt to draw participation of community members in decision-making processes (Rafique et al., 2023).

Rendering the involvement of community members in participatory governance into a political arena marginalises the idea of developmental local governments that articulate the role of all community members in development. The local authorities must be vested in the role of developmental local government as much as their political affiliations (Leta, 2017; Zwane & Matsiliza, 2022). Party structures are often used to select community members who will participate in decision-making processes, using measures such as affiliation, councillors network and WC structures to exclude some members of the community (Sibanda & Lues, 2019). This often disempowers community members to participate fully and actively in municipal affairs. Local authorities are required to use CP processes to enhance and involve active participation of community members in municipal affairs regardless of their political affiliations and party structures (Zwane & Matsiliza, 2022).

Building a developmental local government requires that community issues be addressed from the grassroots level up to the municipal council level and with support from the local government political leadership. However, Cornwall (2017) makes a point that this environment is a place where political, personal agendas, fear and dependency are instilled in local communities. According to Hove et al. (2022), these spaces breed contestation between elected and appointed local government authorities and communities, in which development initiatives and projects end up reflecting the dominating political parties in local government. Hence, the belief that

participatory environments present individual and political agendas that disempower community members to make any significant impact on decision-making processes.

The language, terminology and explanations that are used during community participation are not always at the level of understanding of all community members (Mashiachidi & Moeti, 2016). This is regardless Chapter 4 Section 18 (2a) of the Municipal System Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) instructing local government authorities to be language sensitive in PP discourse. As such, community members do not seeing the value of their presence in meetings meant to share information and seek input. Sibanda and Lues (2019) and Dube et al. (2021) argue that community members view themselves deliberately excluded in the decision-making processes because the documents and explanations provided are not user friendly in respect of the language of the community members. It is for this reason that Mnguni and Hlohlolo (2024) recommends that local government authorities to adhere to the legislations and employ the use of a language that is familiar and accessible to communities.

Researchers such as Marzuki (2015), Leta (2017), Mamokhere and Meyer (2022a), and Hao et al. (2022) agree that community members level of education has an impact on their responses to the efforts made by the local government authorities to engage them in decision-making processes. The authors further recommend that community members be empowered on their rights, roles and responsibilities. Mashiachidi and Moeti (2016) also support these views by stating that the lack of knowledge among community members makes it difficult for them to participate effectively in development activities. Furthermore, the level of education of community members affects their ability to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes once language becomes a barrier to information and participation.

The ability of community members to articulate their needs and wishes during the decision-making processes is important in development activities and practices. Tshoose (2015) and Mamokhere and Meyer (2022a) recommend for community members to be educated to effectively and efficiently participate in local governance

matters, especially those that are affecting their livelihood and development. In this context, Fourie and Van der Waldt (2021) also recommend that local authorities employ a targeted approach to CP practices that is applicable and relevant to their own settings and environments. This means that each of the local municipalities should conduct environment scanning to identify mechanisms that are appropriate for their communities. It may result in increased interest and a positive response to efforts by the local government authorities to engage communities in decision-making processes.

Makalela (2018) reports that the low levels of participation of community members in local government matters are fuelled by the absence of CP guidelines and principles. This poses a significant challenge to the active and meaningful involvement of communities in local governance. The main challenge experienced with this level of participation is the misalignment of communities' realities and conditions to the set municipal development plans and initiatives. The consequences of this low participation are experienced through the inability to make just development decisions on development initiatives even though there are available mechanisms in local government to involve broader communities in decision-making processes Mamokhere and Meyer, (2022b). Hence, a clearly defined community participation strategy must be followed in local government to meaningfully shape development outcomes.

2.5. Initiatives taken by community members to ensure that they take part in decision-making processes.

Essentially, CP in decision-making processes within the local government includes but is not limited to, direct and indirect involvement in decision-making processes about the policies, plans, or programmes that directly and indirectly affect the livelihoods of the communities (Quick & Bryson, 2022). In essence, participation gives power back to community members to make informed decisions concerning their developmental needs and solutions. It further ensures community trust in local government since as Leonard (2019) explains participation without influence is empty and frustrating for the

powerless. These are community members who rely on local government authorities for their development.

Even though there are mechanisms for community participation, there is minimal effort by authorities to inform communities on the importance and participation opportunities in local governance (Bajrami & Bajrami, 2024). Communities are forced to resort to their own means to ensure they participate in decision-making processes. Yende (2024) believes that this is due to the failures of these local authorities to include communities in decision-making processes. The author further refers to this initiative as community-led participation that is because of lack of consideration of communities in development-related decisions in local government. For some community members this has become preferred method of participation that ensures they take part in decision-making processes (Ragolane & Malatji, 2024a).

Though local municipalities are expected to avail mechanisms that foster active involvement of communities in decision-making processes, these have not been the case in various municipalities and locations. Scholars, such as Bakre and Dorasamy (2018), Asha and Makalela (2020), Msenge and Nzewi (2021), Malemane and Nel-Sanders, (2021) and Umoh (2022), report that there has been an increase in community protests in local government space, which are mostly violent as a result of exclusionary decision-making processes. These studies argue that community members have taken the road of protests as the only means to have their voices heard in development-related decisions affecting their livelihoods. According to Naidoo and Ramphal (2018), these are a result of communities' desperation to raise concerns around decision–making processes. However, it remains unknown whether these protests have provided meaningful opportunities for community involvement in decision-making processes.

The concept of service delivery protests is not only found in the South African context (Mamokhere, 2021). Communities embark on these protests as a consequence of community exclusion in decision-making processes (Gamalath, 2021; Shongwe and

Meyer; 2023). They are a collective challenge posed to the political elite and local authorities by communities with mutual concerns and common goals seeking reforms in power distribution and resources (Kali, 2023; Mngomezulu, 2020). They appear to be the only alternative route to attract the considerations from the local authorities (Thusi et al., 2022). The lack of community participation, which results in lack of trust in local government authorities results in serious development challenges such as these service delivery protests (Chili et al., 2023).

Taylor, et al. (2020) concludes that the increase in service delivery protests in the South African context is a display of community discontent with the decision-making processes of the local government authorities. When local government authorities fail communities they are expected to serve, service delivery protests become the only option communities have for recourse. It is evident that there is an existing gap in the manner community participation unfolds in local government due to the increase in these protests. Msenge and Nzewi (2021) asserts that only meaningful community involvement in decision-making processes can be a deterrent to these protests.

While there are regulatory and legislated processes for the involvement of community members, there are also established connections with local government elites within communities to influence decisions in local government. The lack of trust and belief in local authorities leads community members to the development of these connections (Swapan & Khan, 2022). For instance, Maphumulo (2025) mentions that the connections to the local traditional leaders in communities has the potential to ensure there is an alignment between community needs and local government development initiatives. However, in relation to the connections built with ward councillors, their ineffectiveness has made the mechanism undesirable and unfavourable (Ragolane & Malatji, 2024b). The implication of such attachment allows for the manipulation and power-centred decision-making processes. This attachment poses even more challenges to locals as it is susceptible to corruption and bribery.

Most importantly, active CP is a cornerstone for influencing and driving the decision-making processes in local government (Leta, 2017). Notably, community members utilize different means to hold the local authorities accountable on their mandate of ensuring that their constitutional right to participate in matters of local government is upheld. While it may not be feasible for the government to satisfy every member of a community in decision-making processes, development initiatives facilitated through community inclusion has merits and could minimize protests (Bakre & Dorasamy, 2018). Kali (2023) states that a responsive government can minimize the negative effects of the protests especially regards to participatory decision-making.

2.6. Community needs identification, analysis and prioritization.

Section 153 (a) of the Constitution of the RSA, Act 108 of 1996 articulates the identification process of community needs in local municipalities (RSA, 1996). It stipulates that municipalities must structure and manage their administration, budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community and promote the social and economic development of the communities. It is through community involvement in local government that these needs can be identified and given priority as required by the legislation and policies that govern local government during local government participatory processes (Costumado & Chemane, 2024; Fourie & Waldt, 2021). Community needs and interventions are identified in such a way that voices at the grassroots level feed into the development planning and initiatives of the local municipalities (Kasapa & Gyan, 2023). However, the top-down approach used in local government development initiatives identification limits voices of communities in development initiatives planning processes (Arkorful et al., 2023). The dire consequences of this approach is that development initiatives end up not aligned to community needs, unsupported and not sustainable.

African scholars in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania share the similar sentiments as South African scholars, in that the involvement of communities in the identification of development initiatives is paramount to their success and sustainability (Kasapa & Gyan, 2023; Naku et al., 2021; Yusuf et al., 2020). In all of these African countries, there are legislative frameworks that safeguard the participation of

communities in the identification of development-related initiatives that affect their livelihoods. The general view is that the involvement of communities during the planning and identification stage is important for building consensus with the communities. Even though this is the case, Fuseini et al. (2025) argue that communities are still side-lined in development initiatives identification and prioritisation. This raises the question whether the community initiatives are identified, analysed and prioritised to fulfil the needs of communities or that of the local government authorities.

Molepo and Maleka (2018) state that the local authorities, through consultative processes are expected to develop plans that include all the prioritised development needs. This plan according to Arieko and Kisimbii (2020) is crucial to local municipalities as it points out a blueprint for the achievement of community needs. By aligning community needs to available resources in a development plan, local government authorities are able to ensure prioritisation of development initiatives. In addition, Fourie and Van der Waldt (2021) argue that these development initiatives must be inclusive of the implementation plans, budget and evaluation criteria set out for the assessment of the attainment of the deliberated objectives. The important part is to ensure that communities are involved in the process at the early stage to ensure that their views are considered in decision-making.

The development initiatives identification processes, Munzhedzim (2020a) believes can be undertaken through various mechanisms and platforms such as community meetings, WCs, IDP forum meetings and social networks. Ngoran and Mougoue, (2021) states that this is an important foundation in the analysis of the development initiatives. This notion is also supported by Petunia and Selepe (2020) who state that the approach allows the local government authorities to deliver accurate and need-based development initiatives that benefit community members. Similarly Lavhelani Kgobe et al. (2024) and Ngoran and Mougoue (2021) agree that none of the local government authorities can know community needs unless they embark on CP processes. Essentially, the involvement of community members in local government

decision-making processes is the only way in which local needs can be addressed (Munzhedzi, 2020a).

Over recent times, researchers have noted that local authorities prioritise their own ideal development initiatives with little or no involvement of communities. This Asha and Makalela (2020) believe is because the local government authorities prioritise development initiatives linked to their own preferences and that of political structures agendas. Adebayo and Butcher (2021) states that some of the initiatives are decided and prioritised to benefit local economies rather than the aspirations of the local community. This is despite of the legislative frameworks that provide for the consultations processes rendering community members passive receivers of pre-determined development initiatives.

Relevant stakeholders, including community members, need to be afforded an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the conversations on development matters to achieve effective and efficient local governance that prioritise community needs. It reduces planning costs and aids proper coordination, collaboration and consultation in the needs identification process (Sapkota, 2023). These stakeholders create a clear road map for sustainable and inclusive planning, with community members as active change agents who can define real development challenges, needs and priorities through community needs assessment processes. The findings of the study by Fourie and Van der Waldt (2021) led to them recommending a need for systematic change within local government operations due to lack the appetite for active involvement of community members in local decision-making processes.

At the core of development-discourse lies continuous inclusion of community members in needs identification. The practice of imposing singularly identified and prioritised development initiatives fall away to give community members a legitimate opportunity to invest inputs and opinions in their development. The MSA (RSA, 2000) makes provision for local authorities to consult with community members in developing a priority plan that addresses their development needs (RSA, 2000). This ensures that

the identified needs are based on grassroots interventions and community needs (Dayadi et al., 2024). Local authorities must be able to identify strategic interests that need to be responded to and prioritize them with community members through active participation (Uddin, 2019).

Mokoena and Molepo (2024) argue that the legitimacy of development initiatives rests upon the involvement of communities in the development and planning stages of the initiatives. Local government authorities have a legal and moral obligation to involve communities in identification, analysis and prioritising development needs (Fourie & Van der Waldt, 2021). The achievement of local government objectives according to Kamau and Mbirithi (2021) are set on the participation of communities in identification of development initiatives. However, Malemane and Nel-Sanders (2021) and Sapkota and Adhikaree (2023) observe that it is a common practice in local government that community needs identification, analysis and prioritization are subjected to local authorities and external stakeholders. The authors further state that the misalignment of development initiatives and community needs and aspirations.

There are notable challenges in the identification, analysis and prioritisation processes of development initiatives in local government and Chili et al. (2023) believe that poor consultation processes as one of the hindrances to well defined development initiatives that are community specific. This has led to communities accepting development initiatives that are pre-determined, pre-recorded and pre-prioritized due to top-down municipal operations. Kinyata and Abiodun (2020) conclude that many development initiatives in Africa fail due to lack of consideration of community involvement processes in their identification. This strips away the alignment of community needs to the development initiatives. At most, these development initiatives end up not used by communities because they do not serve any of their development needs.

Arieko and Kisimbii (2020) call for improved community engagement and deliberations in the identification of development initiatives in local government that foster

participation in both identification and prioritisation. These deliberations need to include community members from the beginning to the end. Hence, local government democratic strategy includes policy framework that prioritises community involvement in decision-making processes (Ndou & Sebola, 2016). This encourages communities to show up at municipal public participatory meetings for them to authentically communicate their development challenges and aspirations (Bester, 2020).

The ability of local authorities to understand grassroots challenges and needs is hampered by exclusion of communities in prioritizing the identification of development initiatives according to Matsa et al. (2023). Similarly, Uddin (2019) and Arkorful et al., (2023) argue that the identification process that is not characterised by community involvement hinders the success and sustainability of the development initiatives. The authors believe that all relevant stakeholders should be involved in the deliberate collaborative process that needs to take place in the identification of development needs. They further state that the evaluation process should include the impacts of each of the development initiatives identified in line with the needs. This would allow for identifying good practices and challenges from the current participatory experiences and developing ways to improve future processes.

2.7. Implementation of community development initiatives

The White Paper on Local Government 1998 (RSA, 1998b), the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a) and the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) provide a leading role to the local government authorities in the co-ordination and implementation of community-centred to develop initiatives. Atkinson (2002) states that in principle the local authority, since its transition in 1999, has turned into local government that promotes community development. This ensures that communities have a central role in the implementation of development activities. However, Mlambo and Maserumule (2023) indicate that community centred development practices have drastically declined in local government. This is because local government operations are unaligned to development prescripts. Therefore, the developmental local government as envisioned in the WPLG 1998 has not be realised.

The implementation of community development initiatives in local government is centralised to the councillors and the municipal council due to the bottom-up approach not being practised in local government (Masuku & Molope, 2020). This according to Kusambiza-Kiingi-Planact (2018) is due to the centralised nature of local government where decisions are made centrally and communities are only informed later about the developmental initiatives taken by local municipalities. Such an approach shows that communities are involved in the implementation process, at the stage where only their labour is needed. The manner of decision-making employed affects planned municipal developmental programmes, as they are likely not to be in line with the needs of local communities. Hence, community members most of the projects are not supported by the community members.

Vhumbunu et al. (2020), Mashamaite and Lethoko (2018), and Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan (2023) point out that community development initiatives are multifaceted programmes reflecting an interplay of economic, social and physical community development. These initiatives aim at addressing municipal specific local development challenges. It is for this reason that they must be identified interventions aligned to community needs (Ssegawa & Muzinda, 2025). Such interventions are intended to combat and alleviate socioeconomic challenges by eradicating poverty while increasing self-reliance and independence of communities in local governance as Shava and Thakhathi (2016) observe.

Each development initiative is expected to have its objectives and outcomes as well as resources needed to implement, monitor and evaluate its contents. This is further stated by Dick-Sagoe et al. (2023) that development initiatives in local municipalities must follow systematic processes where communities and authorities negotiate and reach consensus on the such objectives, target beneficiaries and strategies needed to achieve the initiative objectives. Mosquera-Guerrero et al. (2023) argue that a development initiative must have an identified community need to address. Therefore, development initiatives in local government are community centric as they involve extensive consultations with communities, balancing competing interests and addressing long-term social and environmental outcomes.

Yusuf et al., (2020) state that grassroots participation in development initiatives in local government is essential to sustainability of the community development programmes. The authors believe that it gives communities control, ownership and interest in the development initiatives that are authentic to development challenges and needs. The sustainability of community development initiatives further implies that community members partake in decisions regarding project delivery modalities, assist in the mobilisations of resources, motivate others to join and offer their local knowledge, skills and expertise. It is for this reason that Sapkota (2023) posits that grassroots involvement of communities in the conceptualisation of development initiatives is not only necessary but strategically imperative. Hence Musyoki et al. (2020) recommends a community participation strategy that is community centric and provides guidance to the local authorities on projects conceptualisation.

The conceptualisation of development initiatives according to Van der Waldt (2024) commences with the valuations of the community's local area and environmental scanning to identify needs and development challenges that should be addressed. The author argues that community development initiatives ought to mirror and illustrate the debates and deliberations between parties. This means that people who are supposed to be beneficiaries of development initiatives should be engaged in every stage from the conceptualisation to the actualisation and management. Such level of involvement is necessary so that the development initiative can have their desired impact at the local level (Dick-Sagoe & Nyamadi, 2022).

Development initiatives are deemed meaningless unless they are implemented and demonstrate an impact on the lives of community members. Moreno-Monsalve et al. (2023) and Ramodula and Govender (2021) state that implementation process of development initiatives requires clear goals and objectives for community development and sustainability. Molepo and Maleka (2018) state that the implementation phase of community development initiatives that it must be characterised by the set priority goals as articulated in the consultative implementation

plan and the budgetary process. In essence, the implemented development initiatives must appear in the municipal development plan, following a meticulous process that involves elements such as time, co-ordination as well as monitoring evaluation strategies. The absence of these community development initiatives aspects will lead to having detrimental effects on the livelihoods of communities (Kiio, 2020).

The National Development Plan 2030 in South Africa dictates that improved local government performance requires amongst others just pure implementation of government programmes (RSA, 2013). Local government authorities are expected to implement initiatives as set out during community involvement and participatory governance as deliberated upon by all participants (Munzhedzi, 2020b). Ironically local authorities are seen to be implementing those that are funder specific due to local government financial dependency (Phago & Molosi-France, 2018). The only remedy is for local government authorities to conduct an environmental analysis to ensure that the implemented development initiatives are locally specific and respond to locals needs. Therefore, the National Development plan 2030 directs and informs the participation of communities in development-related matters.

Mashamaite and Lethoko (2018) identified the implementation of development initiatives as one of the challenges facing local governments in South Africa as many development initiatives fail. The failures are attributed to mainly structural exclusion of community involvement in development initiatives (Sikhosana and Ntini, 2021). An analysis of standardised CP strategies to determine the level at which community involvement would have assisted in the execution of the initiatives is proposed by Matarrita-Cascante et al. (2020) to address the failure. The authors argued that expert opinion is needed on other initiatives such as in the construction of roads. Thus this further necessitates transparency from the local authorities during the integrated development planning to clarify those initiatives that local municipalities must implement from provincial and national government and the process to be followed in their implementation.

The implementation of development initiatives in South Africa face both structural and implementation challenges as developed and documented structures to influence their conceptualisation seem to be power driven and lack direction due to political operation at local government (Hove et al., 2022). Researchers in local governance argue that local government authorities implement initiatives that are related more to their political objectives than to the needs of communities (Ramodula & Govender, 2021). This is further supported by Modise (2017) in his conclusion that the implementation of development initiatives favour political agendas above community-centred needs. Even though, political support and will are important for the full implementation processes (Munzhedzi, 2020b), the idea of local government existence is that development processes must be free of politically influences for the implementation of development initiatives that benefit of all community members.

Sewwandi (2024) contends that the challenge that community members face in local government is that they only get to interact with the development initiatives at the implementation phase. Consequently, communities are forced to accept development initiatives that have no bearing on their immediate needs. These development initiatives implemented are guided by undefined objectives, they are broad and unstructured with predetermined goals of the local government authorities (Ndunge, 2020). Researchers such Dana et al. (2021) argue that development initiatives that are implemented without following the process of CP lack community support, ownership, protection and care. These initiatives often fail as the involvement of community from the identification phase until the implementation and evaluation phases are indispensable to their sustainability (Yusuf et al., 2020).

Mashamaite and Lethoko (2018) and Vhumbunu et al. (2020) recommend that local government authorities build meaningful partnerships with external stakeholders, such as private entities and communities in the implementation processes such partnerships, the author maintain will guarantee sustainable local development initiatives in response to the local government development mandate. The collaboration is essential as local communities are constantly at the receiving end of the predetermined development initiatives, which lack sustainability (Sibanda & Lues,

2021). This can be a symptom of a lack of active participation of community members in their development initiatives (Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022b). Therefore, noting the importance of the role that the community members play in their own development as prescribed by legislation, local authorities should adhere to the constitutional mandate of providing an open environment for community members and authorities to engage in developmental issues and policies.

According to Mulinge and Sambuo (2024), lack of meaningful involvement in development initiatives decision-making throughout the planning, implementation and evaluation stages undermine the ability of local government authorities to adequately address local needs and sustain project outcomes. Development initiatives require the involvement of multiple stakeholders such CBOs and community members for their success. Opwora (2020) not only justifies the involvement of community members in the implementation processes in community development programmes but also emphasises that the success of such initiatives rests on local knowledge. Thus local government authorities are expected to apply strategies that will ensure that community inputs are part of the implementation of these projects.

2.8. Community involvement guidelines in decision-making processes

Various community involvement strategies and models have been proposed and implemented in different countries and contexts with the aim of ensuring that community members get an opportunity to participate in local decision-making processes. These strategies and models are set to attract community interest in local government matters, especially in those matters that affect their livelihood. They consequently, afford ordinary members of communities an opportunity to influence local decision-making processes on development matters (Ibrahim, 2017; Kariuki, 2020). The idea is for community members to draw tangible development benefits from development planning. These benefits in the context of this study are community-driven development activities.

Dayadi et al. (2024) state that a CP model must reflect the relationship between local authorities and communities, it must be able to increase community involvement in development planning and achieve PD goals. Similarly, Ibrahim (2017) states that local authority need to capture grassroots participation, where development solutions are based. This implies that these models must safeguard community-based planning. In support, Enaifoghe and Adetiba (2019) state that the dedication to community involvement processes is based on the principle of bottom up development approach because the approach enables community members input in decision-making processes relating to development initiatives. The approach is a central feature of this study in community participation because enable to researcher to examine the extent to which community members participate in decision-making and how this influences the identification, analysis, conceptualisation and implementation of development initiatives.

The adoption of Arnstein ladder of citizen participation in countries has played a critical role in community participation. This model is based on eight rungs of participation which describes the different levels of degree and control at which community members are involved in community development initiatives. These levels suggest distribution of power amongst local authorities and community members (Okazaki, 2008). This is because power has potential influence on who participates in local decision-making and their level of participation. However, the Arnstein ladder of citizen participation is criticized by Swapan (2016) who states that it does not reflect the realities of community members in developing countries. Such a limitation has an impact on local government ability to respond to the needs of its communities. The author suggests that Arnstein (1969) ladder of citizen participation lacks concentration on participatory challenges that face countries such as South Africa.

The Arnstein model has been an important one in the field of CP as such brought about much needed debates on local government participatory processes according to Maphazi et al., (2013). It further gave rise to different community involvement models in building community centred local governance. Correia et.al, (2023) argue that it is important that a CP model surrounds itself with the interests and needs for community

members' comfort and willingness to participate. In light of this, inclusive public participation guideline provides an outline of the identification process of community interests and needs are not alienated in development-related decision-making processes. This prevents the feeling of powerlessness in participatory spaces.

At the bottom of the eight rungs of the level of participation are two levels, manipulation and therapy that indicate non-participation of communities in decision-making process. These levels signify the rule of autocratic power where local government authorities disregard community inputs in decisions-making processes (Arnstein, 1969). In these levels communities are led to believe and support development-related decisions that are predesigned and predetermined which are mostly unaligned to their development needs according to (Karner et al., (2019). However, authentic participation and involvement are not real as a result of manipulation. Therefore, resulting in centralised decision-making process unaligned to local government legislation, frameworks and policies.

In rungs three, four and five are informing, consulting and placation that symbolise a degree of tokenism. Communities are told about decisions that are made by local government authorities without providing spaces for engagements and affirmations that their requests and voices are considered and when these inputs are requested, local government authorities make decisions on their own (Arnstein, 1969). At these levels, the involvement of communities in decision-making processes is rather a symbolic exercise without any meaningful impact on decision-making processes (Yusof et al., 2025). Therefore, informing and consulting do not translate into meaningful participation and involvement of communities in decision-making.

On the last three rung levels, communities share decision-making power in development activities. These levels are partnership, delegated power and citizen control (Arnstein, 1969). At the local government sphere, these levels represent the ability to influence development decision-making processes. It is for this reason that Malemane and Nel-Sanders (2021) state that at these levels, community members

dictate development activities and programme implementation through their involvement and shared decision-making power. These different levels of citizen participation can be explored in the manner in which development-related decision-making are undertaken in the Dihlabeng Local Municipality, taking into account the legislative and policy guidance in community participation. This plays a critical role in understanding the meaningful role of communities in development initiatives.

The Public Participation Model (PPM) elected by the parliament of South Africa is one of the models that take guidance from Arnstein's ladder of participation. The aim of the PPM is to improve community members' influence on parliamentary decision-making processes (RSA, 2016). This model follows Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation in its conceptualisation and assesses the level at which communities participate in parliamentary matters. However, the deteriorated trust in local government authorities and the elected parliamentary representative has made communities sceptical of the implementation (Umoh, 2022). This is because, even though communities provide inputs, feedback is not received. Hence, in the IPPG, the central argument is that feedback provision is a continuous process that ensures public participation office and the local government authorities are well conversant with communities' views and aspirations.

In relation to PPM, an argument can made whether or not the local authorities' task with the implementation of this model are actually following the model steps as documented. While on paper the model looks appealing, the practice in government is such that the participatory processes seem far from the envisage ladder of Citizen Participation on the rungs applicable to community development activities. Local government in South Africa can take lessons from countries such as Indonesia where community development practitioners have seen significant growth in the participation of community members in local decision-making processes through the implementation of the CP model (Dayadi et al., 2024). This shows that when the models are implemented correctly within community-based planning, they can be effective in community involvement strategies.

The CP model for developing countries is another distinct strategy largely centralised on understanding the realities of community members that affect their participation in local governance issues (Swapan, 2016). The idea surrounding this strategy is the inclusion of grassroots marginalised communities in decision-making. While this model is relevant to the idea of developmental local government, Guragain (2024) states that the strategy lacks educational and capacity building aspect, hence most communities are not aware of the processes to follow in participating in local governance matters. The author argues that while this model greatly advocates on grassroots participation, it does not acknowledge the need to ensure full awareness of the development-related processes through education. The risk is that even the implementers might find it hard to build confidence in the strategy with limited educational capabilities. Hence, the inclusive public participation guideline focuses on well-educated and informed authorities in participation guidelines to lead the implementation of community involvement processes.

Mayekiso et al. (2013) present a Normative Public Participation Model (NPPM) that emphasizes the need to ensure that community members and stakeholders are provided with an accessible and easy way of participating in local governance affairs in South African local municipalities. In this model, the author maintain relevant stakeholders that have a role in decision-making processes are provided with an environment accessible to their needs for participation. Maphazi et al., (2013) state that this environment is inclusive of multiple strategies and forms of participation that are accessible to communities in local government. The model proposes participation of community members to be brought close to the communities through active WCs, efficient, effective public participation unit (PPU), plan and well-designed local communication strategy for meaningful PP (Mayekiso et al., 2013).

Literature on participatory models in developing countries, such as Botswana and South Africa, has indicated a need for reformed participatory processes to ensure that the adopted models achieve their set objectives (Phago & Molosi-France, 2018). The currently adopted measures in both countries are not yielding the much-needed involvement of community members as expected in community-based planning but

rather those outputs of municipal authorities and politically appointed individuals. The effectiveness of community-based of planning requires good governance and better investment on CP at local government sphere (Waheduzzaman & As-Saber, 2015). Local government must ensure that CP models are committed and dedicated to development of community members and guided by regulatory prescripts for strict adherence.

Electronic-participation (E-participation) models adopted in local government respond to the eminent challenges in CP in local governments that are brought by disengagements, natural disasters and hindrances in local physical environments and fast-paced digital technology. These models are meant to ensure that community members have access to their local authorities regardless of the time and their physical presence (Pirannejad et al., 2019). Some of these proposed e-participation models include context based citizen participation approach (Marzouki et al., 2017) and balanced E-participation Index (Pirannejad et al., 2019). These models, in line with technological advances, are platforms for easy consolidation of community members' inputs and opinions while providing timely feedback. However, literature reveals that inputs received through this approach are filtered into local government processes and feedback provided to the community members is still lacking, especially in South African local municipalities.

Researchers such as Shin et al. (2024) explored the e-participation models in local government argues for much more engagement of the effectives of such models to provide active participation of community in decision-making processes. The authors holds the view that e-participation model needs further exploration on how inputs received from the communities can be filtered into decision-making processes. These findings suggest that any model that enforces CP needs to outline processes of reporting to communities. In addition, Maleka and Moeti (2021) conclude that communities are unaware of these online participatory mechanisms that limit their utilisation. Efforts must be made to educate and enlighten communities on any adopted model and strategy that has to deal with the involvement of communities in local governance.

It is important to note that the involvement of community members in decision-making processes does not equate to their influence of development initiatives. A model proposed for CP must have an output on measuring the influence that results from the involvement of community members. Furthermore, it should encapsulate representation of ideas and thoughts deliberated during CP. This will ensure that local initiatives mirror the local needs, further providing feedback on the implementation process. The purpose of this study contributes significant knowledge on the CP model that can be implemented in the DLM is to ensure that active participation is achieved, which leads to community members who can constantly influence the local authorities' decision-making processes.

Currently, concerns on the various models lack of consideration of the realities of local municipalities exists and an inclusive public participation guideline provides a remedy to this challenge. The IPPG adopts a community approach where communities are central to each of the steps followed in public participation. This includes an environment scanning process, an effective public participation office that ensure community inputs are documented and feedback is provided. This targeted public participation approach realigns the local participation strategies with a decentralised model of local government.

2.9. Theoretical framework

This section of the chapter presents the theoretical framework underpinning this study. A theoretical framework forms an important foundation on which the study is based, substantiates and support its arguments (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). It further strengthens the researcher's epistemological approach (Eisenhart, 1991). This serves as an essential contribution to knowledge construction and the development of meanings from the collected study data. A framework represents a structured way of enabling a researcher to rely on a formal theory for a coherent explanation of a phenomenon under exploration (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). In this study, the theoretical framework provides an outline on the important discussion on the role of communities in decision-making processes in development initiatives in local government. For the

current study, Participatory Development theory is adopted as the theoretical framework.

2.9.1. Participatory Development (PD) Theory

The theoretical framework guiding this study is the Participatory Development (PD) theory which according to Oakley(1991) emerged in the early 1970s as a response to the modernisation paradigm. The author states that at the time the paradigm was economically centred with little attention given to the involvement of community members in their development. The basic assumption of the theory is that development is a bottom up approach that shapes development activities where communities play an active role in decision-making processes in identification, analysis, prioritisation and implementation of development initiatives rather than recipients of pre-determined initiatives (Freire, 1970). This theory aids the central argument of the study that despite the legislative framework for community participation in local government, communities are dissatisfied with the manner in which development-related decision are taken. Thus, the study provides the lens through which the investigation on community involvement in decision-making processes in development initiatives is undertaken. The study draws on two case studies, the Dihlabeng Local Economic Hub and the Sivukile Youth Agricultural Cooperative initiatives to explore decision-making processes in the DLM.

PD is rooted on the principle that people participation in community projects and initiatives is necessary in community-centred development (Dinbabo, 2003). The theory becomes particularly relevant in local government development initiatives that affect the livelihood of communities. This is because development initiatives must be community orientated following community participation process. In essence, the PD theory asserts that community development planning and implementation of development initiatives is a bottom-up approach. It emphasises the inclusion of community members as active role players in development related decision-making processes where voices of community members are heard in development interventions (Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2009).

In the context of this study, this approach is reflected in the participatory mechanisms in local authorities, how communities are involved in the needs identification, analysis and prioritisation and implemented the participatory guidelines that exist in the DLM. These central questions were raised in the study to understand the ways in which communities are involved in decision-making processes in development initiatives. This represents decentralised decision-making in development discourse as articulated in the local governance policies around the planning and implementation of development initiatives (Tandon;1991). The negotiations and deliberations on development initiatives are remedy to community dissatisfactions and for the attainment needs driven initiatives based is on the belief that these negotiations provide and reflect community interests in local government matters (Wiyaboon, 2018).

Community members and local government authorities are expected to jointly determine through a participatory approach development challenges and needs and design the development interventions to address them (Dinbabo, 2003). As such, these development challenges and community needs are best dealt in a negotiated environment where transparency and accountability are guaranteed. In this case, active participation of community members in the decision-making processes in development initiatives reflects an alignment of community needs and development interventions. As a result, their participation in the identification, analysis and prioritisation, conceptualisation and implementation of development initiatives is of paramount importance in development planning processes.

One of the most important considerations for PD is its alignment to the RSA local government legislative provisions. These provisions compel the involvement of communities in local government decision-making processes in municipal governance and includes section 152 of the Constitution of the RSA (RSA, 1996), Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a), the MSA 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) and the WPLG (RSA, 1998b). The legislation mandates the involvement of community members in local governance through efficient and effective participatory approach. This aligns with the key principles of the PD that ascertain clear and organised

community participation in development initiatives. Therefore, PD compliments the community participation processes as stipulated in the local government legislation provisions.

Legislative frameworks protect the value of community voices in decision-making processes, which makes participation of communities in local governance a legal right. As such, the effectiveness of a democratic state rests on its ability to afford ordinary community members an opportunity to deliberate and negotiate policy direction and development initiatives (Agomor, 2023; Naku & Afrane, 2013). The theory supports the local government rule of law that requires communities affected by development decisions to have their voices heard in those decisions. PD is enshrined in the legislative processes of local government that makes it relevant in decision-making processes. The relegation of communities to endorsers of decisions taken elsewhere falls off.

The introduction of PD in the development planning stages introduced the participation of local community members as a catalyst to democracy and development (Keough, 1998). Moreover, it aligns with a democratic system of governance where participation and development are characterised by empowerment and decentralised decision-making processes (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). In his criticism of PD concedes that the PD, Kapoor (2005) on local CP champions communities at centre of development practices. This puts an emphasis on the role of community members in moulding their development needs and initiatives through participatory practices. These are important elements of good governance especially in relation to community development.

Hu (2022) states that one of the critical components of PD is that the involvement of communities in development processes build a self-reliant and empowered community that attains community driven development solutions. Similarly, De Gramont (2013) states that PD empowers communities to have a voice in development practices, a factor central to this study. By drawing on this key component of PD, the study explores how communities in the DLM were empowered to contribute to the decisions on DLEH

and SYAC. In this way, communities serves as co-decisions makers rather than passive participants in the identification, analysis and prioritisation of development initiatives that affects their livelihoods.

In practical terms, De Gramont (2013) believes PD emerges as the panacea for the shortcomings of the top-down approach in local developments. Cornwall (2003) states that PD prides itself on inclusivity, creating spaces for the less vocal and powerful to exercise their right to be heard and begin to gain more choices in development initiatives. The emphasis on this idea is that most of the solutions to local governance problems are in the community itself. Therefore, local government authorities must consider the needs, aspirations and local knowledge in the community development initiatives (Schumacher, 2011). In a democratic state, local governments are shaped by participatory processes that are important in decision-making and involve communities as development partners in development planning processes and decisions.

Mosse (2001) and Mwanzia and Strathdee (2016) attribute the failures of many development initiatives in addressing the needs of communities as a result of single-handed top-down approach which excludes communities in decision-making processes. Cooke and Kothari (2001) advocates for PD in that it active involvement of communities in decision-making as a cornerstone to sustainable and well supported development initiatives. The argument put forth by the authors is that development initiatives are sustainable when communities are involved from their identification to implementation. Their failures are due to inconsideration of community members in development planning such as the IDP and local government budgetary processes.

Chambers (1994a), Rahman (1993), Chambers (1997), and Kyamusugulwa (2013) state that applying PD results in a shift from top-down approach to bottom-up approach where local voices are used in the conceptualisation of community development initiatives. These researchers argue that development would not be possible without the locals sharing their knowledge on development challenges they experience. The

current study lean itself to this argument by exploring the identification process that was followed by DLM authorities in the DLEH and the SYAC as case studies. Hallard (2022) explains that the advancement of PD is on the idea that shared development knowledge between community members and authorities is an important factor in development.

The rationale behind the PD approach is that the participation of beneficiary groups develop and strengthen their ability to make decisions on matters that affect their livelihoods (Dahal, 2021). Their presence in municipal development planning is not just a mere show-up but actively participating in shaping development. This results in empowered community members who are able to fully contribute in decision-making processes as well as to manage and defend their development initiatives (Gonzalez, 2006). The notion is further propagated by Dinbabo (2003) who states that empowered communities are self-reliant and take ownership of their development they guard and protect development initiatives in their wards. Christens and Speer (2006) justify PD development practice as an empowering process in which development decisions are reflect the ideas of the local communities. Similarly, Chambers (1997) further states that participatory decision-making improves communities' influence in decision-making processes.

The significance of participatory development is emphasised by Cornwall (2002), as not a mere practice of inviting local communities to meetings and outreach events but more on the meaningful participation to impact the decisions taken in local governance that affect them. The concept implies a more inclusive decision-making process where local communities are actively involved as well as empowerment programmes in the local government (Dinbabo, 2003). It is characterised by people making their own decisions and collective ideas and deliberations to development challenges (Rahman, 1993). Therefore, PD refers to participation as a collective and meaningful effort of empowerment and development in that it gives ordinary community members an opportunity to manage their own developmental needs. In essence, a sheer top-down approach to decision-making and ineffective for sustainable development objectives to protect development roles of communities (Wiyaboon, 2018).

Chambers (1994a) points out that involvement of communities in development practice is a process implying the loss of central control and proliferation of local diversity. However, this does not translate into loss of power and local control for government authorities but the shared principle of collaboration and interconnectedness in development processes (Brooks, 2017). In the study, the researcher viewed the approach as providing opportunities for communities to contribute and deliberate on development initiatives as required by a democratic system of government. This is where decentralised decision-making processes and shared power in development initiatives are seen accordingly in line with the local government democracy. Participatory development therefore ensures that local development and service delivery objectives mirror the interests, demands and needs of the public (Mathebula, 2016).

Aligned with the theoretical framework, the fundamental role of local government authorities in municipalities is to ensure that community members are meaningfully involved in local government matters. Brooks (2017) indicates that the discussions in local government around 1990 pointed strongly to the presence of active and meaningful community involvement in local government matters and development initiatives. It is through this assertion that community members are important actors in development and local government decision-making processes. This is a key element of PD as ordinary community members play an active role in shaping and transforming the manner in which development initiatives are conceptualised, prioritised and implemented (Dinbabo, 2003). Local government, by its mandate, must provide a conducive environment where community members can participate actively and meaningfully in developmental socio-economic practices.

PD further fosters ownership of development decisions from communities (Hu, 2022)., protection and care of the development initiatives (Koopmans et al., 2014). This is attained only when communities are part of decision-making processes (Christens & Speer, 2006, Dinbabo; 2003 ; Maboudi & Nadi, 2022). In local municipalities,

participatory development by acknowledging and appreciating the inputs and ideas of community participants in local government programmes. Stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations (NGO's), CBO, business forums based in communities have an important role in development practices of their constituencies shape development planning processes and achieve a sense of ownership borne of active and meaningful participation (Maboudi & Nadi, 2022).

However, PD is not without critics as demonstrated by Kapoor (2005) who states that PD fails to address some of the inequalities that exist in communities which include patriarchy, class inequalities and decisions made with limited participation. Notwithstanding, Mohan and Stokke (2000) provide support for PD by dismissing the politics of local communities in the efforts of community involvement. Marginalised communities in the DLM have an important role in decisions on development initiatives to have their needs heard and listen to. The study was meant to explore the extent of community involvement on development discourse in the municipality. The central question was whether community members were able to influence development-related decision-making processes through the local municipal participatory mechanisms.

The role of participation in development according to Williams (2004) provides a platform for the voice of communities but also strikes the predetermined and pre-recorded objectives from being implemented by giving community members the ability to have inputs and play a critical role in development of initiatives and decision-making. Dinbabo (2003) argue that PD is indeed sensitive to issues of inequality, local politics and inclusion by providing an opportunity for ordinary community members to participate in decision-making processes regardless of their gender, social standing or political standing opening the participatory environment to marginalised communities. Central to PD is the understanding of local dynamics as an impetus to CP because local knowledge is important in shaping development processes.

The critique against PD notwithstanding, the orthodox mechanism for community development encompasses meaningful participation in societies. To break down

unequal power relation experiences and encounters in local communities, active participation is required as it empowers the least powerful (Kyamusugulwa, 2013). The power of the decision-making process is shared between all participants (Adebayo & Butcher, 2021). On many occasions, it is local authorities who do not want to relinquish centralised power regardless of the legislative framework (Sibanda & Lues, 2021). Through participation, does communities understand their role in local governance, development initiatives and they are able to participate actively in decision-making processes. Therefore, sustainable ideas on community development depend on the support of the local communities.

Keough (1998) considers PD as an intermediary to segregation ensuring that communities are central to development planning. In addition, Chambers (2017) concludes that the realities and truths of local communities can only be understood in development through the participation of those communities in their development by lessening the bridge that widens communities apart. De Gramont (2013) argues that PD advances community interests and empowerment in local decision-making processes. According to Denney et al. (2018) participation is a critical tool needed for the successful implementation of sustainable development initiatives.

In South African local government, PD reconfigures centralized decision-making power and development controls to the people when implemented accordingly and correctly without compromise. Efficient and effective participatory development facilitate the achievement of accountability and transparency. In this study, the researcher argued that the adoption of PD in local municipalities upholds the constitutional right to participation by local community members. This means that only when the local authorities create an environment where the community can fully and extensively participate in decision-making processes can a democratic state and good governance be achieved as explained by Mohan & Stokke (2000). In addition, Hu (2022) states that participatory governance builds local governments that are very much responsive and accountable. Therefore, the underlying approach of the current study was the achievement of responsiveness and accountability through community participation.

2.10. Chapter summary

The chapter has reviewed literature on the involvement of community members in local governance as an indispensable part of democratic governance, especially in local government. It presented arguments for different mechanisms made available by local government authorities to involve communities in decision-making processes. However, the literature revealed that these mechanisms are a mere camouflage for decision-making processes in local government, especially on matters that affect the livelihood of communities. This raises the question of the process for development-related decisions taken in local government considering that there are legislative and policy frameworks that guide CP in this sphere of government.

The chapter further illustrated that despite the mechanisms that are made available by the local government authorities, communities are systematically excluded in decision-making processes in development initiatives. These community members remain unimpressed with the efforts made by the authorities as commonly the final product that comes after the consultations and deliberations are not reflective of their voices. Furthermore, the chapter provided and explained the current measures that are taken by community members to ensure that they participate in the decision-making processes of development initiatives in their local municipalities in the belief that local government authorities will hear their voices and respond positively to their development needs. Moreover, the chapter presented the processes of identification, analysis and prioritisation of development initiatives in local government.

Lastly, presented Participatory development as the theoretical framework underpinning this study. In this chapter, this theory is reflected as the best option because it enforces the active involvement of communities in decision-making processes such that these decisions reflect of the development needs of the communities. The bottom-up approach emphasises the inclusion of community members in development related decision-making processes as active role players in

accordance with legislative and policy frameworks of South Africa. The next chapter presents an in depth description of the research methodology employed in the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a detailed in-depth description of the research methodology used in this study to explore ways in which the community in Dihlabeng Local Municipality is involved in the decision-making processes in the Dihlabeng Local Economic Hub and the Sivukile Youth Agricultural Cooperative. The chapter commences with the explanation on the research paradigm and its significance for the study. The explanation is followed by a discussion of the research approach, design, sampling process and data collection methods employed with the goal of achieving the aim of the study. In addition, an outline the study target population and the selection of the participants that includes the used exclusion and inclusion criteria are presented. A discussion of the data analysis process and the measures that were employed to augment trustworthiness and enhance the research integrity of the study are reflected in this chapter. Lastly, a discussion on the ethical considerations and limitations of the study conclude the chapter.

3.2. Research Paradigm

The study was embedded on interpretive research paradigm as its philosophical stance. This is because social scientists need to take into consideration their philosophical views and assumptions of the world around them and how these views would affect their study. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), a research paradigm of a study has significant bearing on the manner in which data is construed and meanings are drawn. Creswell and Creswell (2017) and Yin (2016) state that a research paradigm guides a researcher on the way in which a phenomenon is to be studied and determines the study's research design, methods and the overall research approach. The authors define a research paradigm is representative of a set of beliefs that provides a lens through which the researcher views the world, the individual's place in it and the range of relationships that exists between the world and its parts.

Interpretive researchers seek to interpret social reality through the subjective viewpoints of embedded participants within the context where reality is situated (Bhattacherjee, 2012). This paradigm was deemed appropriate for the study in which participants shared their experiences on their involvement in local decision-making processes in development initiatives in the DLM using the DLEH and the SYAC as case studies. Contrary to any other paradigm, this paradigm implies that knowledge is constructed by the experiences and social engagement of the participants with their social environment (Bryman et al., 2014; Hughes & Sharrock, 2016; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022; Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

In the context of this study, the subjective experiences of the participants in decision-making processes in the selected development initiatives were explored using the interpretive paradigm. This was to ascertain the constructed meanings that participants have drawn within local government participatory environments. Since the researcher believed that there were multiple meanings that the participants could attach to their experiences. An opportunity to attach these different meanings to the decision-making processes in order to produce outcomes associated to the involvement of communities in local governance was provided. The interpretive paradigm assisted in understanding the role participants had played in the decision-making in development initiatives.

The study explored the ways in which community members are involved in decision-making processes in development initiatives with understanding that interaction between community members, community representatives (CRs), elected and appointed local government authorities and their environment in their common and familiar setting, would provide a narrative of their real experiences in the decision-making processes of the DLM in development initiatives. This is the reason the selected development initiatives explored in this study are based on the social environment of the participants. These are the development initiatives that they had seen, heard and experienced in their wards. Each of the two purposefully selected wards had an initiative that was explored for the purposes of the study and the participants in the study were based in these local wards. The goal of the study was

to understand the participants in their social life and discover how they constructed meaning related to local governance with respect to community development initiatives in their environments.

The study acknowledges that should a different paradigm be selected, it would not serve the aim of this study and would provide different outcomes. Hence, the in-depth understanding of the experiences of the participants in decision-making processes in development initiatives was conducted in their own wards where the researcher spent prolonged time directly engaging them in their familiar environment.

3.3. Research approach

A research approach is defined as the manner in which research is conducted (Bless et al.,2020). The selection of the appropriate approach employed in a study is reliant on the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Noor, 2008). It is built on the phenomena investigated; aim of the study and on the data needed to achieve it. There are three approaches that researchers can employ depending on their research problems need to be investigated and these are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches, each with its own characteristics and qualities (Akinyode & Khan, 2018 ; Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The research approach for the purpose of this study was a qualitative approach chosen to explore the lived experiences of the participants in decision-making process in development initiatives in the DLM. A qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate as it enabled the researcher to investigate the meanings, explanations and definitions individuals or groups attach to a phenomenon in their natural setting rather than quantifying things as quantitative research approach as per Lune & Berg, (2017). The approach is explained by Bairagi & Munot (2019) when they state that is done by exploring how people look at the way things are done, behaviours and accompanying views. Furthermore, a qualitative research approach is imbedded in the interpretive paradigm chosen for this study.

Based on the aforementioned definitions, an in depth description of lived human experiences can only be explored qualitatively when directed to coincide with the aim of the study. The aim of the study was to explore the experiences, meanings, attitudes and views the participants had of the decision-making processes in selected local development initiatives in the DLM. The aim provided the researcher with the opportunity to gain a sense of the lived experiences of the participants on their participation in the local government matters, especially on issues affecting their livelihoods such as local development initiatives. These were the realities of these participants in the DLM local governance therefore; a qualitative research approach was best suited for this exploration. It allowed the participants to explain their own experiences in their own words in accordance with Holloway & Galvin,(2023) rather than numerically as it would have been the case in a quantitative study as explained by Mishra & Alok, (2019).

The qualitative approach becomes appropriate when the purpose of the study is to explain a phenomenon by relying on the experience of a person in any given situation in this study (Stake, 2010). The insights and lived experiences of the participants on the decision-making processes produced qualitative data that assisted the researcher to answer the research questions while exploring the research problem. Furthermore, the qualitative approach was employed as it is based on the principle that human knowledge is not possible to describe without looking into human experiences as lived and defined by the actors themselves (Polit-O'Hara & Hungler, 1993). In this study, the researcher captured depth understanding and experiences of the community members on their interaction with the local authorities. Such provided rich understanding on the participation of community members in decision-making processes regarding development initiatives.

Creswell (2012) emphasises that a qualitative study takes place in a natural setting of the participants where the researcher gets to experience the investigated problem in the same environment where data is collected. In this study, the researcher set up appointments with the participants in their wards, at the times that were convenient for them. He further ensured that a rapport was built with the participants in order to gain

extensive understanding of the research problem in the local municipality. A qualitative approach was employed to enable the participants to explain in words the role of communities in decision-making processes within the Dihlabeng Local Municipality through the perceptions and descriptions of the participants. Their reflections were supported with direct quotations to ensure that true lived experiences were illustrated. In a qualitative study, words, images, and descriptions of things observed by the researchers are important to conceptualise the real experiences of participants (Lune and Berg, 2017).

3.4. Research design

A research design is regarded as a blueprint for the study as it outlines how a study is planned and conducted (Maree, 2019). It guides the researcher in the overall approach to the study. Welman et al. (2005) explain a research design as a plan for gathering study participants and data. This roadmap shows how all elements in answering research questions come together to achieve the research objectives (Kumar, 2018). The design provides a clear process that the researcher follows to facilitate the attainment of aim of the study. In the context of this study, an exploratory case study research design was used systematically to address the research problem. The study involved two development initiatives in the DLM to explore the extent to which the community was involved in decision-making processes in the identified development initiatives.

Exploratory case study design allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem hence its use in this study. The design assisted the researcher to gather raw new data from the participants through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions for better understanding of the phenomenon of community participation in the DLM. Bhattacherjee (2012) and Elman et al. (2020) state that this type of study is characterised by the exploration of a new area of inquiry where the phenomenon is not known. The exploratory case study resonated with the central features of the research where there was limited knowledge on the involvement of community members in decision-making processes related to development initiatives

in the DLM. The design was most relevant due to the need to strengthen the unexplored community involvement strategies in this local municipality.

The experience of the participants in the decision-making processes provided the researcher with core data needed to gain an understanding of the participants' involvement in local governance. De Vos et al. (2011) state that an exploratory study is undertaken to provide a meaning to a study phenomenon rather than just describing it. The participants in this study were able to contribute to the construction of an inclusive public participation approach, which is a cornerstone for active and meaningful involvement of communities in decision-making. New knowledge in how community members were included in local governance matters in DLM could thus be added. Given the extent to which communities have indicated dissatisfactions with local authorities' decision-making processes in the municipality, the study would contribute knowledge to how communities could shape, contribute to community development initiatives and influence policy directives on community involvement processes.

3.5. Study area



Figure 3.1: Map of South Africa showing the location of the Dihlabeng Local Municipality in the Free State Province. Source: Google Maps, 2025.

The study was conducted in the DLM in the Free State Province, South Africa as shown in Figure 3.1. It is a category B municipality as demarcated through Local Government Municipal Structures Act 1998 (RSA, 1998a). These types of municipalities are referred to as local municipalities and it is one of the six local municipalities in the Thabo Mofutsanyane District Municipality, situated about 250 km from the capital city of the Free State province, Mangaung. The municipality comprises of the towns of Bethlehem, Paul Roux, Clarens, Fouriesburg, and Rosendal. The study focus areas were Bethlehem-Bohlokong and Paul Roux- Fateng tse Ntsho whose the two development initiatives under investigation. The municipal office is in Bethlehem, which is it is the economic hub of the local municipality.

The StatsSA Community Survey conducted in 2016 indicates that the total population of 128,704 liven in the 20 local wards and accounts for 19% of the overall population in the district municipality (RSA, 2019; StatsSA, 2016). A significant fraction of the community is underprivileged with a high level of unemployment and consist of rural areas. This means that community members are dependent on the municipal development initiatives for their livelihoods. The residents rely on agricultural and private businesses for their livelihoods, as these are the two dominant economic sectors in the area (StatsSA, 2011). As a result, the two development initiatives selected for the purpose of this study were from the two dominant sectors in the local municipality an agricultural project and the economic hub initiative.

The study was conducted in two wards namely Ward 16 and Ward 17 and one development initiative was investigated in each ward. Ward 16 is situated in Bethlehem, the economic hub of the local municipality and is the service point of the Eastern Free State Province, which houses the local municipal headquarters. The ward is semi-urban and is the first location constructed in the municipality. The DLEH initiative is found in this ward. The aim of the development initiative is to build youth entrepreneurs who will start their businesses and in the process employ local community members. This initiative is an economic development project in community development.

Ward 17 is in Paul Roux, commonly referred to as Fateng Tse Ntsho by the residents of this area. The name is Sesotho, a commonly used language in DLM. The ward is located in the rural area of the local municipality, 35 km from Bethlehem. According to DLM DRAFT IDP 2023-2024 (RSA, 2023), the town is located in an area of agricultural and tourism significance and provides related services to the surrounding area. It is a service centre that has seen significant growth in size and development. The study focused on the SAYC development initiative. The aim of the initiative is to develop farmers in the municipality. Communities are trained and provided with farming equipment as a start-up for crop production to curb unemployment. The participants in the initiative are youth based in the local municipality.

The contrasting features of the two wards provided the researcher more comprehensive data on the level of CP in local municipal affairs. The one ward being in the economic centre of the local municipality and the other with high unemployment rates. It provided a clearer picture on how communities are involved in decision-making processes, especially when they are placed closer or far from the municipal offices, respectively. The participatory mechanisms used by both community and municipal authorities were important to explore as they provided an indication on the level of involvement in decision-making processes. They has led to an understanding on the conceptualisation and implementation of development initiatives, which was central to the study.

3.6. Study population

Welman et al (2005) defines a population is full of cases from which a sample is taken and does not necessarily only refer to individuals but groups, organisations, events or conditions to which habitants occupy. Every subject that is involved in any type of inquiry constitutes a population (Mishra & Alok, 2019). Bairagi and Munot (2019) consider a population as the entire group of participants a researcher would be looking at before carrying out a study. Importantly, a researcher needs to be meticulous and precise in the selection of the population from which data will be derived from as this has significant impact on the outcomes of the study (Bhattacherjee, 2012). In this context, the data came from the population of those participants would have been

tasked to ensure that Community Participation (CP) takes place in the local municipality and those participants that would have been part of CP in the local municipality. This precision has bearing on the quality of data gathered for the study.

The population in this study comprised of the councillors, officials, ward committee members and community members. The officials and ward committee members are by law tasked to facilitate and promote community participation and the facilitation of decentralised decision-making processes in development initiatives within the local municipality. The community members as important partners to development in the local municipality formed part of this population. These participants were purposefully selected from the respective wards under the investigation. They were best placed to provide the researcher with valuable data that provided answers to the research questions, which served as guidelines to achieve the objectives of the study.

3.7. Sampling

Maree (2019) states that sampling is a method of choosing a sample or portion from the population for the study. Lune and Berg (2017) explain a sample in research as a representation of a larger population being explored, hence fewer participants are selected to represent the population (Mishra & Alok, 2019). Successful representation depends on how well the sample represents the population (Lune & Berg, 2017). This qualitative study employed non-probability sampling method, which is purposive sampling which refers to intentional sampling a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under investigation according to Creswell & Poth, (2016). This method of sampling was chosen as it enabled the researcher to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon as per Palinkas et al.,(2015).

A researcher employed purposive sampling as Lune and Berg (2017) state that in this type of sampling, researchers identify participants who would richly represent their population in the study due to possessing characteristics aligned with the study. In addition, Creswell and Poth (2016) state that in purposive sampling the research

deliberately selects participation with knowledge and experience of the matter being investigated. In this study, participants were directly involved with the participation of communities in their localities and their positions required them to facilitate CP in the local municipality. Their positions in the municipality ensured that data was collected from participants who were knowledgeable of what is taking place in the local municipality.

Purposive sampling included ward councillors and the municipal authorities who would provide rich information on the involvement of communities in decision-making processes in development initiatives. This was followed by the selection of four CRs from a list of 20 community representatives. The researcher ensured that the four selected participants were from the respective wards where the initiatives were based, two from each ward. Similar to community members, they had been residing in the wards for five years at the time of the study. These CRs had initiated and convened a community meeting. Their knowledge of local government matters provided better understanding of the engagements that had taken place between the representatives and communities on community needs and development.

It was crucial that the study focused on the officials who were tasked with ensuring that there were active and meaningful participation and decision-making processes, as they play an important role in ensuring that the voices of the community were central to local development. The views of the community in relation to their participation in the local municipal meetings and decision-making processes were ideal to gather their lived experiences on whether the decisions taken by the DLM appointed and elected authorities were reflective of their inputs.

The study had twenty-three participants sampled from the two wards and from the DLM offices, seventeen were community members, four CRs and two municipal representatives. For community members, a selection criterion was used to determine the qualities of the community members to take part in the study. The criterion included individuals between the ages of 25 to 65 years, years of residence in the ward,

knowledge and interest in local governance. This age group had knowledge in the local municipal operations and of their involvement in decision-making processes. They also had some level of interest in local governance. All of them had at least a minimum of five years residing in the local municipality and in terms of gender, both males and females formed part of the study. The inclusion criteria resulted in the community members who had shown interest in local government matters in DLM.

The two wards for this study were purposefully selected as each of the development initiatives was based in the wards. These wards are commonly affected by service delivery protests and contrast one another in their location and economic activeness and access to the local government authorities. The community members in the wards represented the population who have engaged with the local authorities on government matters. This gave the researcher the ability to engage the members on their participation in local governance matters.

A purposive sampling was followed in the selection of the DLEH and the SYAC because data collected from the initiatives was best positioned to provide insights on the participation of community members in decision-making processes. Even though these initiatives were the only ones found at the beginning of the study, their impact on the communities provided the base for exploration. This is because they are based on community development and expected to respond to the development challenges of the communities. It is expected that community participation would have taken place in their conceptualisation as they affect communities' livelihoods. Moreover, there was data available on these initiatives, which included media reports.

In relation to the documents that were sampled for the study, these were purposively selected based on their capturing of community participation processes in the local municipality. These documents captured the essence of community participation in DLM. They further indicated mechanisms of community participation in local governance and had reports on the development initiatives used as case studies in

this study. The selection criteria were inclusive of municipal strategic documents, media reports and minutes of community meetings.

3.8. Data collection methods

Bairagi & Munot (2019) state that data collection methods chosen by a researcher in exploring an identified research problem relies on the problem itself and the researcher's understanding of who the participants of the study would be and the kind of data to get from them. Social scientists according to Bless et al (2020) may employ different kinds of data collection methods which can either be unobtrusive or reactive. The former refers to instances where participants in the research are not aware of being studied and the latter to where participants are aware as they will be responding to the questions posed by the researcher. Yin (2016) explains that in a qualitative study, different methods of data collection can be employed to further ensure that quality data is enhanced. For the purpose of this qualitative study, the researcher employed multiple data collection techniques to collate data from the participants.

The techniques were semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions supplemented by document review. The use of different data collection methods in the study allowed the researcher to ascertain that reliable and accurate data was gathered for the study. Thus, it gave the researcher an opportunity to triangulate the data in order to ensure its credibility. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple type of data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In addition, the research instruments used in the study were shared with the study promoter and the feedback received was used to improve their quality.

3.8.1. Semi-structured interviews

Maree (2019) states that interviews assist researchers to source experiences, ideas, beliefs and opinions from participants while also observing physical expressions. In addition, Bairagi and Munot (2019) states that during the interviews, a researcher can dive into in-depth perceptions of the participants by engaging on other matters that were not previously thought of in the context of the research questions while observing

the non-verbal cues of the participants. In the context of the study, in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to solicit data from the municipal authorities and community representatives due to their role in the local municipality. These were key strategic players in CP provided municipal planning processes and facilitated the involvement of communities in local governance.

In principle, authorities and community representatives lead and represent the community in decision-making processes in the municipality therefore they are expected to be knowledgeable of community participation prescripts. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to seek clarity on the strategies and plans that the local municipal authorities have in place to ensure that community members participate actively in decision-making processes. During the interview process, semi-structured questions were posed to the participants to give them an opportunity to freely express and share their lived experiences, perceptions and views on community involvement processes in the local municipality. The researcher with the assistance of the study promoter designed interview schedules that were used to collect data from municipal authorities and CRs for the research study (Annexures D and E).

The schedules were also available in Sesotho as the common language spoken in the area to ensure clarity when needed. The participants were requested to share their views and perceptions on decision-making processes in the local municipality and how decisions were made regarding development initiatives. These municipal authorities and CRs hold positions associated with community involvement in local governance matters. It is understood that the nature of their work requires knowledge of the CP legislative frameworks that guide them in community participation. The interviews were conducted at a time and schedule that was convenient to the participants. The appointments with the participants were made well in advance to afford them an opportunity to prepare themselves for the engagements.

All the interviews took place at the interviewees preferred spaces, for example some of the CRs were interviewed in their homes while others chose the municipal offices

located in the respective wards as per their preference. Municipal officials were interviewed at the researchers' office as per their request. The duration of the interviews was between 40 and 60 minutes. During the interviews, a recording was used for ensuring that the researcher is able to transcribe accurate data as provided by the participants and this was done with the permission of the participants. Each of these recordings were saved in a password-protected device for confidentially to be maintained.

3.8.2. Focus group discussions

The researcher guided community members during the focus group discussions by suggesting topics that were aligned to the research questions raising issues on their involvement in decision-making processes in the selected development initiatives. He only facilitated the discussions that were taking place amongst the participants to ensure that the discussions were aligned to the topic. The main difference between focus group and group interviews is in the degree of specificity concerning the issues to be discussed, often predetermined by the researcher (Kumar, 2018). These focus group discussions allowed for deeper investigation of complex issues related to of local government decision-making processes as the researchers can hear people talk and trigger responses and ideas that they did not think about as per Bhattacherjee, (2012). The participants in focus group discussions were community members who had attended municipal meetings and could express their views and inputs on development decisions made in the local municipality.

The study comprised two focus group discussions, one focus group had eight participants, and the other had nine participants both groups comprised of males and females. The discussions took place at the community hall on the dates that were predetermined and agreed upon by both the participants and the researcher where participants did not need to travel long distances and in their own natural settings. As the residents were Sesotho speaking, the focus group discussions schedule was translated into Sesotho by a graduate with a Master's degree in Sesotho in order for the researcher to provide clarity where it was needed. The schedule was in English (Annexure F) however, code switching to Sesotho was used as the need arose.

During the focus group discussions, the researcher ensured that views of the participant were treated with respect. The environment was made conducive for the participants to share their experiences on decision-making processes in the two development initiatives by ensuring that all the participants respected each other. The researcher ensured that all the participants were able to share their experiences freely without being judged nor intimidated. Throughout the discussions, the researcher guided the participants to engage in a conversation rather than one person dominate discussion. This was important as it allowed for a structured flow of ideas from the participants.

The discussions were recorded with the permission of the participants to assist the researcher to ensure that accurate information was used by the researcher for transcription and coding. These discussions continued for about 40 to 50 minutes a session with the number of focus group sessions determined through the law of saturation. At this point sufficient information had been gathered and the discussions, the recordings were transcribed by the researcher for interpretation.

3.8.3. Document review

Document review was supplementary to the data collected through the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The importance of using this type of secondary data was built into the idea that publicly available reports, documents and other documented information could provide the researcher with more insight into the level of engagement of participants in decision-making processes in development initiatives. Noor (2008) states that information gathered from secondary sources can be used to cross validate the primary data collected. Numerous forms of documents could be used for this review process according to Yin (2016) therefore in this study multiple documents were consulted to complement primary data collected though the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

The documents that were reviewed for the purpose of this study were the minutes of the DLM IDP for 2019-2020 (RSA, 2019a), the DLM IDP and Budget process plan

2020-2021 (RSA, 2020a), and the DLM IDP Review 2019-2020 (RSA, 2019b), DLM IDP 2020-2021 (RSA, 2020b), DLM IDP 2023-2024 (RSA, 2023) and newspaper articles on DLM from 2022 (Anon, 2022a; Anon 2022b). These were sourced from the website of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, the DLM website and EFSIN sites. All these documents were selected as they captured the essence of CP and municipal planning processes in the DLM. These were used to supplement, corroborate and to compare data from the interviews and focus group discussions and were acknowledged accordingly.

3.9. Data analysis

Data analysis involves drawing up a profound meaning from the information gathered through the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The purpose of qualitative data analysis is to interpret the data and the resulting themes to facilitate understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Sargeant, 2012). It requires meticulous handling of information together with careful interpretation. Following the data analysis process described by Creswell and Creswell (2017), thematic analysis was conducted to identify rich meanings attached to the process of local decision-making processes in development initiatives in the DLM. Data collected through the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion as well as document analysis were thematically analysed.

At the end of the data collection process, the researcher de-identified all the recordings from the semi-structure interviews and focus group discussions to ensure confidentiality of the participants. The data was later organised to prepare for soliciting sense of ideas and overall impressions on the community involvement processes in the DLM. The researcher needed to listen to the recording over again to ascertain that the responses provided by the participants were aligned to the questions posed. Once the researcher was able to ascertain the alignment, the process of transcription started. The transcriptions had to be re-read to ensure that they were a true reflection of the views and experiences that were shared by the participants. These transcriptions included everything that was said by the interviewees. The researcher

with the assistance of the promoter ensured that data was transcribed as per the recordings from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

After the data was transcribed and de-identified the researcher began gathering the overall sense and impressions of the data and its relevance to the research questions as per Creswell and Creswell, (2017). This was done to allow the researcher an opportunity to get a sense of the views as presented by the different participants. The process took extensive reading of transcripts and writing notes next to each sentence to reflect on the messages and meanings given by each participant. After identifying the meanings associated with every response provided, the researcher began with the initial coding process. The codes were compared with the original data to ensure consistency of the responses provided.

The researcher looked at the similarities in the experiences and views after the initial codes were identified from the data. Common expressions were coded and grouped together and the codes were arranged into potential meanings to identify similarities, patterns and common ideas. This process resulted in the emergence of themes which were also tested against the codes which was followed by the reviewing of the themes that were identified thus at that point in accordance with Creswell and Creswell (2017). The significance of drawing up themes for analysis is emphasised by Bless et al. (2016) because they assist the researcher to come up with meaningful patterns to answer the research questions. The process was compared to the original data up to a point where saturation was reached.

Creswell and Creswell (2017) state that thematic analysis involves the researcher refining the specifics of each theme and description, ensuring that they are supported by data and drawing on how the themes will be presented in the qualitative analysis. At this stage, the researcher revisited each of the extracted codes under each theme to ensure that each of the codes was aligned to the theme and shaped a reliable description that supported the theme. The researcher was able to identify which of the codes fell under each of the themes in order to provide a comprehensive narrative

story about the collected data. Lastly, the description of the themes was supported by enough data to corroborate the dominance and this step involved the interpretation and meaning of data as proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2017). It is at this stage that a scholarly report of the analysis is produced (Bless et al., 2013). Thus, the final themes that are substantiated by codes are presented in the ultimate report. Quotations are used to support the themes that emerged during the analysis.

A computerised programme for qualitative data analysis, the ATLAS/ti 23, assisted the process of data analysis and it was used as an information storage space for easy retrieval for analysis. All data collected was transcribed and saved as Microsoft word documents and imported into the program where initial codes were created. The themes were documented and reported, also supported by the codes to form part of the final report. The program ensured that the researcher takes a well-organized, systematic, efficient and effective data analysis in a structured manner.

3.10. Ethical considerations

Social science researchers have the right to search for truth and investigate societal challenges with the aim of contributing and adding to the existing body of knowledge, however, this must not be executed at the expense of the participants' wellbeing (Mouton, 2001). Participants in a research process should not experience any harm and undue stress. Struwig and Stead (2013) argue that the act of searching for this truth is an ethical enterprise that needs to take into consideration the well-being and rights of the participants. Since ethical dilemmas can arise at any stage of the research, it is important that a researcher is aware of such dilemmas and can deal critically with them so that they do not affect the integrity of the study (Bryman et al., 2014; Creswell, 2012). A strong characteristic of an ethical study is the one that considers and addresses all anticipated and emergent ethical issues (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

In this study, the researcher took caution and measures to ensure that key requirements in conducting an ethical study were maintained to safeguard the

participant from undue stress, harm and unethical practices. Throughout the study, the researcher adhered to the social sciences ethical guidelines as provided by the North West University (NWU) ethics policy. The collection of data from the participants only started after approval was granted by the NWU Ethics Committee. Pre-approval was required to ensure that the study's ethical considerations were aligned with the national and international laws and regulations on the code of conduct for researchers. This clearance (Annexure A) was obtained confirming that the study did adhere to the research ethical principles that guaranteed protection for both the researcher and the participants.

Most importantly, the DLM approval formed an integral part of the study, as without it, the study would not have been conducted. The Municipal Manager (MM) was responsible for the researcher's entry into the local municipality and further engagements that took place within the community about the contents of the study. Permission was sought from the DLM MM to involve appointed and elected local municipal authorities, CRs and community members in the study and this was later granted by delegated authority before the study could be undertaken (Annexure G). This process took the researcher six months to accomplish but approval was a significant part to the quality of data that the researcher could gather as well as access and the participants as described by Singh & Wassenaar, (2016).

The community members were recruited via posters, which were placed at the strategic areas that are easily accessible by the communities and authorities such as the municipal buildings in the two wards, the local councillors' offices, the library and community WhatsApp groups. The researcher also visited these strategic places to engage with community members who seemed interested in reading the poster about the study. This made the community members comfortable seeing the researcher face to face and those interested notified the researcher at these strategic places and through telephone. They were later contacted telephonically to arrange face-to-face meetings to explain and provide more information on the study and the process of informed consent. The participants were informed that their participation in the study

was voluntary and that they could terminate participation at any point of the process should they wish to do so.

The municipal authorities were recruited through the office of the PP in the Speakers officer and the DLM MM. The office further provided access to CRs responsible for PP in the municipality. These were active ward committee members in the wards and they were also contacted telephonically by the researcher to explain the study and its aim together with the process of informed consent. Dooly et al. (2017) explains that informed consent is needed in research for the participants to be provided with information on the study to enable them to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. It further ensures that the participants understand the nature of the study (Israel & Hay, 2006). Through informed consent, all the participants are given thorough information on the study, the risks, benefits, expected outcomes and alternatives before they participated by the researcher.

In ensuring that the participants in the study understood the information provided by the researcher and their informed consent, they were given seven days to thoroughly go through the form written in their home language and to indicate if they were interested in taking part in the study. The explanation of informed consent was shared in both English (Annexure B) and Sesotho (Annexure C). Since sesotho is the commonly spoken language in the area. In addition, the researcher used code switching to clarify matters and explain some of the questions that were asked the potential participants and those who took part in the study. The consent form articulated their right to participate voluntarily with no compensation and their right to withdraw from the study at any time should they wish to do so. After seven days, the researcher went back to the wards and municipal offices to collect the signed consent forms and set up another appointment for focus group discussions and the semi-structured interviews.

During the data collection process, the participants were also requested to consent to the focus group discussions and the semi-structured interviews being recorded.

Anonymity was assured throughout the study and the researcher used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants and only these are used in the research report. Pseudonyms are used to identify the participants and ensure that no personal information links participants with the data provided. The researcher made an active attempt to ensure that the confidentiality of the participants and the data gathered were maintained. Data was collected at community halls, the office of the researcher, and the ward committee members were interviewed at their homes where only the researcher and the participants could hear to conversations. Information gathered from the participants was placed in a lockable cabinet and a password protected recording device and a laptop to which only the researcher and the promoter had access. Participants' data was coded and stored in a password-protected computerised system.

Data collection instruments and consent forms were translated into Sesotho, which is the common language in DLM. A graduate with a masters degree in Sesotho was asked to translate the instruments and consent forms. Furthermore, for data collection, the instrument was presented in English to the participants; however, code switching done when necessary. This was done to ensure that a clear message on the research was received from the participant and they were able to share their experiences thoroughly.

The findings of the study are important in strengthening the manner in which CP is undertaken in the municipality. They present an opportunity for local authorities to amend their decision-making processes to ensure that communities are important role players in development as envisioned in local governance policies. Therefore, a summary of the findings was shared with the local municipal authorities through the Office of the Speaker. The manner in which the findings of the study would be disseminated was also shared with the participants through informed consent forms.

3.11. Research trustworthiness

In any research process, whether qualitative or quantitative approach, the research findings must be credible and valid. Cope (2014) states that in a qualitative study, researchers are mostly faced with questions about the quality of their research that guarantees that it not influenced by their research biases. Nowell et al. (2017) argues that for qualitative research to be accepted as trustworthy, qualitative researchers must demonstrate that their data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent and exhaustive manner through explicitly recording the research process and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine the process credibility. In exploring this critical part of the research, the researcher in this study employed the following principles provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as quality verification criterion to ensure quality and rigour of the research findings: confirmability, credibility, dependability and transferability. The following discussion provide a brief exposition of the four principles.

3.11.1. Confirmability

Nowell et al. (2017) state that confirmability of the study can be achieved once a researcher illustrates that the findings and interpretation are a result of the data collected from the participants. That is, providing assurance that the findings and interpretations are not influenced by the researchers' personal beliefs or theoretical position (Bryman, et.al., 2014). In the study, the presence of the promoter during the data collection, transcribing and coding ensured that the findings and interpretation were a true reflection of the information collected from the participants. Moreover, the availability of promoter throughout the study assured that the study was undertaken with precision and truthfulness. This has led to the accuracy and relevancy of the data gathered and analysed. Furthermore, the DLM inclusive community involvement strategy developed for the local municipality was guided solemnly by the empirical findings of the study and was further validated by the different role players in CP and the participants of the study.

3.11.2. Credibility

Credibility of the study is achieved when data evidence points to the views and experiences of the participants as gathered through the data collection phase that improves the legitimacy of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It enhanced by the researcher describing his or her experiences in the study when reporting a qualitative study the researcher should demonstrate data collection processes, methods of observation and audit trails (Cope, 2014). In this study, the researcher employed and outline the different data collection techniques with semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, supplemented by document analysis.

The prolonged engagement that the researcher had with each of the participants provided and opportunities for better relationships with them thus they became more open and communicative. The researcher made sure that the participants felt safe and comfortable throughout the engagement by building a good rapport with them. They were able to share openly their construction of the meanings they have attached on the manner in which they partake in decision-making processes in development initiatives in the DLM. The researcher in this study provided extensive and enough time in the interest of developing a rich understanding of the research problem. Furthermore, the researcher focused specifically on the issue of CP even though there were instances where the participants asked questions about the local municipality which were not related to the study.

The researcher ensured that the information gathered from the participants was peer-reviewed by the promoter. In this instance, the researcher utilised the services of the promoter throughout the study to enhance the credibility of the study and its findings. The raw data was made available to corroborate the transcriptions and these were made available to the participants to confirm their accuracy. The researcher shared all the field notes and transcriptions for the verification of the promoter for any audit trail that might be needed regarding the study.

The themes that emerged in the study were a result of the different methods used to collate data from the participants as such themes that emerged were supported by the direct quotations of the utterances made by the participants. Data collected from the participants through these different methods were properly recorded and kept for the future validation of the findings should the need arise.

3.11.3. Dependability

A study is deemed to be dependable when the research findings gathered are similar when repeated with the same participants in the same environment (Cope, 2014). For the achievement of dependability, Bhattacherjee (2012) states that a researcher needs to ensure that thick descriptions of the phenomenon studied are provided to guarantee that similar findings will be attained should the research be conducted in the same conditions. To achieve the dependability of the current study, the researcher employed the same interview processes and focus group discussions on a similar way in both of the selected wards for data collection. This was done to ensure consistency in the manner in which the data was collected from all the participants in the study.

The study research method, which was qualitative, is further thoroughly and properly explained in sections 3.4 and the findings of the study in chapter four to ensure dependability of the study. Furthermore, field notes and transcriptions from the data collected are kept for further verification and for audit purposes. According to Bryman et al. (2014), this would ensure that good practice and procedures are followed for audit purposes.

3.11.4. Transferability

A qualitative researcher is responsible for providing an in-depth description of the research design and methods to enable those that would need transferability of the study to do so (Nowell et al., 2017). Daniel (2019) states that transferability can be used by other researchers to look into the similarities and the differences in the findings for their own study in the same context and it provides valuable lesson for future studies in similar environments. In this study, the researcher ensured that thick

descriptions of the employed research design and methods are provided. The manner in which the participants were recruited and selected is explained thoroughly. The process of data collection, analysis, and consideration of research ethics is provided. The in-depth descriptions ensure that replication of the study is possible should other researchers need to conduct a similar study. Furthermore, the researcher provided the names of the development initiatives selected for the purpose of the study and the reasons for their selection in this study.

3.12. Limitations of the study

A researcher is obliged to declare truthfully any limitations of their study that might have an impact on the generalisation of the results and conclusions (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). According to Akanle et al. (2020), irrespective of how good a research study can be conceptualised, there are limitations that a researcher needs to be aware of in research. Hence, it is important that measures taken during the study to curb any negative impact such limitations may pose to the validity and credibility of the study.

The researcher had multiple meetings with both elected and appointed DLM authorities including the municipal legal officer, to explain the purpose of the study thoroughly. There were several attempts made to include ward councillors from the two purposefully selected wards to participate in the study, meetings were held with them as their portfolios in the local municipality include that of ensuring community involvement in municipal decision-making processes. In addition, numerous ways of communication were sent to the DLM MM to thoroughly introduce and explain the purpose of the study. At the beginning of the study ward councillors had agreed to participate however, on the day of the interviews none of them honoured the appointments that were made well in advance. Further attempts to involve them in the study were made through the Office of the Speaker and proved unsuccessful.

Ward councillors are expected to foster a culture of community involvement in municipal affairs in their local ward as stated in the MSA, 2000 16 (1) (RSA, 2000). In addition, Municipal Structures Act (RSA, 1998a) provides for the involvement of

communities in municipal affairs through the municipal council that comprises local councillors. The Act further elaborates that it is expected of this council to ensure the achievement of section 152 of the Constitution of the RSA, Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996), which provides for the participation of communities in local government affairs. However, the ward councillors and the MM opted not to provide their experiences in relation to community involvement in the identification, conceptualisation, and implementation of development initiatives in the DLM. Their responses to the views provided by other participants would have been appreciated. However, their inputs could not be gathered as they failed to honour multiple appointments that were scheduled with them. The data gathered from other participants including municipal officials was able to provide data needed to achieve the objectives of the study, despite the reluctance and failure of the councillors to participate.

Throughout the study, it became clear that the community members were not pleased with the manner in which decision-making processes are undertaken by the local authorities. It is possible that some of the comments may have been overstated with regards to the selected development initiatives. The researcher ensured that the purpose and content of the study were clearly explained and emphasised to the participants in order to keep focus on the aim of the study. In addition, the two purposefully selected wards were led by two different political parties implying there was a possibility that political influence. The assurance provided to both municipal officials, CRs and community members was that this study was undertaken only for academic purposes.

A request was sent out to the DLM MM to participate in the study, however the MM failed to respond to the countless invitations sent to his office. The nearest candidate to replace the MM was the Director IDP. The Director IDP in the office of the MM was found as an alternative participant to the MM who provided information needed for the study.

3.13. Chapter summary

This chapter provides a detailed in-depth description of the research methodology used in the study to solicit data in response to the research questions presented in chapter one. The research paradigm is described and its significance for this study. It is followed by the presentation of the research approach, design, sampling and data collection methods employed with the goal of achieving the aim the study. In addition, the chapter reflects an explanation of the target population for the study and presents the selection of participants, which included the exclusion and inclusion criteria. Furthermore, the data analysis process was discussed together with the measures that were employed to enhance trustworthiness and guarantee research integrity. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the ethical considerations and limitations of the study. The next chapter presents the empirical findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction.

The previous chapter presented the research methodology employed in gathering data needed to achieve the objectives of the study. This chapter presents the empirical findings based on the data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion as well as document analysis. The themes that emerged during the analysis were community involvement in decision-making processes and the absence of a public participation strategy (PPS). These themes were presented together with codes that were identified. The verbatim quotations from the participants were used to support the themes and codes. In the presentation of the findings, pseudo-names were used to safeguard the identities of these participants. For example, FG1 P1 to FG1 P8, and FG2 P1 to FG2 P9 for community members, CR 1-4 for CRs who were ward committee members as well as K1-K2 was assigned for local municipal representatives who were the DLM authorities.

4.2. Community involvement in the decision-making processes

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis refers to community involvement in the decision-making process of their municipality. The section is divided into four codes aligned to the theme. The findings of the study are therefore presented according to these codes.

4.2.1. Measures in place to incorporate the views of community members

The expectation of community members after the consultation process were that their views shall be reflected in the final documented development initiatives in the municipal strategic plan. However, though there were measures in place to engage communities, their views were not incorporated in the local development initiatives.

CR4 stated that….

> *Meetings are held to inform the communities as the projects are about to start. Communities have the opportunity during these meetings to voice their opinion. The inputs will then be tabled at the council meetings to share the views with the local authorities in the municipality. Personally, I have never seen any of the views of the community being taken by the local authority decision-making processes. Therefore, I don't think there is any strategy to ensure that views are considered. Local authorities act in their own way, take their own decisions, in whatever way they want and understand (CR4, 2023).*

Similarly, CR3 stated that…

> *Community members are just informed about the initiatives that will be implemented by the local authorities during the meetings. A lot of community members are unemployed at the moment, they are looking for employment, once there is a project, all of them are just thinking about how they can get employed in it (CR3, 2023).*

CR3 and CR4 recognised that the community members were only told about development initiatives after the local authorities had made their decision. CR4 stated that communities were informed of the development initiatives only when they were being implemented. The same sentiments were shared by CR3 who explained that the local authorities had used prospective employment to brainwash communities whenever development initiatives were implemented in the municipality. Communities in economic straits environment were seen to accept anything that was provided to them as an offer of job creation. Furthermore, CR3 stated that due to the high unemployment rate in the area, community members were subjected to the belief that these initiatives would provide them with employment regardless of where the initiatives were conceptualised.

CR4 further stated that the municipality had no guidelines in place to ensure that the views of the communities were considered, hence communities were accepting anything they are given in the form of development initiatives. The PD approach places emphasis on communities as active partners in the discussions on development initiatives as they hold important knowledge on how their development challenges can be tackled (Hallard, 2022). CR3 and CR4 suggested that in the DLM, local authorities were the only individuals actively participating in decision-making regarding to the development initiatives, even though community meetings were held.

According to the DLM 2018/2019 (RSA 2018) and DLM IDP 2019/2020 (RSA, 2019), community involvement and participation in the IDP processes form an integral part of the decision-making processes on the local development initiatives. Strategic documents were reviewed and did not include the DLEH and the SYAC as development initiatives that were negotiated and deliberated upon in the public meetings and the IDPs. The documents attest to and complement the views shared by CR3 and CR 4 that community members were just informed of the development initiatives in the local municipality regardless of the inputs that would have been provided at local meetings and during the integrated development planning stage.

A report in the EFSIN reflected the sentiments expressed by the participants:

> *In August 2021, a few months before the municipal local elections, the Dihlabeng local Municipality, under the leadership of the then mayor, started building a container business development in the park where children used it as a recreational facility. Senior managers were asked if the land had been zoned for business or if it is still zoned as a park. Furthermore, they were asked if community consultation was undertaken regarding the project and for the records of the consultation process. No response to the questions were received. (Anon, 2022).*

The responses from CR4 and CR3 confirmed that the DLM authorities do not incorporate the views of the community in the decision-making processes. Lack of response to questions raised by the EFSIN reporters, also indicated that the DLM authorities did not consult with communities in the identification of DLEH (Anon, 2022b). The reporters further questioned whether CP was done prior to the building of the container business centre.

It was difficult to gain access to the DLM strategic documents, such as attendance registers and minutes of community meetings, where these development-related decisions on the development initiative were taken because the DLM authorities were unresponsive to the requests as indicated in the EFSIN. These documents would have provided an indication of the views and inputs provided by the community members on the development initiatives, whether their input was considered and if not, what the reasons were.

The local municipal website reflects that the publication of community discussions around development initiatives in the form of minutes was last done in 2019, i.e. before the implementation of DLEH and SYAC. This implies that local authorities in this municipality did not publish deliberations and this has the potential to limit community members' knowledge on whether their inputs were captured after the deliberations at the municipal council had taken place. The absence of documented deliberations may lead to a view that the meetings held do not cater for the views of the community members. This view may attract apathy from community members regarding their participation in local government matters.

Geekiyanage et al. (2020), make a point that the main constraint to active and meaningful community involvement in decision-making processes, over and above the lack of knowledge on development activities in municipalities, is the lack of clear directives on the community involvement processes. The authors recommend changes in the manner the process is undertaken to include measures that will assist local government authorities to incorporate the views of the public in decision-making.

It becomes evident that without a clear community involvement strategy, CP faces many challenges, such as the inability for inclusive active process that reflect of the needs of communities. Although local authorities may embrace the need for CP through the available participatory measures without structures to incorporate their views in development activities in place, the exercise only fuels more dissatisfaction because of the frustrations regarding the voices of communities heard in development-related processes. Similar observations are made by Asamoah and Ile, (2024) who state that despite multiple participatory mechanisms in local government, there is no alignment of the inputs provided by communities and final decisions made by the local government authorities. There is a need for legislative enactments and standards for community involvement processes in local municipalities in order to uphold meaningful and purposeful PD processes (Geekiyanage et al., 2020).

4.2.2. Needs analysis

Data analysis unearthed concerns in the manner in which community needs identification and analysis process was undertaken in the DLM. The participants indicated that local authorities determined development initiatives in local wards to meet their own needs and those that were morally accepted by them. The participants argued that these initiatives frequently failed to align with their local needs and aspirations as their needs were not considered.

Participant 4 in focus group 2 said:

> *They need to deliver services in the correct manner, that hub they started it for themselves. If ever they started engaging us on our needs, they could have understood that we do not need it at the moment. We have more pressing things that need their attention, but we guess that is how the municipality operates, on their own. (FG2 P4, 2023).*

Participant 5 from the Focus group 2 indicated that …

Even with that economic hub, I do not think there are enough businesses around here that would have needed such a space. We have a complex here, with enough space and businesses, so that is why I am saying that this hub was not needed. We can go through this whole municipality and engage further; I doubt that anyone will point out that it is a need around here. Maybe it is fashion in this municipality. I guess they are trying to push people into businesses and perhaps this is their way of doing so. (FG2 P5, 2023).

In addition, participant 4 in Focus Group 2 stated that …

Prioritisation of development needs is depended on the local authorities, in that in their own spaces without us, they decide for us, which is that important and which is not. They do not even come back to us and inform us of their decision. There is never feedback provided on which initiatives they will even start with. (FG2 P4, 2023).

Along with the views shared by the participants, an EFSIN reporter wrote that …

*While visiting the site, "Issue" spoke to the local man who declined to be named. He said people passing by used to ask the locals what is being developed but he said nobody knows because nobody from Dihlabeng ever came to tell them what was being developed. He felt it was just a way for politically connected people to make money off a tender (*EFSIN, 2022).

FG2 P5 expressed disappointment in that the DLEH initiative was forced on them. The participant further believed that there was no need for this type of an initiative in their ward. FG2 P4 indicated that development initiatives in the DLM were based on the local municipal authorities more than their needs as community members. The participant further indicated that feedback on discussions held within the local wards with the local authorities on development initiatives was not prioritised, at least to indicate the initiatives that the local council had agreed upon based on the needs of the community. The data gleamed from EFSIN further supported the views of the

participants that this development initiative was never a need of the community but that of the elected DLM authorities (Anon, 2022 b).

Fourie and Van der Waldt (2021) argue that municipalities are morally and legally obliged to actively involve communities in identifying, prioritizing and fulfilling socio-economic development needs. However, participants in the study, FG2 P4 and FG2 P5 shared that development initiatives were decided upon by local authorities. The same experiences were found by Ouwencamp and Van der Waldt (2024) who stated that local authorities in local government struggled with the legislative provision that ensures the needs to the communities are filtered into development planning. The responses from participants, FG 2 P4 and FG 2 P5 indicated that the community members were not involved in the decisions about the implementation of the DLEH in DLM. The overarching experiences based on the responses showed that community members were not considered and only play a role as receivers of the set initiatives.

The practice of local government authorities in deciding on best development initiatives for communities in the DLM is highly common in the DLM. Based on the views expressed by the participants, identified community needs resonate with what the local authorities deemed as appropriate and important for the communities. Often this way of decision-making processes disconnects the needs of the communities to the local government development initiatives implemented (Dayadi et al., 2024). These views were supported by the experiences of the participants who shared that there was no need for the DLEH to be implemented as it did not serve their current needs. Hallard (2022) argues that it is through the PD approach that the alignment of community needs and development initiatives can be attained because communities would be involved in the grassroots development of such initiatives. Dinbabo (2003) also stated that in PD communities are at the crucial place of understanding their own development needs, top-down development initiatives are rarely aligned to the needs of the communities as was the case with the DLEH in the DLM.

The participants were probed about the role they played after noticing the development initiative in their local wards. They indicated that they had adopted measures to get attention of the DLM authorities in order to participate in decision-making processes in the development initiatives. Contrary to the reports in the literature where protests were common in the local municipalities, in the DLM the participants resorted to use document demands, provided inputs through the local community representatives and ensured attendance to community meetings. These measures did not yield any positive results. The participants stated that the even when they went through the local wards in pursuit of understanding the initiatives, no one was able to explain if the needs analysis process involved community members when it was undertaken. There was evidence in the responses that were provided by the participants during the facilitated discussions and interviews that they were unaware of the processes undertaken by the DLM authorities to involve them in decision–making processes.

Participant 2 in focus group 2 responded to the question about participation of the community members in the conceptualisation of the selected initiatives and had the following to say:

> *They have local meetings; they will announce through the Speaker's office that there will be a certain meeting that will take place, but in most cases part of development initiatives or improvement is hardly included in the meetings. We notice when these projects are running that there is actually a development initiative taking place within the ward, not knowing how it came about as this was never discussed in the meetings that we would have attended. And when one looks at the participants who are taking part in these projects, you would realize that it is not even the community members from the ward part of it. It is actually a child of a friend who has been involved to participate in this initiative. The meetings are there (as per legal requirement) to provide justification of the meeting to have taken place. However, the community members of this ward were not part of the Dihlabeng Economic Development initiative." (FG2 P2, 2023).*

Another participant questioned the existence of this development initiative by asking this question:

> *I would like to ask a question; we saw containers erected in the park in this ward... we do not know why? What is their use"? (FG2, P6, 2023).*

Participant 3 responded to the development of the DLEH by saying…

> *When the economic hub was advertised, it was in the "Issue" newspaper. Authorities, it was said that they, the local authorities wanted to assist the businesses that were affected by COVID 19 pandemic. Creating an affordable space to operate. We saw it a little when it was advertised, however this too did not work, they just wasted a lot of money, and it is now a white elephant having removed our playground for our children. (FGP3, 2023).*

As explained by FG2 P2 and FG2 P6, the community was not involved in the discussions about the DLEH development initiative. This implies that the voice of the intended beneficiaries was not offered the opportunities to share their ideas. FG2 P5 indicated that the local authorities held meetings with community members, yet development initiatives were hardly discussed. However, they only to see them implemented without their involvement and knowledge. FG2 P6 questioned the DLEH about the containers that were placed in their ward, yet they did not know how that came about. There seems to be a common view among the participants that the initiatives were based on the decision of the local authorities without properly conceptualising the needs of the community members. However, FG P3 indicated that the development initiative was made public in the local newspaper informing the communities of the initiative that would be implemented, though, the advert did not request public input.

The CRs supported community members by stating that:

> *It is very difficult to explain the process that was followed to ensure that community members are involved in economic hub decision-making. We only*

saw the erection of containers when they were placed, we even asked ourselves what they were meant for. Even community members had no clue as to why they were there. (CR2, 2023).

Another participant, CR2, responded by stating…

"There are no processes in place to involve community members, we only saw the erection of the containers without any knowledge of their usage. We were told during one of our meetings, after it had been erected, that it's under investigation. Since that time to date, we have no idea what investigation was been done. Even today, community members are still asking and complaining about it. We still don't have answers. Money has been spent recklessly, so there is no involvement of the community members. Yes, apparently that spot was supposed to have been a recreational park according to the municipal demarcation. However, local authorities opted to have the economic hub. It was not supposed to be a place that deals with businesses." (CR4, 2023).

The two community representatives, CR2 and CR4, acknowledged the absence of a process in the DLM that made provision for the facilitation of the inclusion of community members regarding decision-making in development initiatives. CR2 explained the DLEH initiative was implemented without their knowledge, which was the reason it was difficult to explain the process followed when it was identified, conceptualised and implemented. Similarly, CR4 stated that as soon as they became aware of the initiative, they inquired from their local municipal representative about its conceptualisation. Since that time to date of the interviews, no feedback was received from this local municipal authority. As a result of these incongruencies, community members concluded that their involvement in the conceptualisation of this initiative was not needed. Further to that, CR4 explained that when they were inquiring about the DLEH, they learned that the DLM authority had intended to construct a recreational park. The fact that an economic hub was constructed instead provided more evidence that community members were not informed about development initiatives that were taking place in their locality. This means that the PD process, which is a constitutional

requirement in this country, was not facilitated by the DLM authorities as expected because community members were seemingly not involved when significant decisions which affect their living conditions were made.

Rashied and Begum (2016) state that decisions regarding development initiatives are centralised to the elite local government authorities who decide what needs to be implemented, when, where and how. A similar conclusion was made by Masuku and Molope (2020) who found that conceptualisation of community development initiatives excludes communities. The findings of the current study point to this predominance of local government authorities exclusion of local community members in the decision-making process especially related to initiatives.

The process seems to be exclusively designed for elected and appointed municipal authorities, as a bottom-up approach is not practised in local government. The low involvement and participation of community members in decision-making on local development activities has been seen as the main reason for failure of community development initiatives in local government as observed by Arkorful et al., (2023). In Similarly, Cooke and Kothari (2001) argue that most development projects failures are due to lack of a PD approach. The use of the approach ensures that initiatives are fully supported and sustainable through aligning them to the needs of communities and fostering active development agents among community members.

While community members strongly believed that they wre not involved in decision-making processes in development initiatives in the DLM, municipal representatives reported that there were efforts made to provide platforms for community members to get involved in the decisions on the development initiatives.

For example, K1 indicated the following …

> *Fortunately, enough, we have a local radio station, Dihlabeng Community Radio, where we involve community members in this process and get their*

input. The commonly used method is loud hailing, mainly because most of our ward is predominantly black, we only have one predominantly white ward, which is Ward 10, and this is where we issue notices. Loud hailing for community meetings, Dihlabeng local radio station, making use of print media like Free State Issue newspaper, and ultimately loud hailing for public participation. We have access to the local newspaper, we buy space at the newspaper, and it is printed and issued when the newspaper comes out, every Thursday. The mediums are used to inform the community members about the council schedule, mayoral programs, IDP road shows, and municipal road shows for the participation of the community member. Radio and print media are used to this effect.' (K1, 2023).

The same sentiments were shared by K2, who stated that...

The municipality places invitation notices in the local newspaper, Facebook, and notice boards to inform the community about the processes they intend to follow (K2, 2024).

K1 and K2 reported that community members were provided with multiple channels to take part in the decision-making processes. K1 explained that through IDP, mayoral Imbizo's and council meetings community members were granted with an opportunity to make inputs in their development needs and aspirations in strategic municipal planning processes. K2 explained further that they introduced more measures that include the use of local radio stations, notices, newspapers, council meetings, mayoral programmes to afford enough opportunity for participation in local municipal affairs. Both participants stated that multiple channels were available for communities to voice out their inputs in the development initiatives. They were not excluded from participating in the local governance structure in the DLM. Further to that, the K1 and K2 indicated that all the wards were covered since differentiated approach was adopted based on the specific participatory needs of communities in those wards.

The perspectives shared by K1 and K2 are consistent with the findings of Tejedo-Romero et al. (2022) who discovered that local government in Portuguese municipalities employed a wide range of strategies to engage communities in development processes. These includes the use of online services to facilitate discussions on development initiatives. Similarly, Asamoah and Ile (2024) found out in their study of Ghana, community meetings and hearings were the most used participatory mechanisms by the local government. The participatory mechanisms, such as online platforms, meetings and hearings are approaches that have been adopted in various countries around the world such as in the study. These experiences mirror those shared by K1 and K2 who stated that the DLM employs a variety of mechanisms to create opportunities for community involvement in local government matters.

The K1 explained that the two development initiatives were conceptualised as the needs of the community members …

> A *research study was carried out, taking data from SA, including our IDP, and a need was identified for such an initiative in the local ward. The idea was then taken to the top management of the local municipality, ultimately the council, for councillors' approval. The council is a decision-making body. Ward 16 was identified as the beneficiary of this initiative; it was seen that the economic hub would be viable in this local ward. The council will be the Municipal Manager and the Directors, Cooperate Services, Local Economic Development, technical service, and Chief Financial Officer. The top management will be the Municipal Manager and Directors, Corporate Services, Local Economic Development, technical service, and Chief Financial Officer. The Sivukile Agricultural Development Initiative is one of the emerging farmers in Bohlokong. They used to pester the municipality about the idea. Now, they were referred to SETA to help them with the business plan. SETA assisted them with the plan, which was later presented to the local authorities, the LED office and further implemented. (K1, 2023).*

K1 stated that an assessment of community development needs is done through municipal development planning process, which ends up in a municipal strategic plan known as the IDP. Furthermore, K1 indicated that this plan is reviewed annually to align it to emerging community needs. However, K1 did not mention how community members were participating in the conceptualisation of development initiatives that address these needs. Mamokhere and Meyer (2022a) state that an IDP is an indication of deliberations and CP in the needs assessment desired for the priorities and needs of the communities. However, in many municipalities this is used to showcase a CP process without so much as to influence development initiatives. K1 indicated that the local authorities initiated the DLEH, while the SAYC was conceptualized through the constant push from a group of members of the local community. The sentiments contradicts those of the community members, where the indication was that they are unaware of how the two initiatives came about as the two initiatives were not part of the IDP.

The study further reviewed the DLM IDP 2019-2020 (RSA, 2019), DLM DRAFT IDP 2020 -2021 (RSA, 2020) and the published DLM IDP draft 2023-2024 (RSA, 2023). The purpose of this review was to explore where the selected development initiatives would be captured in the IDP as stated by the key municipal office, along with the needs and views of the community members. In the analysis of these documents, it was clear that the two selected development initiatives were not in the strategic documents. Therefore, revealing that the initiatives were conceptualised outside the stipulated municipal planning processes. The documents provided hindrances to community members' involvement in decision-making processes because the lack of discussion on development initiatives during the IDP reviews provides communities with no platform to voice out their inputs in the decision-making process. This is attested by the community inputs in the focus group discussions and interviews that during the meetings, the local authorities deliberately omitted talking about the development initiatives.

4.2.3. Overlooked community input

Community members explained that their contributions to development-related decisions were often overlooked and not valued despite being invited and attending community meetings. This had led to the view that their inputs were not appreciated by the local authorities.

The Focus group participants shared the following experiences:

> *The local authorities will have their meetings (consultation), they come to preach and preach to us and then we are asked for our views and input. We do take such opportunities to contribute and participate in decision-making processes. They (local authorities) would appear so serious. One would think all we say has been taken note off and when something comes up you do not see any of your inputs.* (*FG2 P1, 2023).*

> *Our local municipal authorities do not take anything we say into account. Our inputs are not valued. (FG1 P1, 2023).*

Participant 2 in the FG1 further elaborated that...

> *Other than that, the opportunity that we get, perhaps when the council has a meeting or when we are called to a meeting by the local councillor, we would normally during these meetings give our inputs. However, none of the inputs that we would have provided are taken into consideration as we do not get to see implementation of our suggestions. The local municipal authorities have also implemented suggestion boxes for which we would provide inputs however nothing really happens to those inputs. (FG1 P2, 2023).*

The participants held the view that their opinions were not valued by the municipal authorities as they never got to see them bearing any development initiatives in their favour. The responses from participants, FG1 P2, FG1 P1, and FG2 P1. indicated that

they attended to the community meetings as called by the local authorities with the aim to contribute and influence the decision-making processes of the local authorities. However, the overall experience and sense of the participants showed that even though they would participate during these processes, their inputs and views were neglected by the local authorities in decision-making processes. P1 in FG2 stated that they believed that the local authorities effectively used these invited spaces to provide their own opinions. P1 in FG 1 shared the same sentiments and explained further that their contributions were not valued by the local authorities since such decisions do not reflect the deliberations and consensus arrived at during the public meetings. Furthermore, P2 in FG1 indicated that they were forever attending these meetings organised by local municipal officials where inputs were made but community members had nothing to show as evidence that their views bore any tangible impact on decisions. They held the view that their written inputs, provided through suggestion boxes were not being processed and taken into consideration.

The position held by these participants is aligned to the conclusion of Di Maddaloni and Sabini (2022) that despite the promises of inclusion in the identification, conceptualisation and implementation of development initiatives, these communities were still left out in the sense that their inputs were not considered. Although a platform for participation were provided, inputs from the community members as significant participants in the development agenda were not taken and included in the project at hand. In the case of this study, the community members were invited to public meetings to solicit inputs but these seemed not to be appreciated or reflected in the final product. Ragolane and Malatji (2021) found in their study that community involvement in local government decision-making continuously moved in the opposite direction to the intended purpose of acknowledging the contributions of community members in local governance affairs. These scholars suggested that there were still continuous underplay of the value of the inputs provided by community members in development decision-making processes by the local government authorities. The practice was still aligned to the top-down approach, which PD theory criticised as it undermines the significant role that the community plays in the development related decision-making processes.

Sebola (2016) argues that regardless the CP frameworks and prescripts (such as the Constitution of the RSA of 1996 (RSA, 1996) and the MSA 32 of 2000) (RSA, 2000), decisions are still representative of the view of the minority elite municipal authorities rather than those of community members. In the case of this study, participants would have been called to community meetings to deliberate on their needs which were not taken into consideration. Sebola (2016) concludes that community members are just by-standers to their own development. Foster (2018) states that despite significant progress demonstrated through PD oriented policies, which are aimed at creating a conducive environment for CP in local governance, the experience of communities is that their views are not translated into any development initiatives and interventions. This disempowers communities, as they become passive participants, while local authorities end up sole key players in decision-making processes. Dinbabo (2003) cautioned against these practices as they hinder a participatory approach needed to address the development needs of the communities.

Participants were asked how their needs were reflected in local government authorities' development programmes and the response were that the needs of the community in the development activities, such as DLEH and SYAC were excluded. While community members were invited to community meetings and had access to local authorities, they are of the view that their needs were frequently excluded in the development initiatives.

Participant 1 from focus group 2 indicated the following:

> *We have been here for long; I have not seen our needs reflected in municipal programs and development activities. Their programs only show that which they want to implement on their own. (FG2 P1, 2023).*

This sentiment is supported by participant FG2 P5:

> *One can tell from these initiatives and development projects that the local authorities are not listening. Nothing we say gets implemented or inputs considered. (FG2 P5, 2023).*

Furthermore, another participant stated that:

> *We must be consulted, for us to deliberate on issues. At the moment, the container park (Economic hub), is in the place where it was our children's park. If we were consulted, perhaps we would have been able to influence such a decision before it was made. We needed that space for our children. All of us have needs, and we need to engage better to address such needs. (FG P2, 2023).*

Further to the experiences shared, FG2 P3, stated emotionally stated:

> *just feel like this place is just synonymous with its name "Bohlokong", a place of pain and hurt. We just not being listened to by the people who are supposed to have our keen interest at heart. (FG 2 P3).*

The participants stated that despite the attendance at public meetings and gatherings, the DLM authorities continued to be unable to show how inputs and views of wide community members were incorporated in the two development initiatives. There was no evidence that views of the community members were incorporated into any of the development initiatives. As indicated by P1 in FG 2, their needs were not visible in the development initiatives. Furthermore, P5 indicated that anyone on the ward should see that the implemented initiatives represent the ideas of the local authorities and community needs were not included in such. Similarly, FG2 P3 stated that their needs were not part of any development initiative in the local ward.

The responses provided similar expressions of participants in other previous studies such as Mamokhere and Meyer (2022b). The researcher found that in Tzaneen, the

views and opinions of community members were not included in the development activities of the municipality in relation to their needs. In addition, Mulaudzi et al. (2023) state that community needs are often not aligned to the programmes of local authorities and this can be seen through the implementation of the integrated development planning where the aspirations and priorities of the communities are not captured. Malemane and Nel-Sanders (2021) argues that public policies, programmes and projects are constantly designed by public officials and external experts on behalf of communities and this is the reason they are unaligned to the community needs. This fuels the notion that local government authorities do not view communities as active agents in their own development but endorsers of decisions taken elsewhere. Furthermore, most initiatives fail in local government because often they do not incorporate inputs of the locals resulting in lack support and ownership (Malemane & Nel-Sanders, 2021). According to Chambers (1994b) for development initiatives to be community centred, community knowledge, support and ownership must be filtered into their identification, conceptualisation and implementation through the PD approach.

4.2.4. Unresponsive local authorities

The section presents the nature of the relationship between community members and local government authorities in incorporating deliberated and documenting communities' views into the development initiatives. The participation indicated that there is lack of responsiveness of the DLM authorities and this is regardless of the measure that communities would have taken to participate in the decision-making processes in development activities. Direct extracts from the respondent regarding their experience on the role of local government authorities in ensuring active participation in development activities are provided.

The participant in the focus group stated that:

> ..... *We are promised by the local authorities that our views will be taken to the council meeting and perhaps discussed, but we never see any changes, not*

even their implementation. Furthermore, we would never receive answers or feedback on our requests and inputs. (FG1 P1, 2023).

Participant 1 responded in the following manner:

Just as we have stated in the beginning, we inform them during meetings about what we need. They just crush everything we say. Our councillor, we inform them, but we do not even know if, during the council meeting, our needs are shared. (FG2 P1, 2023)

The experiences shared by participants, FG1 P1 and FG2 P1 showed that they were aware of their role in providing development inputs and actively participating in local governance matters. However, the DLM authorities seemed not to respond to the inputs that were shared with them during public meetings. As mentioned by FG2 P1, the DLM neither responded nor attended to inputs provided by the community. FG1 P1 attested to the casual nature of these DLM authorities during their engagement sessions where neither follow-up meetings nor feedback on discussions was given to the community members. The response was followed up by the criticism from FG2 P1 that even the elected representative in the municipal council, who was tasked with ensuring that local government decision-making processes reflected the needs of ward community members did not respond to their inputs. This community representative was also accused of not providing feedback to this constituency.

Nyama and Mukwada (2023) conclude that ward councillors are known for ignoring views provided by communities during participatory processes, especially when those views do not align to theirs. The failures of ward councillors to share the views of their constituencies have been cited by other researchers such as Mamokhere and Meyer (2022a). The author found that communities were subjected to minimal to no feedback as expected during and after participatory processes. They recommended an inclusion of measures such as print media, broadcasting and the internet as well as WCs to

strengthen and provide feedback on municipal council deliberations on inputs provided by communities on development-activities.

In addition to the views shared by FG1 P1 and FG2 P1, participant 3 in focus group 2 elaborated on the lack of response of the authorities to community contributions:

> *Even during the meetings that they call, we inform the councillors of our needs, then they leave, and nothing happens afterward to address the needs that we would have identified. Other than those meetings, we even go to them in person, but everything is still the same. We are not being heard. (FG2 P3, 2023).*

The participants in this study expressed frustration with the treatment they received from local councillors. FGP3 stated that while community members followed legal procedures to communicate their needs to their representatives; they were often ignored and not granted a hearing. This lack of response and commitment from the councillors fostered a sense of hopelessness on the role of community members in development related decisions in the DLM. Molefe and Overton-De Klerk (2019) documented similar findings, noting that community members often felt unheard, overlooked and disengaged by local councillors. Ideally, ward councillors should act as a bridge between the communities they represent and the municipal council by regularly updating the community through ward meetings. These updates would ensure that the community stays informed about the development priorities and needs, empowering them to participate actively in municipal development planning processes.

According to the respondents in the study, their role in municipal planning was reduced to informing local councillors of their needs without any tangible development impact. These findings are further consistent with Nel et al. (2023) argue that the top-down approach by the local government authorities in relation to community development

excludes community members in development-related decisions. The provisions of CP is that communities must be listened to, be heard, provided with a conducive environment to participate in municipal affairs that requires their involvement of communities (Makumu & Mlambo, 2024). The respondents in this study indicated a contractor views to the provisions of CP because they believe that they are unheard, not listened to and not provided with a conducive environment to present their inputs.

Participant 7 added that they also employ other measures to be heard...

> *..... Other than the petitions that we do, we also write letters and address them to the municipal local authorities and the council itself, we are still to date wait responses on those letters. (FG1 P7, 2023).*

P6 also shared the same view …

> *Even if we file petitions, the local authorities will indicate that our petition will be answered in 3 days. We still do not receive anything from them. We do a lot but also do not help us; there is no one who responds to them anyway. (FG1 P6, 2023).*

In addition P2 stated that …

> *We try our best to go to our ward councillor, even when we hear things from other people on the ward. These meetings are started by us as community members; we call ourselves concerned community members, however, even ourselves still get to experience no changes in how decisions are made. (FG 1 P2, 2023).*

The responses revealed that community members felt left out by those who should lead and support them because they were not responsive to their needs even after they made efforts to engage the DLM authorities. FG 2 P3 explained that community members even visited the municipal offices such that they at least be given an

audience, but the councillors remained unresponsive. FG 1 P7, FG 1 P2 and FG1 P6 indicated that apart from the meetings and the in-person visits to the local municipality, they also sent petitions and letters to the councillors and the highest decision-making structure of the municipality, which is the council all these efforts were yet to yield results.

The views shared by the participants match to the findings presented by Asamoah and Ile (2024) where found that the unresponsiveness of elected and appointed municipal officials to provide communities audience hindered meaningful CP, eventually creates a gap between local authorities and community members. Further, the lack of responsiveness results in the perception that municipal authorities are self-serving while in a democratic society, the needs of the people are supposed to be at the forefront of any development discourse especially in local government (Agomor, 2023). It presents major concerns as to how the conceptualisation of community development initiatives unfolds in the DLM when the local ward councillors are being unresponsive to the voices of the communities.

From this experience, a disappointed Participant 6 in focus group 2 mentioned that …

> *We have reached a stage where we are just tired of fighting with the municipal authorities, what do we get from that? Absolutely nothing. They just ignore any means and inputs at the end of the day "We have been protesting, year in and year out. As old as we are, having to protest all the time but what do we have to show for it? We are honestly tired. Now that a political party is going to the elections, we will only now be promised heaven on earth, only because of the elections. We only get to see the local authorities in our ward during the time of elections and that's all. (FG2 P6, 2023).*

The efforts that were taken by the community members did not yield the results they were expecting. FG 2 P6 stated that they had reached a stage where they were drained by unfulfilled promises of inclusion. In addition, the respondents indicated that

they authorities only remembered them during the election time. In light of the responses from the participants, FG2P6 and FG1P6 indicated that various mechanisms, such as petitions, letters and in-person visits to the local authorities and councillors to ensure that they had an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes even though they do not yield any influence.

The views expressed by FG2 P6 and FG1 P6 indicated that community members made the effort to participate in local government development affairs. However, their inputs were not reflected in the implemented development initiatives, as local authorities remain less responsive to the deliberations. The findings are consistent with Motloutsi and Motloutsi (2023) state that the existing designed community engagement mechanisms in local government are not achieving inclusion in decision-making processes despite the understanding of what community involvement is and what it should achieve. In addition, Mokoena and Molepo (2024) acknowledged that community members are often neglected in the identification, conceptualization and prioritisation of development initiatives.

The participants experiences have shaped negative perceptions on local government decision-making processes because of local authorities disregard communities needs for their own, and lacking compensation for local community development aspirations as captured by the manner in which they respond to community members (Abas et al., 2023). Furthermore, these necessitated community members to find alternative ways to attract the attention of local authorities for the achievement of their needs. A responsive local government is one that strengthens community participation for the benefit of good governance in decision-making processes (Baloyi, 2023; Mbithi et al., 2019; Thebe, 2017).

When community members were asked about the role that local councillors play in ensuring active and meaningful participation in the wards, their responses were that councillors were passive and did not ensure that communities are involved in decision-making processes.

The participants indicated the following...

> *We try our best to go to our ward councillor, even when we hear things from the other people in the other wards, we go to our councillor to find out if we would have similar development initiatives and what we need to do, however, we do not have get a way forward. (FG2 P1, 2023).*

> *I think I need to agree with her, we reach out a lot to the councillor because our mode of communication is through her. We could easily go to the local municipal offices, but the councillor is the closest to us; hence, we would constantly engage her. However, councillorship has proven to be useless, the biggest part in economy development, we are here, however, we do not get to have an input. We wish we could engage the local authorities, inform them of our needs so that they can at least work on them. (FG2 P2, 2023).*

Furthermore, participant 5 indicated that

> *One would approach the local municipal authorities themselves, because we feel like the local councillor does not have our best interest at heart. They (local authorities) would refer us back to the councillor whom we can see ourselves that out inputs are not necessarily a focus to her. (FG2 P5, 2023).*

The views of the participants expressed a loss of hope in that their local councillors would consider their inputs in the development activities. FG1 P2 and FG2 P2 viewed the role of local ward councillors in the facilitation of active and meaningful CP as non-existence in the DLM, despite efforts to be involved. Both participants indicated that they are unsure that their inputs in the development activities are considered in discussions at the council. Participant P5 from focus group 2 indicated that it was clear that their ward councillor did not have their best interests at heart. When they approached the municipal offices themselves, they were referred back to the councillor who do not listen to them.

The community members who participated in this study were well conversant with the roles that their ward councillor must play in relation to representing the views in municipal structures. Munzhedzi (2020b) and Kamal et al. (2018), also noted in their studies that community members were aware that their local councillors must serve as vehicles through which their interests and aspirations are met because carried the mandate of the electorate. However, the experiences of the participants in the current study indicated that either local councillors lacked the understanding of this important task or they were merely ignoring it. Fourie and Van der Waldt (2021) recommended continuous training of local councillors in keeping up with the local community dynamics that needed to be presented at local councils. The training councillors to conduct their own ward environment analysis and scanning and ensure CP to participatory decision-making regardless of political affiliations.

The views of the participants resonate with Munzhedzi (2020b) who found that the performance of councillors at local wards when it comes to assurance of community member's participation on ward level decision-making was beyond is unsatisfactory. Mamokhere and Meyer (2022b) found that the relationship between the ward councillors and community members reduced overtime due to the manner in which the councillors hold their responsibility of ensuring the active participation of community members in decision-making processes. Therefore, councillors are commonly and deliberately ignoring their constituencies and constitutional roles, while giving preference to their political interests (Mokoena & Molepo, 2024). In this context, as suggested by participants, FG1 P2 and FG2 P2, local councillors failed in fostering community involvement in the DLEH and the SYAC initiatives as required by local government policies, prescripts and directives.

Community representatives added that even though there were meetings organised for the community members to receive reports and suggest ways in which their areas could be developed, participants believe that these were not used effectively.

For example, CR4 stated that …

> *Normally, they (local authorities) call an IDP meeting, at the community town hall. Community members, ward committees, and other stakeholders are given a chance to explain their needs. These stakeholders can include churches, businesses, or any other communities. We then table our needs per responsible wards. The meetings take place according to specific ward at the specific date. After that, the council sits and decides on the development initiatives to be implemented. Once the decision has been made, they come back to us and present the initiatives which will be done in the year in accordance to be available budget. However, these meetings seem to be bearing no fruits as community members presents their needs, as at the end of the day, local authorities decide on their own which to implement, and most of the time they are not in-line with the needs presented by community members. We are then told about the budget being the reason. We are tired. (CR4, 2023).*

Participant 8 in FG 2 stated that...

> *We have been staying here for a long time and attending meetings. I have not seen our needs reflected in municipal programmes. Their programs only show what they want to implement on their own. My husband has been living in this municipality for a very long time, each time he would go to their meeting and raise his hand to input, he would be ignored and disrespected. (FG2 P8, 2023).*

The view of participants, CR4 and FG2 P8, is that attending public meetings did not benefit them in the sense that their views do not have any influence on development decisions in the local municipality. Both participants said that local authorities in the DLM practised top-down approach in the decision-making on development initiatives regardless of the decentralised processes that were a feature of a democratic governance. CR4 stated that they were provided with an opportunity to provide inputs, which they did without hesitation. However, these views did not translate into any development interventions, as such their involvement was just a matter of compliance.

Furthermore, FG 2 Participant 8 indicated that their attendance to these meetings over the year had never translated into development results. Therefore, the meetings were seen as environments where confirmation of development activities conceptualised by the local authorities in their own exclusive decision-making processes were affirmed. The participant indicated that activities in the local municipality were a reflection of centralised decision-making power and disregard of communities as they were ignored. Development initiatives that are conceptualised and implemented are those that authorities decided upon at the exclusion of the community members.

CR4 expressed to this element of centralised decision-making processes by explaining how development initiatives were decided from the top council to the stage where communities were just informed of the decisions taken. This supports the assertion by Foucault (1980) that power is everywhere including with the communities. It is experienced in the manner decisions were taken by the DLM authorities, hence the indication from the community members that they are tired of these spaces that yield development initiatives where the majority of them were never part of their conceptualisation. FG 2 P8 shared the same views as CR4, that decisions about development initiatives were taken elsewhere and implemented as determined by the local authorities. The views from the two participants, CR4 and FG2 P8, suggested that communities did not have a role in the conceptualisation of development initiatives a top-down, exclusion or both approaches were practiced in DLM.

The sentiments as shared by the community members were later confirmed by the CRs when asked if community members attend the meetings as called by the local authorities.

One CR confirmed …

> *Yes (A lot), definitely. Community members attend the meetings. They participate a lot. It is just that they kept on being promised that feedback will be provided, yet we do not see any changes taking place. In terms of*

development – NO, NO, community is not given an opportunity to voice their development needs for consideration by the local authorities. They participate with the hope that something might happen should they attend to these meetings. (CR1, 2023).

Furthermore, another participant (FG1 P5) indicated that …

The local authorities only talk about the development initiatives without implementation. For example, we have been talking about the paving initiative in the ward in all the meetings we are attending but its implementation to date has never been done. They all end up in these meetings only. (FG1 P5:2023).

CR1 shared the views that community members attend public meetings but they did not receive feedback on the suggestions they made. Community members stated that they responded positively to the requests for them to attend the meetings. CR1 suggested that communities attended the meetings with the hope that they would one day be heard by those that were supposed to listen to their needs. FG1 P5 noted that the discussions taking place at the meetings seemingly were not attended to since none of the suggested inputs are implemented. The participant,even makes reference to their requested paving for their road made in one of their meetings which at the time of the interviews had not been done though was a point of discussion on the agenda.

In the context of community meetings, the views from CR1, FG 1 P5 and FG 2 P8 are similar to the findings on CP mechanisms in the local municipality. Petunia and Selepe (2020) state that community meetings are strategically designed to actively engage a wide audience in information sharing and meaningful discussions aimed for a specific common purpose. However, these meetings have not produced results that responded to community members' interest to participate meaningfully in local decision-making processes. Even with high attendance levels, the impact of meetings on participatory decision-making seems to be disappointing. This observation is supported by the findings of Asamoah and Ile (2024) that these participatory mechanisms do not yield

any influence on development related decisions. Despite the idea that these community meetings support participatory processes in local municipalities, in practice this does not seem to be the case (Sideris, 2021). However, in this study, the DLM communities seemed to be responsive to these measures to participate and engage with the local authorities through this structure.

The responses of FG1 P5 and FG2 P8 that public meetings were well attended by community members were contradictory to the findings reported by scholars, such as Zwane (2020), Ragolane and Malatji (2021), and Matloga et al. (2024), who found that community members had ceased attending public meetings as they were viewed a futile exercise. The findings in this study showed that meetings were still well attended even though the community members do not see themselves as giving any input to influence the decision-making processes. They are consistent with Mbithi et al. (2019) who found that attendance to public meetings by community members had an insignificant influence on meaningful community involvement in decision-making processes. Nevertheless, the fact that community members were still present in these insignificant public meetings hid the fact that they were deliberately excluded from CP processes. This support and availability of community members provides a clear indication that communities comprehend the importance of their involvement in participatory processes as per Hofer et al., (2024).

Gwala et al. (2015) state that community meetings as outlined by local authorities provide superficial participation processes. Mbithi et al. (2019) conclude that this is related to lack of capacity among local government participation facilitators to plan empowering meetings, which are intended to afford community members an opportunity to influence, direct, control and own local development initiatives. In this case, knowledge on community involvement and its expectations become very important for the efficiency of these mechanisms. As such as Mbithi et al., (2019) observes the current set of mechanisms are provided as just by-the-way activity of the local authorities for the set legislations compliance.

The responses from participants, CR4, FG2 P8, and FG1 P8, indicated overarching challenges, limitations and hindrance to active participation in decision-making processes in local government. The act of unappreciated community inputs, being unresponsive to community needs, community members who do not have any influence in decision-making processes and political interferences can be attributed to an unequal power relationships between the community and local authority limit efficient and effective participation. As Mahé (2018) explains power control in participatory spaces.

In the context of this study, community members experience their powerless when invited to provide input on deliberations, which were practically ignored, decisions were taken by the authorities. This threatens that objective of PD as participation married by unequal power subsequently reinforces the coercion of community members to pre-determined initiatives (Kyamugulwa, 2013). It is evident that in context of the that the prescripts that are in place to support CP in decision-making process are flawed in the DLM. CR4 indicated that inputs from community members are never part of the development initiatives in the local municipality. The perception of the CR is that local authorities only come to meetings to “preach” to the community members, signifying the element that community members were there to listen, not to be heard.

4.3 Absence of public participation strategy (PPS)

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis is the absence of PPS in development-related activities. Local governments, based on their environment, must develop strategies for CP that cover the manner in which community is involved in decision-making processes as indicated in the RSA National Policy Framework for Public Participation 2007 (Ouwencamp & van der Waldt, 2024; RSA, 2007b). However, this documented process in which communities are to be meaningfully and purposefully consulted is lacking in the DLM. This is explained by the experiences shared by the participants in this study. The presented codes are supported by the verbatim extracts of the participants’ responses.

4.3.1 Unclear community participation (CP) process

The absence of a CP framework in DLM indicates that there is no defined manner in which community members are to be consulted in decision-making processes. Dayadi et al. (2024) state that CP prescripts are to be in place in local government for the effective and participatory processes in development-related decision-making to be implemented.

The participants were asked questions on the process followed by the local government authorities to involve community members effectively in development-related decision-making processes. The three responses cited below demonstrate the view of the participants:

CR1, responded by indicating that …

> *We are never told by the local ward councillors about the process that will be followed to ensure people to take place in the initiatives now that they have been implemented. Yes, we are not told before it happens, we only see things happening, and we are not told what they are.* (CR1, 2023).

Participant CR2 supported the views of CR1 by stating that …

> *We only see these projects just happening, we don't know where they come from and their use. To date, I do not really understand what is happening with these containers as a member of the community and the ward committee. (CR2, 2023).*

The same views were elaborated by FG2 P2 who shared that.…

> *There is really no proper consultation process in place; I cannot recall any meeting I attended where we were asked to give proper input, involved in the analysis of our local ward and its inputs and then their prioritisation. But we see sprouts of development initiatives taking place, for example, the economic*

hub, which we only learn about at the streets. We will by chance when they advertise such an initiative see it, only because they need to and are forced. But I do not recall any meeting where we all sat down and listed the priorities by their importance (FG 2 P2, 2023).

CR1 and CR2 indicated that they were unaware of the processes that were followed by the DLM authorities to involve community in decision-making. CR1, as a community representative in the local ward, explained that their own councillor did not keep them informed of any CP process in development initiatives that took place in the respective wards, they only had to see them once initiatives were implemented. FG2 P2 shared the same perspectives as CR 1 and stated that even though they saw development activities, such as the DLEH, they were never part of its identification nor prioritisation. They learned of the development initiatives from the changes in their surroundings, unclear of the consultation process that was followed in their identification and conceptualisation.

Correia et al. (2023) argued that, community involvement, frameworks, and procedures must be designed to fully integrate community members to participate actively and meaningfully in decision-making regarding development-related activities. The participants in this study reported that they were unaware of any documented framework, adopted by the DLM authorities, to guide community involvement in decision-making. The national government has established a public participatory framework (PPF) aimed at guiding local government authorities in designing PP processes, which would see decentralising communities influencing development-related activities. The expectation is that local municipal authorities would develop their own strategies based on this national framework. Nonetheless, participants confirmed that no such guidelines existed at the local level. The absence of this strategic imperative in local planning is problematic, as it leads to top-down decision-making processes (Retnandari, 2022). Similarly, Biljohn (2019) asserts that the failure of local authorities to implement concrete measures for community involvement limits engagements and make it difficult to assess the effectiveness of efforts to promote participation, ultimately hindering effective participatory decision-making.

When the municipal representatives were asked about the PPS used in the DLM to guide the involvement of community members in decision-making processes, contradicting explanations were provided.

K2 provided the explanation…

> *The municipality developed a public participation plan that outlines specific strategies and channels for community participation. These plans ensure that information about the development initiatives is accessible to all the residents. (K2, 2024).*

However, K1 provided a different explanation from the one given by K2, yet the officials were in the same local municipality, K1 stated that …

> *There was no plan in place and followed in the conceptualizing of the development initiatives. The Dihlabeng Local Economic Hub was not in the IDP. It was thrown by the municipal political executives, that is why it is so difficult to explain how it was conceptualised. It was thrown into the window by the senior municipal executives, I requested information from the IDP people about this project, however, they also told me the same thing - that it was not in the IDP, and it was given to them to implement. Sivukile Agricultural Development initiative is one of the emerging farmers in the local ward. Community members used to pester local economic development unit with the idea. They were referred to SETA to assist them with the business plan. SETA assisted them with the plan, of which later was presented to the local authorities, the LED office, for which that only then the project came into reality. (K1, 2023).*

The municipal representatives, K1 and K2, provided different views on the availability of a PP plan that was followed by the local authorities to involve community members in decision-making processes in the DLEH and the SYAC. K2 explained that the local municipality had PP plan that ensured that community members were part of the decision-making processes related to the development initiatives. K1 differed with K2

in that he said there was no plan followed as the Dihlabeng Economic hub was an idea of the local authorities, whereas the SYAC was implemented due to a group off community members constantly visiting the Local Economic Development (LED) office for the implementation of the initiatives. These contradicting views supports the perspectives of community members and CRs the process followed by the local government authorities to involve them in decision-making processes was unclear. It further indicates that there was no documented process that was followed by the elected and appointed DLM authorities that guides the involvement of community members in decision-making processes. If indeed there was one, both of these municipal representatives would have responded in a similar way. The officials are expected to have knowledge of this process as their portfolios within the local municipality environment includes the facilitation of public participation and would have also known about the guidelines.

In response to the question on the steps DLM authorities took to ensure that community members were involvement in decision-making processes without a PPS, K1 responded that….

> *The first step is the development of a plan by local authorities; this plan is presented to the top management. Ultimately to the local councillors. The plan is developed by the LED office of the local municipality. It is then tabled to the Business Unit Manager, who with LED office draws up a plan that is tabled to their Director. Subsequently, the plan will be approved and submitted to Section 8 of the municipality. After that, the plan is made an item for discussion in the mayoral committee; Community participation will be the last step before the council meeting. After adoption, the process begins to implement. (K1, 2023).*

The municipal representative, K1 stated that CP in development activities such as the DLEH and the SYAC come as the last process in the identification, conceptualisation of development initiatives. Community members only had the opportunity to endorse a plan already which was already in place. The provision of PPS in DLM would have

equipped the local authorities with the understanding that community involvement in the selected development initiatives should have been a continuous process from the identification, conceptualising, implementation and evaluation of the initiatives in order to avoid community being by-standers in development decisions. It is evident from the National Policy Framework for Public Participation 2007 (RSA, 2007b) that development planning process is a collaborative process that involves active participation of communities as development partners (Kgobe et al., 2023). However, this aspect of the decision-making was not considered by the Dihlabeng Local Municipality based on the findings on this study.

Tsoeu-Ntokoane et al. (2024) argue that the inputs of community members in development projects are silenced as a way of affording the local authorities a top-down approach to development planning. The respondents in this study confirmed this view by concluding that the value community voices in development planning was undermined by the local government authorities due to unclear community participation process in the DLM. Ouwencamp and Van der Waldt (2024) emphasised that the commitment PD planning must be led by the local authorities to ensure that decision-making processes are accommodative of community members. The failures of local government authorities to draw such a plan symbolise an act of disregard to decentralised decision-making approach as required by the Constitution of the RSA. This further exacerbates the top-down decision-making process in the DLM, where development initiatives are decided upon before community can have an input on development planning processes.

4.3.2. Inadequate knowledge on CP processes

In the response to the assertion made by the community members that the DLM authorities were unresponsiveness with regards to their participation in development activities. The municipal representatives conceded that there were hindrances that limits their ability to ensure that there is participation of community members in development initiatives. However, the informants place challenges with local ward councillors.

K1 conceded and indicated that….

> *The appointment of local ward councillors poses a challenge to community participation. We need more knowledgeable councillors who can ensure that the legislations as put through for local government are thoroughly implemented. There is a need to appoint individuals on merits such as qualifications; if only political parties would employ people with a bit of experience, if only councillors would graduate from being a ward committee member coupled with learning, most of the councillors do not have grade 12 and are unable to understand community participation (K1,2023).*

K1 who is a municipal authority admitted that local councillors lacked the knowledge on facilitating community involvement in their wards. These admissions align with the assertions made by the community members.

K2 added to this view by stating that….

> *While community involvement offers numerous benefits, it also provided certain challenges, such as power imbalances between the local municipal authorities and community members that leads to unequal participation and decision-making processes (K2, 2024).*

The key informants, K1 and K2 admitted that local authorities lacked knowledge on CP processes and those that have the knowledge treated CP as space where power over communities was exacted. K1 explained that the local authorities that were in the local municipality lack knowledge in CP. The participant stated that local councillors were elected into their position with limited skills on how to involve community members in decision-making processes. K2 further acknowledged that participatory environments were filled with power struggles between the local authorities and community members that deterred the ability of active and meaningfully involvement in the development initiatives decision-making processes. The admission of these key informants that decision-making processes were filled with power struggles and lack

of knowledge presented the view that CP in development initiatives was indeed not prioritised in the DLM and that there were no structured way of undertaking community consultation processes.

Matloga et al. (2024) concluded that the implementation of active participation of community members was hindered by employment of unqualified municipal officials expected to enforce PP processes. This is further supported by Abas et al., (2023) who observed that municipal authorities who were tasked with facilitating CP lack the skills on aiding the involvement of communities in decision-making. The authors expressed views that are similar with K1 who stated that for CP in the DLM to be meaningful there was a need for officials with the relevant skills and experience to facilitate the deliberations between local authorities and community members, a factor that was lacking in the DLM. These observations by K1 support the views of community members that their participation in development initiatives only ended with their attendance to meetings, as councillors were unable to facilitate the process. Sibanda and Lues (2021) express the same views as those of K2 that abuse of power provides for unequal distribution of decision-making involvement of communities in development decision-making process. Therefore, the indication that decision-making processes are a centralised activity in the DLM hindering any efforts of PD is indeed real.

4.3.3 Prioritising political party affiliation over the residents

Athough the Constitution of the RSA (1996), MSA (2000) and the WPLG (RSA, 1998b), emphasised CP in local development matters, the practice in the DLM is that affiliation to political parties are used to determine who gets access to information. The participant in the study stated that members of certain political parties get information ahead of everyone else in the local municipality. As a result, the extent of participation in the decision-making processes is comprised by political affiliations. According to the participants a group that is aligned to the elected DLM authority seem privileged and empowered to participate while those that are not connected to this politically appointed official are restricted.

Participant 1 explained the following …

> *..... and most of the time, it is the individuals who belong to a certain political party that will be taken by the local authorities to be involved in the projects. We have on numerous occasions requested that local authorities be fair in the recruitment process, we would appreciate transparency to ensure that we all have an equal chance to be involved; however, this has not been considered. (FG1 P1, 2023).*

This was further confirmed by a participant in the study when asked about the challenges to involve community members in local municipal affairs, who stated that.…

> *Most of the time when requested to attend the meetings, community members usually do. However, I see the challenge to this effect as politicization. Some of the things are done based more on political organizations and no longer about serving the whole community, leading to the participation of certain people who end up only being the only ones to participate in municipal affairs. It depends on the political structures. At times it is mainly people from the ruling political party. They end up having a lot of information about development activities such as economic hub and Sivukile Youth agricultural development initiatives that most of the community members do not have. They end up being the ones with the most influence than the rest of the community members" (CR2, 2023).*

Furthermore, CR1 explained that:

> *Those who are politically connected with the local authorities in the local municipality are the ones that normally would participate in decision-making processes. Therefore, it is not possible in this ward that all community members would know of these initiatives such as economic as not all are connected political to municipal officials. (CR1, 2023).*

Participants, FG1 P1, CR2, and CR1 stated that political interference by representatives in the local municipality hindered the active involvement of most community members in decision-making processes. FG1 P1 raised an important issue about the lack of transparency and fairness when selecting participants for development projects. Community members had requested that the process be done openly, however, the request was ignored. CRs, CR1 and CR2 also agreed the community members who indicated that they found it difficult to contribute to the DLM development activities because representatives of political parties tended to make these activities projects of their parties.

The views expressed by the participants are consistent with the findings of different scholars on development practice discourse in local government. Sibanda and Lues (2021) state that community members are often marginalized from the decision-making process due to their political position especially if they differ with those who are in positions of authority. In addition, Ndlovu (2017), Maqoko and Asmah-Andoh (2019), Masuku and Jili (2019), Mngomezulu (2020) and Sapkota (2023) argue that such misuse of political power in government planning cripples the ability of a community member to participate in needs assessment processes that aid development decision-making. The same findings were noted by Mkhize & Mutereko, (2022) that despite the documented legal and policy prescripts aimed at protecting local government independence and averting interferences, those that are politically affiliated get preference in development initiatives decision-making over those that do not have political connections. Consequently, interference by political party representatives erodes trust and confidence in local government authorities, raising questions about the adequacy of existing participatory approach mechanisms and the legitimacy of development related decisions.

4.4 Discussion

The Dihlabeng Local Municipality faces significant challenges in achieving active and meaningful involvement of communities in decision-making processes regarding development initiatives. This could be attributed to the absence of PPS in the

municipality to improve the manner in which community involvement processes is undertaken. This directly hampers the ability of community members to influence decisions that affect their lives, livelihood and development initiatives.

The National Policy Framework for Public Participation 2007 (RSA, 2007b) and South African Local Government Association (SALGA) Effective Public Participation (SALGA, 2013) provided guidelines to be followed by the local authorities in drafting their own CP plans. In the DLM, this has not been the case as it does not have any documented process as prescribed by the national and local government framework. This shows that the local authority is yet to develop their own community involvement framework that could make it possible for communities to influence council's decision-making processes especially in the development activities.

Local governments municipalities are expected to make their PP publicly processes but the DLM seems to be unable to do so. This is seen through the inability of the officials to provide and publish their municipal strategic documents that guide community involvement frameworks for ease of decision-making processes. The municipal website has the DLM IDPs, their audit and annual performance reports, job advertisement and tenders but not their PP guideline. Therefore, it is not a surprising that this local municipality experiences challenges with incorporating communities' views and aspirations in decision-making processes regarding development initiatives as there are no guideline to direct community members.

The framework needs to be made accessible to the community and its partners for them to comprehend local decision-making processes. Failure to ensure that the framework is made public disempowers community members and they end up not knowing how they can meaningfully participate in local governance matters. As Jurlina Alibegović and Slijepčević (2018) state this issue of non-compliance is seen as refusal to adhere to set government legislations as well as to decentralise power and influence. This was confirmed by the officials that the local municipal was without a documented plan to ensure the involvement of communities in decision-making

processes regarding development initiatives. The notion was further supported by the CRs who acknowledged that the initiatives were implemented without following any PP plan, as there was none in the DLM. All these make community members feel un appreciated and unrecognised in development activities.

What seems to be a centralisation model within a democratic system is not only prevalent in the study area as Panday (2019) explained that in Bangladesh, local authorities are fixated on the idea of centralized power to the level where communities are shut out of the development decision-making processes. Sibanda and Lues (2021) also affirmed that the manner in which power in local government in the Eastern Cape Province South Africa is used by the authorities to systematically breed the exclusion of community opinion in development initiatives. The study can attest to this as well, as the refusal to decentralise power and influence was revealed in DLM through the manner in which development initiatives are further conceptualised and implemented.

The findings of this study revealed that those with power over and above the community's members instruct the local authorities to implement development initiatives aligned to their own interest. This was further, explained by the key informants as a deterrent to CP, which led to unequal participation of communities in decision-making processes in development initiatives. It was discovered in the study that such initiatives often end up as white elephants such as the DELH. The affirmation confirms that the principle of PD that initiatives that do not acknowledge participatory approach lacks sustainability. Hence, the community members are treated as receivers rather than active participants in development.

South Africa has adopted a decentralised local government system reflected in the legislations however in the DLM centralised decision-making seems to be the dominant order of the day. The two development initiatives which were research case studies for the current research depended on the views and aspirations of the local authorities. These centralised decision-making processes form part of factors that limit the participation of community members in decision-making processes. This approach

therefore proves that decision-making is based on the need of the authorities, especially the politically appointed and connected as indicated in the empirical evidence. The interference is informed by the manner in which the municipal executives provided decisions surrounding the DLEH. The CRs and community members provided similar responses and drew the same conclusions regarding the establishment of the two initiatives.

De Wet (2016) indicated that it is a well-known phenomenon that CP needs to be a priority for both elected and appointed local authorities. There is a sense among all the categories of participants that local authorities do not prioritise the views of the communities in decision-making processes even though community participation seems to be taking place through the available DLM participatory mechanisms. This is aligned with the position held by Masuku and Macheka (2021) that communities are used by local authorities for superficial involvement since these authorities coordinate CP. It can be expected from a local municipality without a well-planned, documented, and articulated community involvement process. There is nothing to judge them against in the absence of documented guidelines hence they find it easy to ignore the views of the community members.

The absence of a well-negotiated and documented process in the DLM breeds unattainable community involvement process. The local authorities are unable to provide verification that inputs and aspirations of communities are filtered into development initiatives. This gap further bares out and questions the aspect of good governance in the municipality. As stated in chapter two, scholars such as Auriacombe and Sithomola (2020) and Mankuebe and Manicom (2020) argue that community involvement in decision-making processes is a corner stone of good governance. It is for this reason that characteristics of good governance such as participation, collaboration, transparency, responsibility, consensus, equality and accountability are questioned in this local municipality.

The primary function of local government authorities includes creating an open environment where communities participate fully in development initiatives decision-making. In the DLM, though there are mechanisms in place for communities to participate in local government matters but the final decisions rest with the local authorities. The community is subjected to the role of by-standers of authorities' development decisions. Hallard (2022) argues that such passive role turns community members into ignorant subjects to their own development processes. The communities are left find alternative measures to force their participation in development activities.

Development initiatives such as the DLEH are unaligned to the needs of the community members despite clear legislative provisions of community involvement in initiatives such as this one. Despite the efforts taken by the community to participate in decision-making, their engagement only end up passive, resulting in a tendency to accept imposed solutions. The community members confirmed this in this study by stating that as they avail themselves for community meetings and they are accessible to the local councillors and ward committees however, the DLEH and the SYAC development initiatives do not reflect these efforts as their deliberations were done elsewhere outside these of public meetings.

The participatory channels for community members provided in local governance in DLM are inclusive of printed media communication and the use of local authorities in the local wards. These mechanisms were confirmed by both community members and key informants who indicated that public meetings are held, petitions are made, local radio stations are used, local newspapers and the ward committee system exists. However, these channels have proven not to cover development activities as they are used for community invitation to meetings only with little or no significant influence on decision-making processes. Therefore, the existence of these participatory channels is only as good as their existence on the municipal papers.

The study has demonstrated that there seems to be a perception that calling community meetings, having a ward councillor and establishing WCs equates to active CP in the DLM. A similar observation is made by Sibanda and Lues (2021) who state that these mechanisms are often used to disguise the level of community involvement in local government affairs. In this study, the participants who attended these meetings and gatherings were not provided with an opportunity to influence decision-making processes as evident in the final development plan that did not reflect the inputs they provided during these discussions. Since these development plans do not reflect communities' views, there is misalignment in DLM development activities and the actual local reality. The same sentiments were shared by the communities that were these channels used meaningfully, initiatives such as the DLEH would not have been implemented, as they did not reflect the community's immediate needs.

Participation of community members in decision-making is critical to needs-based development initiatives but in the essence of this study, community members were attending and present at community meetings, hence the high attendance levels. It is evident from the experiences of the CRs that public meetings were commonly used participatory mechanisms in the DLM. This attendance of community meetings was supposed to have been a great platform for the involvement of community members in decision-making processes around the two initiatives. It would have indicated the willingness of local authorities' commitment to a decentralisation process. They would have been the best mechanisms that ensured that community members inputs were appreciated and shown by the active response from the local authorities as the meetings were fully attended, however this was not the case in the DLM. It makes sense why community members are concerned that their consultation is done just as a legal requirement that bears insignificant outcomes. The conceptualisation, identification and implementation of this initiative did not involve community members.

It is evident that the officials understand that an IDP is a consultative process that needs to be informed by various communities and community stakeholders. The final IDP in the DLM does not include development initiatives conceptualised through the participation of community members in the IDP roadshows. It is used for compliance

rather than a deliberated strategic document between the community and local authorities. This is because the local authorities understand that according to the legislation, IDPs must be available in the municipality as a planning tool. However, the role of the communities is limited to the acceptance of the plan rather than active participation in the articulation of such a plan. The IDP documents reviewed indicate minimal to no involvement of the community in the decision-making regarding development initiatives.

A well-planned integrated development planning process has the ability to enhance the way in which the views of community members are incorporated into the municipal development priorities (Asha & Makalela, 2020). However, this process has been replaced by compliance issues with no major impact of development initiatives. The results of such inefficiencies of the local authorities has led to disgruntled community members. In the same vein, Ragolane and Malatji (2021) provided clarity by stating that once a clear and effective PP process is implemented, it fosters local authorities' role in ensuring that the needs and aspirations of community members are incorporated in development activities.

The municipal IDP and budgetary processes stresses the importance of community involvement through the ward councillors, proportional representative councillors, CDWs, and ward committee members however, the general municipal development initiatives issues are not discussed in these meetings. This can be attributed to the facilitation process by the local municipal authorities and further the understanding of the process by the community members. The DLM documents titled "Minutes of the 2019/2020 budget and IDP for 2019 (RSA, 2019b) available on the municipal website and reviewed for the purpose of this study point to general service delivery issues more than the DLEH and the SYAC inputs and opinions. The minutes indicate that the meetings were held in all the twenty wards in the municipality. However, they do not include discussions on community development nor initiatives in the IDP plan. It is evident that if this were done, the minutes would indicate as such. The implication of this is that local authorities were purposely limited the meeting engagements to what

they saw fit for discussions, alienating communities in the influencing any of development initiatives.

The limited and controlled community participation was further revealed by the community members who indicated that local authorities only call the meetings to “preach and preach” to them. The use of such words indicate that local authorities call these meetings to inform community members rather than deliberate issues with them. The interpretation of these words as provided by the participants indicates that they are given the opportunity to actively participate in the decision-making processes. This is confirmed by the municipal officials who also viewed CP processes as lacking any significant impact on the development initiatives in the local municipality. Again, the municipal key informants’ supported this view on the basis that the initiatives were further decided upon by executives in the municipality for which they need to implement even though thorough community involvement processes were not followed. Therefore, community members remain passive recipients of predetermined, pre-recorded and set development plans aligned to that which the municipalities call its development plan. This was demonstrated through the DELH, which was conceptualised and implemented by the local executives with political powers as reported by the participants.

The two development initiatives were approached differently in that the DLEH was implemented for community members without their significant involvement in the process, whereas a certain group of community members who had access to the LED office proposed the SAYC to local authorities. However, despite the participants coming up with the idea for the SAYC, they had to exert pressure on local authorities to ensure its implementation. Hence, one of the municipal officials pointed out that this group of community members were “pestering” local authorities with this initiative. This indicates that communities are constantly taking initiatives to get involved in development activities in the DLM. They even request the authorities to implement community-centred development initiatives, fostering community-based planning processes.

The language used by the municipal officials, particularly the use of the word like “pester” when it comes to the SAYC, indicates a lack of genuine willingness for municipal officials to involve community members in the decision-making processes for the development initiatives. The example highlighted the fact that community members are often overlooked in the decision-making processes of the municipality. Community members are expected to exert pressure on the local authorities for them to carry out their responsibilities in developing the community. The Constitution of the Republic of charges elected and appointed local government authorities to facilitate decentralized decision-making processes regarding identification, conceptualisation and prioritization of community needs as stated in Chapter one of this report. Therefore, community members should be consulted on decisions that affect their lives and not having to fight and be referred to as “pestering” when exercising their constitutional right. This presents the possibility that the community members need to develop their own measures in order to be consulted.

The DLEH was put into effect based on an executive decision, even though community members felt that it did not address their pressing needs. The study showed that initiatives implemented without community involvement often struggle to gain support from communities. Community members expressed that if they had been actively consulted on the initiative, they would have prioritized more urgent development needs requiring attention from local authority decision-making processes. Therefore, the study further indicates that the provision of development initiatives without the involvement of communities leads to initiatives that are not aligned to the needs of the communities.

The participants in the study revealed that community members adopted self-employed measures, such as petitions, letters and community groups, to enable them to have an influence in decision-making processes in the DLM. However, these measures have not been effective in terms of providing for community needs. The participants explained that these measures were adopted only to request absolute transparency in the development initiatives. However, the local authorities have not heard this request from the communities. The development initiatives, such as the

DLEH and the Sivukile Agricultural Development, are still conceptualised and implemented outside the communities' knowledge. This was further confirmed by the CRs who indicated that the DLM authority's lack of transparency and accountability.

During community meetings, the opinions and suggestions of community members are never acknowledged. In these engagement sessions, when community members are provided with an opportunity to provide input in municipal affairs, they use the opportunity by voicing their opinions. However, not much was seen or experienced after that because the discussions do not translates in development initiatives. Participants explained that this made it difficult for them to believe any of their inputs were ever taken to the municipal council as the final decision-makers. Therefore, the community members lack trust in the local authorities. All these accentuate the views that communities were unappreciated in development-related decision-making processes.

The study has shown that none of the two selected initiatives, the Dihlabeng local economic hub and the Sivukile Youth Agricultural Co-operative were found in the municipal documents. The contents of the publicly available IDPs, minutes of the budget and the IDP discussions did not indicate any discussions on the two initiatives. The secondary sources therefore revealed that the two initiatives were indeed not discussed at the meetings with the community members as stated by the participants. The absence of the two initiatives in municipal documents raises questions about the legitimacy and support for these initiatives. Therefore, it can be deduced that community involvement was never the case in the development initiatives.

Good governance in local government is supposed to be a transparent and accountable process. However, for the DLM authorities, governance is not executed in a transparent and accountable manner because decisions are taken without knowledge and involvement of the community members. The participants in the study reported that the meetings organised by the local authorities turn into political meetings, defeating the purpose of the CP. They further indicated that one needed to

be connected politically to have any influence in decision-making processes. The indication supports the general view that only certain politically connected members of the community were involved in development initiatives. Therefore, it makes sense that the SYAC is seen to be for certain politically connected individuals in the local municipality.

It was evident that some key stakeholders, such as WCs and ward councillors, were not well acquainted with the process within the local municipality to engage with the community. This lack of knowledge made it challenging for these individuals to effectively encourage active and meaningful CP in their respective local wards. The MSA 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000), and other relevant legislation, outline the responsibilities of each stakeholder in creating an inclusive community engagement environment, particularly in matters where local government decisions impact the well-being of community members. Therefore, it is essential for all pivotal role players, such as ward committee members and ward councillors, to understand the purpose of their positions and actively work towards achieving their defined objectives.

Several of the participants who were community members expressed uncertainty about whether or not their input reached the municipal council for discussion and consideration. The study indicated that community members feel that it is important for local authorities to provide consistent feedback on their concerns and suggestions. At the time of the study, this essential element in CP is absent in the DLM. Community members expressed that they only provided their opinions without seeing any follow-up on development issues. This lack of follow-up had led to a loss of trust between the community and local authorities in decision-making processes.

Matloga et al. (2024) concludes that the influence of in development-related decisions remains insignificant in many local municipalities in the RSA. The analysis of the two development initiatives in the DLM had provided a similar conclusion. The view of the community members that the municipal council is the final decision maker on the development of local development initiatives affected the way they are consulted in

review processes. Community members are left with the view that regardless of the issues they put forward, the local municipal council decides and implement those that they see fit. This supports the recommendation regarding need for frequent engagement with community members to ensure proper education is imparted to all key role players in CP processes.

The DLM based on the findings of the study does not have processes in place to evaluate the contribution of community members to decision-making processes. The indication from the municipal officials is that the attendance registers are used to validate CP. However, registers alone cannot be a true reflection of the active and meaningful participation of community members. The provision of inputs and opinions as provided by the relevant stakeholders consulted can provide an important analysis of the role played by those who were involved subsequently, providing feedback on those inputs as they were provided.

At the time of the data collection, it was noted that the DLM had more than five PP officers responsible for different wards in the municipality. The availability of such officers within the local wards can enhance the feedback mechanisms and measures that can be used by the local authority in the decision-making processes. In addition, this provides an opportunity for constant and enhanced PP and education of community members. The officers can work with local councillors and ward committee members, to ensure that the PPO unit effectively educate ward committee members and the ward councillors on their active involvement in CP. Councillors and ward committee members hold positions that need to enforce active and meaningful participation of community members in local government affairs hence the significance of the profound knowledge in participatory decision-making.

The importance of a PD approach to local decision-making processes has been emphasised by Dinbabo (2003). The approach propagates the crucial and active role that community members must assume in the local government decision-making processes. According to the Constitution of RSA (RSA, 1996), the MSA 32 of 2000

(RSA, 2000), the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a), and the WPLG (1998b), community members are expected to actively participate as development agents in their local municipalities and decision-making processes. Fostering an important element in local government of joint planning and decision-making processes that ensure good governance and informed development initiatives is a mark of efficient and effective participatory democracy. This ensures that the identification, analysis and prioritisation of development initiatives in the DLM is a collective process where municipal authorities and community members are partners in community development activities.

PD demands that the marginalized community members play an active role in development activities with its adoption. Connell (1997) states that PD achieves empowered communities since it breaks down inequalities and inequities as these are addressed in a platform that offers concrete deliberations for the benefit of all. Furthermore, this participatory mechanism tool assures that development initiatives are a reflection of the larger community rather the elite few (Opaluwah, 2016). Therefore, the adoption of the approach in local governance ensures that local authorities implement development initiatives that reflect community aspirations and needs.

Development initiatives are expected to respond to the needs of community members and ensure improvement in their livelihood. The literature reviewed for this study revealed that communities must play an active role in the needs analysis of the initiatives. Therefore, local authorities must adopt PD to ensure that this objective is achieved in development initiatives. The approach will close the gap that exists between local authorities and community members in the identification, conceptualisation and implementation of development initiatives.

It is important that local authorities understand that integrating the strengths of PD in planning processes yields an approach that puts people first. It further supports development initiatives in local government that are responsive to the local realities.

There is an expectation from the local government, as the sphere of government closest to communities, to ensure that the aspects of development-related initiatives are fully implemented in line with the democratic system of government. The implementation presupposes adequate, efficient, effective and impact-bearing consultation as well as collaboration with the communities.

PD emphasised that the involvement of communities in development processes has advantages. This includes building development initiatives that are guided by local knowledge and needs, inclusion of the marginalised in local governance affairs, the building of empowered communities who can make and contribute to development decisions and sustainable development projects. It can be argued that the involvement of communities in decision-making processes legitimises the decisions and further ensures that local development discourse is aligned to the needs of communities. Therefore, in terms of local governance, ensuring that as democratic system of governance as provided for in the Constitution of RSA be attained.

The PD approach was introduced in local governance to put people at the centre of development for the participation and involvement of community members in decision-making processes, such that communities take ownership of the development initiatives. The data collected for the present study revealed that local knowledge and needs are not filtered into municipal development planning. It can be deduced from the findings that in the DLM there is a lack of involvement of community members in the identification and analysis of development initiatives. It becomes difficult for this local municipality to be able to develop a well-supported community involvement process without proper guidelines or strategy for community participation in place. As the findings indicates, DLM lacks measures for effective CP, fails to incorporate the views of the community members in development activities and lacks provision of measures to incorporate the views of community members in decision-making processes. These are the results of non-negotiated decisions and the absence of documented community involvement process.

The implications of the study to the local authorities, policy makers and development practitioners in the DLM is such that to strengthen and revisit their community involvement processes. The study findings provide an opportunity for the local authorities to re-evaluate their CP processes to ensure that they are aligned to the local government legislation, policies and prescripts. This need will ensure that greater governance and social cohesion is attained as these are critical for any local government development discourse achievement. The proposed public participation guidelines for the DLM are to ensure that both community members and local authorities participate meaningfully in development-related decisions. Once implemented, community would enjoy their constitutional right to participation.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the findings from the qualitative data that was gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 23 participants and supplemented by document review. The findings were presented thematically, with the themes supported by the codes that emerged during data analysis. The verbatim responses the experiences of the participants and extracts of their responses are provided to substantiate the codes. Two themes that emerged from the data analysis indicated that local community members experienced challenges in contributions to development-related decision-making processes in the DLM.

The DLM lacks meaningful processes that ensure that the constitutional rights of the community members to participate actively in development initiatives are considered and revealed. The findings revealed that the broader community members had an insignificant role in the conceptualisation of the DLEH and the SYAC. This is supported by the fact that participatory mechanisms in place do not foster effective CP, the failure to incorporate community member views in development activities and absence of municipal CP strategy. There was no evidence of a well-documented CP process for the municipality hence, community members stated that their participation in meetings was mere legal and compliance requirement as none of their views and opinions form

part of development activities. The following chapter focuses on proposed inclusive public participation guidelines for the Dihlabeng Local Municipality.

CHAPTER 5

INCLUSIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GUIDELINE (IPPG) PROPOSED FOR DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES IN THE DLM

5.1 Introduction

The findings of the study indicates that the Dihlabeng Local Municipality authorities operate without documented public participation strategy. This chapter proposes an inclusive public participation guideline (IPPG) for the DLM authorities on the implementation of community involvement strategies in decision-making processes in development activities. This approach aims to protect the constitutional right of communities to participate in local governance matters. The IPPG provides guidance to the elected and appointed DLM authorities on their constitutional responsibility of facilitating decentralised decision-making processes in line with the country's democratic system of governance. The absence of such a guideline has proven to be an impediment to the achievement meaningful and purposeful involvement of communities in the decision-making processes because the lack of well-defined community participation strategy revealed a vacuum in both communication and participation of community members in decision-making processes. This led to development initiatives that are not shared vision of community members and the Dihlabeng Local Municipal authorities.

The absence of the formal involvement strategy in development initiatives in Dihlabeng Local Municipal authorities has necessitated the proposal of an inclusive public participation guideline (IPPG). The IPPG serves as a targeted approach to decentralised decision-making in the DLM as required in the local government policies. It is evident from the literature that many of the local municipalities perceive community participation as a mere compliance process hence a targeted and specific approach is required to curb this practice. IPPG can be monitored and evaluated in the municipality by a dedicated public participation office through the development of feedback mechanism from the communities and participation rates of the community members in local government matters. Moreover, in case of DLM, the guideline is proposed based on the lived experiences of the participants in the study. The

presentation of this guideline is guided by the participatory development theory embedded in the findings of the study.

5.2. Proposed Inclusive Public Participation Guideline (IPPG)

The approach takes cognisance of the value of having a well-run PPO that not only focuses on adherence to statutory participatory obligations but community-driven decision-making processes. A well-functioning PPO is capable of coordinating and leading participatory decision-making processes with clear objectives and deliverables that should be attained before, during and after the consultation processes with community members and CBOs. To strengthen its effectiveness, this office should be provided with appropriate resources such as dedicated, knowledgeable, ethical and professional officials who can focus on building meaningful community involvement processes in the DLM. This office will also be able to ensure that there is a well-structured and documented process for the elected and appointed municipal authorities in their facilitation of CP frameworks.

Section 152 (1) (e) of the Constitution of the RSA, Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996) and Municipal System Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) require and encourage the participation of community members in local decision-making processes. In addition, the WPLG (1998b) places communities at the centre of local governance. It is through effective collaboration, co-existence and co-deliberation on development solutions that local government authorities are to achieve the developmental objectives as set out in the WPLG (Osborne et al., 2021). Most importantly these policies require local authorities and communities to work together to attain a common development purpose (Madumo, 2023). Thus, a well-established, negotiated and documented process ensures that communities participate actively in the decision-making processes. It further ensures that the DLM authorities become knowledgeable of community participation strategies.

The use of the IPPG is strengthened by the fact that local knowledge needs to be embedded in development activities in local government. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015)

indicates that the struggles of African governments is the reliance on western solutions for local problems. It is for this reason that the critical role played by the locals in communicating matters affecting their environments and development is emphasised. According to Mbembe (2020) there is a need to move away from the view that the locals are unable to identify their needs and aspirations. It is for this reason that a community participation strategy must provide enabling environment for communities' practical solutions to their development challenges. The arguments on grassroots development solutions form the basis of this proposed IPPG.

The unwritten top-down decision-making processes used by the DLM authorities relegates communities to recipients of development initiatives that are predetermined and endorsed. This leads to the misalignment of development initiatives to community development needs. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher proposes an inclusive public participation strategy which is a six-step guideline resulting from the views and experiences of the participants in relation to the DLM decision-making processes in development initiatives. The purpose of this guideline is to ensure that the opinions and aspirations of communities are considered in development-related decisions. Furthermore, this proposed guideline contributes to the existing body of knowledge on CP in local government and the role of communities in decision-making processes in development initiatives.

The democratic system of government requires local government authorities to facilitate decision-making processes in an open and transparent manner. The proposed IPPG strengthen the constitutionally required participatory role of the communities in local governance. This guideline further reinforces local government development planning process in that it offers the DLM council and community members a role of co-decision-makers in development initiatives. As co-decision-makers, both parties are able to collectively discuss, negotiate and deliberate on development initiatives as required in participatory processes such as the integrated development planning. Figure 6.1 reflects that proposed guideline that is meant to facilitate efficient, effective and impact bearing community participation in development planning at the Dihlabeng Local Municipality.



Figure 6.1: Proposed guideline for inclusive public participation in decision-making processes in the Dihlabeng Local Municipality in the Free State Province.

Step 1: Role clarification of public participation officers

The public participation office is proposed as a component of the guideline that is meant to co-ordinate the functions of the staff, community participation efforts integrate community inputs into decision-making processes. In order to have an effective PPO in the local municipality, qualified officials need to be appointed based on formal qualifications and assigned to clear key performance areas aligned to the PP process as set out in the local government policies and National Policy Framework on Public Participation 2007 (RSA, 2007b). These officials must co-ordinate the process of community involvement in DLM such as development activities in the DLM that requires discussions and deliberations and communicate them to the DLM council and the communities as co-decision-makers in the municipality. They will need to constantly engage communities and find alternative ways that will cater for the active participation of communities in development-related decision-making. The proactive exploration of local community participation mechanisms takes away the idea of having reactive local government authorities who only respond to community members once development challenges explodes through service delivery protests and community engagement that takes place only towards local government elections.

The public participation office staff must receive, consider and process the inputs received from communities and CBOs through any of the available CP mechanisms available in the DLM. They must notify communities of these mechanisms and educate them on their uses. It is also expected of these officials to ensure that the inputs received from the communities are acknowledged within the set turnaround time and documented for the DLM council meetings. Over and above these functions, public participation officers must educate the council on CP processes and framework and on how to ensure that their development decisions are reflective of the inputs provided by communities. Well educated and well-informed councillors have the potential of enforcing public participation frameworks as set out in the local government legislation, prescripts and policies (Matloga et al., 2024).

Step 2 Environment scanning

Environment scanning refers to the process of determining the existing barriers and trends that affect the participation of communities in decision-making processes. The DLM council must work with the appointed public participation officers in the public participation office to embark this environment scanning process to assess the current level of participation of community members in local governance. The public participation office must make an assessment tool available to the officers, the DLM council, appointed and elected officials who are legislative tasked with the facilitation of community participation. This assessment will assist these authorities to understand the level of interest and obstacles that hinder communities in participation in the DLM. In addition, the environment scanning will ensure that the available participatory mechanisms such as community meetings, online discussions and social media are suitable for the communities in specific wards for their involvement. Fourie and Van der Waldt (2021) recommend that CP measures be aligned to the best approach that will enhance locals' participation in local government matters. A community survey must be used for environment scanning to gather development inputs from the communities before the DLM council embark in CP processes. The exercise of scanning the environment is meant to ensure that the best community participation approach is employed in the DLM.

Step 3. Analysis of inputs

The inputs of community members need to be consolidated by the public participation officers and provided to the municipal council to determine their considerations and implementation. In this step, it is expected that the co-decision-makers would have given inputs and deliberated on them as development challenges interventions. The members of the community as co-decision-makers would have agreed on the interventions needed to address the identified needs. These interventions would have been documented and made public to the communities through ward councillors' committee meetings, municipal website and online municipal communication platforms. The analysis must include assessing the interventions as negotiated and agreed upon, looking at the municipal finances and development plans aligned to the premise of community development. The analysis should lead to a proposed draft

development plan that is presented back to the communities during the feedback sessions. All deliberations and discussions that takes place in the municipal council should be documented to ensure that the reasons provided for the deferment, agreements and implementation of development initiatives. It is expected that each development initiative discussed must be attached with available resources for implementation.

Step 4. Feedback sessions

The feedback sessions should be conducted after the analysis of the inputs provided by the relevant stakeholders. Feedback sessions are structured discussions with the community members that provides outcomes of the municipal sessions and discussions. These are meant to inform and reaffirm the municipal commitment to transparency and accountability. Through these sessions, the community members are assured that they are being heard. It is vital that decisions that affects the livelihood of communities as co-decision-makers are communicated regularly to avoid trust issues and curb service delivery protests. The IPPG is based on the understanding that it might not be possible for DLM council as co-creators to fulfil the desires, needs and aspirations of communities at once.

To ensure that communities are aware of development initiatives in their municipalities and wards, DLM council can embark on feedback sessions from the municipal level to the respective wards. The findings of this study is that once deliberations have taken place between local authorities and communities, council members make the final decision on their implementation based on the municipal budget and available resources. Therefore, the feedback mechanism that will be employed by the DLM council should offer a platform for effective feedback with valid reasons and an opportunity to deliberate on the feedback itself.

An evaluation criterion must be available in the DLM to assess the feedback given during the consultative sessions conducted. It is important that the local authorities

gather once again to assess the information that would have come from the consultative sessions including agreements or disagreements that might arise from the sessions. Through PPO, the DLM council should recognise new inputs. The recommendations from the feedback sessions should be evaluated, considered and presented to the council to by public participation officers. The feedback is intended to build a culture of transparent and accountable decision-making process on planned and executed development initiatives. Furthermore, the DLM council should ensure that discussions and deliberations are documented, published on the municipal website and areas accessible to the public such as councillors' offices for easy access for the community members. The provision of feedback will also cater for how the views and inputs of communities were considered in decision-making processes.

Step 5: Decision-making

The fifth step in the IPPG is decision-making though consensus building in mechanisms such as public meetings, online submissions, documented requests and inputs, local councillors, ward committees and community development workers programmes. The DLM council through PPO are expected to build a rapport with the local community members by displaying understanding and consideration of their inputs during the negotiations. In fact, the community must be involved in the identification and planning of the municipal development plans such as the IDP and budget planning processes. This will facilitate the conceptualisation of community needs and priorities. At this stage, it is important that the DLM council listens to the views and wishes of the communities together, categorise needs that are of priority and receive immediate attention.

This process should include finding initiatives that can respond to those needs. Once feedback has been received and considered, the DLM council need to adopt the agreed development initiatives as a reflection of community voices heard and considered in the inputs on development planning in development initiatives. The adoption of the inputs would provide a documented implementation process that includes timeframes, responsible officials for each of the implementation stage and

how communities are to be involved in the implementation of the development initiative. The PPO working with the DLM communications office must publish the identified, analysed and prioritised development initiatives on the municipal communication platforms such as the website and public spaces.

This step also includes monitoring which consists of an effective oversight monitoring to ensure the attainment of IPPG desired outcomes and the review the challenges experienced in the community involvement process. To ensure that each of the set standards in IPPG is achieved in the CP process, a monitoring process on each role-player performance in each of the steps is vital. The monitoring must be conducted internally by thr IPPG manager. This office must establish a monitoring instrument whose data can be used for internal self-evaluation before the external monitoring.

The external monitoring can be done by members of the community including stakeholders such as NGOs, community based organisations and business organisations that exists in the municipality where a monitoring tool is shared with them through the participatory mechanisms available in the DLM. This monitoring should not only focus on whether the communities are provided with the environment to voice their aspirations and needs, but also the influence that those voices have on the development initiatives. The expectation of this monitoring would be to attain documentation that supports the identification, analysis and prioritisation, conceptualisation and implementation of development interventions and initiatives as a collaborated effort between the local authorities and community members.

Step 6: Reporting

Finally, the DLM council reports back to the community members, through the PPO, of the successes and challenges experienced in the implementation of the negotiated development initiatives. These co-decision-makers are given an opportunity to engage the authorities on their assessment of the initiatives and on the improvements needed.

Afterwards the officials in the PPO prepare a PP report for internal and external use to share with the co-decision-making makers in the language they would understand.

The success of this guideline depends on the understanding and approval of the DLM council as it is charged with the delicate task of ensuring that community members are part of the local development discourse. The local authorities belief in this strategy would prove an important task to ensuring that active involvement of communities in decision-making processes is achieved. The guidelines must be communicated to all the stakeholders in the DLM through the local participatory mechanisms by the public participation officers, elected, and appointed municipal officials. Moreover, the documented approach must be accessible to all community members and relevant stakeholders such as NGOs, CBOs, available at strategic points such as ward councillors' offices, PPU and DLM website.

The effectiveness of PP ought to be determined by measuring to what extent CP influences decision-making processes in the any municipality (SALGA, 2013). The approach demands that development initiatives in the DLM are deliberated upon with the broader community members rather than imposing decisions that are unaligned development activities and those that are meant for certain members of the community. Furthermore, it is important that the development challenges and community realities be considered for the guideline effectiveness.

5.3. Chapter summary

The chapter focused primarily on the proposed inclusive public participation strategy for the DLM. The proposed six-step DLM inclusive PP guideline can be adopted in the municipality to provide guidance on the implementation of CP in decision-making processes in development initiatives. This guide can also strengthen the manner in which community involvement practices are undertaken in this municipality.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

This study explored the ways in which the community in the Dihlabeng Local Municipality is involved in the decision-making processes of development initiatives with the Dihlabeng Local Economic hub and the Sivukile Youth Agricultural Cooperative serving as case studies. This chapter provides a summary of the study's empirical findings, conclusion and recommendations for strengthening community involvement in the decision-making processes of development initiatives in the municipality. Lastly, it makes suggestions for future studies on the topic of community involvement in decision-making processes in local government-based development initiatives.

6.2. Summary of the research findings

6.2.1. Mechanisms used for community involvement in local government decision-making processes

The Constitution of the RSA, Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996), particularly section 152, charges the elected and appointed local government authorities with the mandate of involving community members in decentralised decision-making processes in line with the democratic system of governance. It makes the participation of community members in local governance a fundamental right. Therefore, Municipal System Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) emphasises this right to participation and democratic governance by providing the manner in which local government should interact with local communities. In addition, Section 19 of the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a) states that for local government authorities to achieve effective community participation, transparent and accountable local governance is required. The legislation cited gives mandate to local authorities to be intentional about ensuring that there is effective community involvement in local government matters. They task the elected and appointed local government authorities to put in place mechanisms and systems to ensure that this right is accessible to and enjoyed by communities.

In an attempt to ensure that community members participate in the development-related decision-making processes, the DLM authorities makes use of community meetings as one of the CP mechanisms. They constantly invite the community to participate in local government decision-making processes. There are meetings that are organised by local councillors in different municipal wards, where community members raise issues on ward development needs and ward-based challenges. There are also meetings planned and organised by the municipal authorities based in the offices of the DLM Speaker, where service delivery issues are discussed. There are other meetings that emanate from the IDP Office, on the IDP processes. However, according to community members who attended these meetings, the discussions during these meetings did not include the Dihlabeng Local Economic Hub (DLEH) and the Sivukile Youth Agricultural Cooperative (SYAC). It is therefore evident that these initiatives were conceptualised outside meetings with the community.

Even though the two initiatives were not part of the municipal IDP processes conducted through community meetings, it cannot be disputed that community meetings do take place in this local municipality as a platform for community engagements. However, there is evidence that this mechanism is not used by the DLM authority to provide a platform for meaningful and impactful conversations. In these meetings, community members are afforded an opportunity to provide inputs on local development needs and aspirations although these inputs do not inform the development programmes. These community meetings are a platform for mere complaints and grievance rather than a space where meaningful deliberations about the development agenda are discussed. In these meetings, discussions on matters emanating from the municipal billing system are given preference over the challenges of developmental initiatives and the needs of the locals.

It is worth noting that although there were concerns in the local municipality from community members that these municipal meetings did not yield any influence in decision-making processes in the DLEH and the SYAC, they were still well attended by the community members. This is the disappointment shared by community members that during such municipal meetings they were not requested to give any

inputs into these development initiatives. In cases where they were given the opportunity to make suggestions or share development needs in the local municipality, they were neither acknowledged nor appreciated. This became evident upon completion of the consultation process when the community members realised that the IDP documents did not reflect their suggestions.

Another mechanism used by the DLM authority to communicate information to the community involves printed media, such as local newspapers. It was confirmed by the community members, CRs and appointed officials that the establishment of the DLEH was reported in the local newspaper. The implementation of this development initiative was announced by the DLM rather than involving the community in the decision-making process on the proposal as required by legislation. The report in the local newspaper was written in English, which is not the common language that is spoken by the majority community members in DLM. The most dominant language is Sesotho and the use of a language that is unfamiliar to the majority of community members on its own systematically excludes community members in having any input in this development initiative. The way in which the initiative was communicated in this local newspaper intentionally excluded majority of community members in its decision-making process and denied them their constitutional right to participation.

In the case of the SYAC, the CRs, appointed DLM authorities and community members confirmed that a small group of community members proposed the development of the initiative and later approached the DLM LED office. However, they needed pressure these authorities to hear them. These appointed authorities did not have a consultation process and mechanism that would involve the broader community in the decision-making around the initiative. It seems to have been implemented to satisfy a certain group of people in the local municipality.

Despite the exclusionary and less impactful participation in the decision-making engagement on the side of the DLM authorities. Community members opted to be proactive by communicating their needs to their ward councillors to promote their

involvement in decision-making processes. They would discuss and unpack with the local ward councillors' matters relating to local governance. This is because the councillors are the closest to the community in the wards. Even though this was the case, when community members approached their local councillors regarding the DLEH to understand its purpose and request transparency in the recruitment of the participants in the SAYC initiative, they did not receive any response. They felt that the trust had been broken in that they were not sure if their request was referred to the municipal council for considerations. The lack of trust resulted from the failure of the council to give them feedback on their requests on a few incidents.

The use of online platforms, such as social media networks, the DLM website, and emails to facilitate discussions by the DLM authority about development planning is a common practice. These mechanisms are made available to ensure that community members who cannot attend community meetings have a way of participating in discussions about development matters in this municipality. The DLM authority confirmed that the mechanism was used as part of the tools used to gather community opinions and aspirations. However, there was no evidence provided by these authorities that the online platforms are effective as a tool of meaningfully sharing and discussing ideas as well as reaching conclusions.

Prior to the Covid 19 lockdown in 2016, the DLM authorities used to make minutes of the discussions that took place in the IDP meetings available on the municipal website. However, this practice has been stopped in the post lockdown era. Therefore, this prevents community members to confirm that the discussions and decisions in the community meetings are recorded and considered by the DLM authorities. The absence of these records deny them easy access to the deliberations that took place in the meetings and associated decisions. This limited their ability to follow up on decisions. Those who could not attend are also denied an opportunity to input through online platforms due to the limited knowledge. They are, as a result, systematically excluded from exercising their constitutional right of taking part in the municipal development planning thus creating suspicions regarding transparency and accountability in local decision-making processes.

There are also suggestion boxes through which written requests and inputs from the community members are received. These boxes are made available at the local councillors' offices in all the wards in the DLM but are not viewed as being effective by the community members as they do not afford them an opportunity to take part in any decision-making processes concerning the development initiatives. There is a belief that their inputs made through this mechanism are not processed and taken into consideration. This is because they never get to see the responses results of their suggestions. Therefore are of the opinion that inputs provided through suggestion boxes are not attended.

It is evident therefore that several mechanisms are available in this local municipality for community involvement processes such as the community meetings, printed and social media, suggestions boxes, emails, DLM website and ward councillors. However, concerns are raised that they do not provide for discussions and deliberations of the issues and plans to inform the decision-making processes particularly with respect to initiatives such as the DLEH and the SYAC. These mechanisms meant to involve community members in decision-making processes have limitations such as lack of accountability and transparency on how the community inputs are filtered into development initiatives. In addition, the mechanism used reflect lack of feedback on inputs provided, exclusionary language used, ignorance of documented suggestions and inputs as well as continuous communication with the communities.

6.2.2. Community members' response to efforts made by the local authorities to engage them in decision-making

One of the objectives of this study was to explore the community responses to the efforts made by the DLM authority to involve them in decision-making processes related to development initiatives. The legislation governing local municipalities requires for the DLM authorities to make efforts to involve community members in decision-making processes in local government matters, such as development initiatives that affect their livelihood. Community members need to make full use of these efforts so that their needs and aspirations are communicated to the municipal

council for consideration. The findings of the current study revealed that community members were aware off and knew different mechanisms employed by the DLM authority to engage them. These mechanisms and platforms were utilised by community members to engage the DLM authority on their needs and requests. However, the efficiency and effectiveness of the mechanisms were found lacking because inputs provided by the community members were not considered.

In relation to the community meetings initiated by elected and appointed DLM authority, there was a positive response from the community members to these meetings. This is evident from the respondents' active participation during these community meetings. The fact that community members attended meetings when requested to do so by the DLM authority showed their eagerness to be involved in the development activities in this local government municipality. These community members were constantly willing to participate in decision-making processes in DLM through the ward meetings, IDP meetings and the meetings called by Office of the Speaker. At all these meetings, community members are showed up and made inputs related to development inputs when required to do so.

Another mechanism that the DLM council uses to share and receive information about the development activities and community needs is the ward councillors as they live in the same wards with community members. Ward councillors act as the mouthpiece of the communities in municipal council decision-making meetings and are expected to champion the voice of the residents in these meetings. They are further expected provide feedback to the community members in their local wards. However, there is a belief that neither their interest nor inputs in development planning are prioritised and shared with the municipal council hence the development activities do not reflect their needs. The participants believed that their representatives did not communicate their contributions to the council. This led to these members believing that the ward councillors do not facilitate community participation in the wards. Even though this is the case, they still engage with their ward councillors on development activities and needs.

In the context of the use of printed media was an effort to involve community members in decision-making processes. The local newspaper used to provide community members with development-related decisions and activities of the council has not afforded the communities an opportunity to participate in local decision-making processes. Moreover, the council made no effort to requests inputs from the community nor provide them with feedback through this platform. An example of this was community members became aware of the DLEH through the local newspaper article. They were not asked to provide a response in line with the article as they were just informed of the implementation of the initiative. The use of printed media in this local municipality resulted in the exclusion of communities in decision-making processes because the community members believed the DLM authorities implement development initiatives that are desired by them without considering their needs and requesting their development related inputs.

It made sense that community members viewed printed media as futile in their quest to participate in development initiatives because they do not trust DLM authorities to consider their needs. These media platforms such as the local newspaper and the DLM Facebook account are just a form of ensuring that DLM authorities' decision-making processes and solutions are enforced on to the communities. Their mere utilisation was to inform and not provide communities with an opportunity to partake in development-related decision-making processes therefore, the lack of response that exists on printed media.

There are online mechanisms used by the DLM authority to involve community such as social media networks including Facebook and email were used to facilitate discussions about development planning. The DLM has a dedicated Facebook page and an email where any inputs including those that are related to local development are shared and sent through to the authorities by the community and CBOs. The DLEH and the SYAC were not on any of these platforms for community members to provide inputs on the proposals according to the respondents in the current study. These platforms were used by the DLM authority to communicate matters they municipality deem necessary such as refuse collection but do not include important development

issues that affect the livelihood of community members. Communities hold the view that this platform does not cater for a meaningful engagement between the people and their leaders.

6.2.3. Initiatives taken by community members to ensure that they take part in decision-making processes in the Dihlabeng Local Municipality

Communities in the country use protests as a means of pushing and attracting the attention of local government authorities to involve them in decision-making, however, in this study the participants opted not to use them in the context of the two development initiatives. In previous occasions where community members used protests as a way of compelling the DLM authorities to listen and hear their voices, these measures were proven unsuccessful. Community members were convinced that overtime these protests do not influence the manner in which development decisions are taken in this local municipality hence they do not see any need for them. They believe that protests have no influence on how the DLM authorities facilitate CP processes.

The community members in the DLM use documented demands to request formally authorities to provide space for them to participate in decision-making processes in development initiatives. This community-initiated measure is seen by the communities as a way of pleading with the DLM authority to provide feedback to their demands and wishes. They sent petitions and letters to the DLM authority requesting transparency on the recruitment processes of community members in the SYAC. Even though they received a response from the elected and appointed the DLM authorities that their request would be attended and considered by the DLM council, they did not receive feedback. These participants stated that this measure would at least have their voices and views heard however, in this local municipality the authorities remained unresponsive.

It is established that each time there was a development initiative in the DLM wards that community members are not informed about; their first point of inquiry was their local ward councillor. They visit their local ward councillor to request participants in these initiatives as was the case with the SYAC and in relation to DLEH, to understanding the purpose of the initiative. Their constant visits to the ward councillors showed that they had no other option but continuously approach their councillors as they are closest to them and council and are best positioned to attend to their concerns and questions. This measure has further proven to be unsatisfactory, as on numerous occasions they did not receive feedback from their representatives in the DLM council.

The DLM authorities failed to engage the community members in development-related decision-making processes as per the findings of the study. As a result community members took upon themselves to approach the DLM authority with the SYAC initiative. This was in the quest to have the authority‘s attention to their immediate need of an agricultural focused programme. Their constant visits to the LED office was to ensure that the authority to hear them and implement this initiative. However, the DM authority did not make any effort to discuss the initiative with members of the broader community hence most of the participants were not aware of initiative. It is for this reason that there is a belief from community that for community- centred development initiatives and programmes, they need to force the DLM authority and those implemented such as SYAC are individuals in the municipality who may be connected to the elected DLM authorities.

6.2.4. Identification, analysis, prioritisation and implementation of development initiatives

The mandate of the local government sphere in community development demands an environment where community needs can be responded. It is expected that communities participate in the identification, analysis and prioritisation processes of development initiatives in development undertakings. This is further provided by the WPLG (RSA, 1998b) and the sustainable development goals of the NDP for 2030 (RSA, 2013), which state that local government authorities must work together with

their local communities to find interventions and measures that address development challenges affecting the livelihoods of communities.

In the context of DLM, the development initiatives followed two distinctive processes in their identification. However, the involvement of the broader community members was non-existent. The findings of the current study revealed that community members played a bystander role in the decision-making of economic hub initiative, as it was identified and prioritised by the elected DLM authorities. As a result, in this local municipality the decision on what the community needs are, when and where development initiatives should be implemented become the purview of the authorities. This argument stems from the fact that these authorities decided on the initiative on their own without the involvement of community members. This is further supported by the fact that the initiative could not be found in any of the municipal strategic documents, such as the IDP, as required by local government legislation. It is for this reason that the participants even questioned the existence of the initiative and considered it be unaligned to their immediate needs.

The economic hub initiative was later reported to be under investigation for corruption and misuse of public funds. These are both cause and outcome of failures of the DLM authorities to involve communities constructively and in meaningful conversations on the development initiative. This further indicates that DLM authorities ignored the constitutionally legislated process that requires communities to play an active role in their development as emphasised by the WPLG (RSA, 1998b). It is not surprising that this development initiative is now a white elephant.

In contrast to the development of the DLEH, which was identified by the DLM authority with the exclusion of community members, the SYAC was implemented to benefit a small group of community members through their own interaction with the local authorities in the local economic development office. Since the PP process was not followed, even though there were participatory mechanisms available in the DLM, it is not surprising that strategic municipal documents were not found for the development

of the initiative. The broader community members were not involved in the identification of the initiative, hence, the view from the respondents that the DLM authorities needed to be forced to support the implementation of the initiative. The PD demands that development be a decentralised process that is essentially based on consultations, discussions and negotiations on development initiatives among local authorities and communities. In the case of the development of the SYAC, this seems to have not taken place but rather through the approach and insistence of a few persistent community members.

The findings of this study suggest that in the DLM, development initiatives are prioritised based on political directives. Even though community members are invited to participate in community meetings through their community and municipal representatives, there are overarching views that politically affiliated members are the ones who give direction on the materialisation of the initiatives. The initiatives are therefore viewed as political party projects. These findings confirm that communities were not involved in the prioritisation of the DLEH and the SYAC. For instance, DLEH was initiated and prioritised for community members without their involvement. This was further confirmed by the appointed municipal representatives that this initiative was seen by local municipal executives as an urgent need for the community. This is despite the mandate provided by the Municipal System Act, Act 23 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) that demands the participation of community members as partners in local development initiatives prioritisation process.

In the conceptualisation of the DLEH in the DLM, the needs of the community members were not considered. The process of conceptualisation of this initiative was centred the DLM authority, who were unable to provide the process undertaken. It is highly unlikely that initiatives that are not deliberated with communities would meet any of the local needs and expectations. Therefore, it is evident that this initiative would not have any impact on the livelihoods of the communities in DLM.

The SYAC initiative was born of the idea proposed by community members to the LED office. The conceptualisation of the initiative took place amongst the members of the community themselves without the DLM authority. They constantly had to approach these authorities for the idea to be taken into consideration by the DLM from implementation. The community members identified their needs, suggested an intervention to respond to the need and then approached the DLM authorities. In this case, the DLM authorities appear to have provided the necessary land and support. This initiative is a success, since it was identified by the community members themselves, hence it is receiving their full care and protection. This indicates that development initiatives identified by the community are more likely to be sustainable because of community support.

5.2.5. Guidelines used by the DLM for community participation in decision-making processes.

The municipality does not have defined processes that stipulate how the development initiatives must be identified and implemented. It is because the identification and implementation of the development initiatives is dependent on the decision taken by DLM authorities in the exclusion of the communities. This is confirmed by community members and ward committee members but could not be ratified by ward councillors because they were unwilling to participate in the study, despite several attempts to engage them. From the point of view of community members and ward committee members, DLM authorities want to implement development initiatives on their own. While these participants spoke in one voice, the appointed officials disagreed regarding the process governing the implementation of the development initiatives. This poses challenges to community members as development initiatives end up not reflecting their needs and aspirations even though they are always willing to participate in the decision-making processes on matters that affect their livelihood.

6.3. Conclusion

This study focused on two development initiatives as case studies to explore the ways in which the community in the DLM is involved in decision-making processes. The

continual dissatisfaction of members DLM the community with regard to their involvement in local decision-making processes warranted an investigation into the nature and extent of their right to participate in decision-making processes in development initiatives. Their involvement in decision-making processes is required to ensure that the development initiatives are aligned to their needs and fosters community development as outlined in the local government legislations. Guided by PD, the involvement ensures that community-based planning is achieved and development initiatives are fully supported as communities take ownership of development-related decisions, receives protection and are relevant to the needs of the locals.

The MSA 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) mandates local government authorities to ensure that there is a conducive environment for community members to participate in development activities. The DLM authorities have made available multiple participatory mechanisms such as community meetings, online platforms and suggestion boxes to afford communities an environment to community with them, as they are required to do so. Despite the availability of multiple participatory platforms the inputs provided by communities in development planning are not considered in the decision-making processes. This limits the voices and wishes of the community in the development initiatives since mechanisms are only for compliance purposes and do not create spaces for meaningful and active involvement of communities in local governance.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996), The MSA Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000), The Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a) and the WPLG (RSA, 1998b) charge and encourage local government authorities to facilitate meaningful involvement of community members in local governance. The DLM community seems to be aware that there are these legislative and policy frameworks that give them the right and opportunity to participate in decision-making processes in development initiatives. It is evident in the manner that these community members are willing and constantly seeking out spaces to engage with the DLM authority on their development-related needs. To show how much

community members wanted to have their views taken into considerations by the elected and appointed DLM authorities, they proactively approached these in the quest to have their voices heard by the municipal council. However, there is evidence that their inputs are disregarded in the final development plans and programmes.

Furthermore, the mechanisms used by the DLM authority to involve community members in decision-making processes are used to rubber stamp matters where decisions that have already been made. The lack of consideration of the needs of the communities are grounds for the advancement of political interests, which undermines CP frameworks. This means that these participatory platforms are just a mere practice of confirming decisions that are predetermined and already implemented. It is evident that in the DLM community members are not involved in identifying the challenges to be addressed by the municipal development initiatives, which leads to the misalignment of the broader community needs and local development initiatives.

The deviation of the DLM authority from the local governance policies that require communities to partake in the decision-making process in development initiatives has resulted in the misuse of state funds, as seen in the case of the DLEH being developed but not used by the community. This is attributed to the DLM authorities deliberately ignoring the rights of the community as mandated by the Republic of South Africa's Constitution, Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996), the MSA Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000), the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a) and the WPLG (RSA, 1998b), which encourages and facilitates community involvement in decision-making processes in development initiatives. Furthermore, as articulated through the PD theory, without community involvement in identification, conceptualisation and implementation of development initiatives, the development initiatives are bound to fail, as is the case with the DLEH. The SYAC should become a good example for the DLM authority that the local community has the potential to identify development initiatives, although this initiative was only implemented for certain community members. It is an indication that community development programmes and initiatives recognised by community members are carefully protected and guarded. In addition,

this proves to the DLM authority that communities can contribute meaningfully to their own development and in community development planning processes.

As extensively elaborated in the literature, community development programmes and initiatives that are to improve the livelihoods of communities are better identified with the active participation of such communities. The DLM authorities lack a standardised process that guides the identification, analysis and prioritisation of development initiatives. These development-related decisions are only taken by these authorities, as CP does not yield any development results and initiatives. This is because as and when the authority wants a development initiative in DLM, it is done without consulting communities and ensuring that the initiatives are aligned to their needs. For instance, the DLEH was identified by the elected DLM authority for the community members as their immediate need. The development initiatives in this municipality depend on what the local authorities consider necessary for the members of the community. DLM authorities do coordinate meaningful CP processes in which community input would be considered in development decision-making. There is no process that looks at the impact of the development initiatives on the broader community of the DLM. It is for this reason that the involvement of the community in decision-making processes remains insignificant. It is further evident in the identification, conceptualisation and implementation of the development initiatives where the broader community inputs were not requested.

The conceptualisation and implementation of development initiatives in the DLM is based on the willingness and political support of the authorities. These initiatives are conceptualised by the DLM authorities and implemented in wards by the elected and appointed authority without broader CP processes yet there are participatory mechanisms in place. The DLEH was implemented to satisfy the political authorities of this local municipality. However, with the SYAC, the project had to be forced out of the DLM authority by constantly knocking in the LED office who had no intention of implementing the initiative. It makes sense why the DLEH remains a white elephant and SYAC is secluded from broader community members. The impression created is that the community is are just recipients of development decisions taken outside of the

constitutional municipal development planning process contrary to the manner provided by legislation.

In practice, the study has shown that the DLM local authorities are far from achieving the set participatory objectives in the MSA Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) that states that local government authorities must work with communities to find interventions that address development challenges. The findings revealed the importance of transparency in decision-making processes that are achieved through CP. The deviation of the DLM authorities can be charging their responsibility to involve the community in implementing decentralised decision-making processes, in line with the country democratic governance, instigates investigation of the validity and transparency of development-related decisions in DLM.

The study has shed light on community involvement in decision-making process in the DLM, contributing to the body of knowledge on CP in the local government development discourse. The implications of the findings for local authorities are such that it is necessary to strengthen community involvement by reviewing mechanisms and processes used for decision-making. While such efforts may create a conducive environment for community members through different structures to take part openly and objectively in decision-making, the effects of this could be improved local government and social cohesion. These are critical for an inclusive democracy in local government as per the dictates of the legislation.

It is evident from the findings of the study that the DLM operates without a documented process for community involvement in decision-making processes in development initiative such a documented process that municipal authorities were following to guide them to consult frequently with community members in decision-making processes in development initiatives. This was further attested to by the views shared by the municipal representatives who participated in the study and the municipal website which did not present a strategy of this nature. Further attempts to access the document through the Office of the DLM Speaker in the PP office and MM were

unsuccessful. This has the potential of resulting in an unwritten top-down approach to decision-making processes experience in the DLM. Consequently, CP in taking decisions that affect their lives becomes a simple act of compliance with the MSA 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) without any tangible contribution to the development processes and initiatives.

This study concludes by proposing an approach to guide CP in decision-making in line with the National Policy Framework on Public Participation 2007 (RSA, 2007b). Its purpose is to guide the DLM elected and appointed officials on how they must facilitate the involvement of the communities in decision-making processes in development initiatives.

6.4 Recommendations

The empirical findings of this study necessitate recommendations to address the challenges and improve the involvement of the community in decision-making processes in development initiatives in the DLM.

While the study showed that community meetings were highly attended by community members, the high attendance did not translate into a culture of co-ordinated development initiatives. The high attendance of community members at community meetings serves as a community participation opportunity for the DLM authority to leverage on. This provides them with an important platform to facilitate meaningful and active decision-making processes. The availability of community members in this environment provides an opportunity for the DLM authority to understand and respond effectively to the needs of community members. In return, this would minimise the dissatisfaction of the community members with the manner in which decision-making processes are undertaken in the local municipality as they will be aware of processes followed by the DLM authority and council. It is recommended that this platform be used effectively by involving public participation officials who will capture the discussions and provide continuous feedback to community members.

At the centre of local government matters the aim to improve the quality of life for all the community members. Community members must feel heard, appreciated and take care of. However, there is lack of provision for feedback in DLM, which has led to communities feeling left out in decision-making processes, unheard and unappreciated. Subsequent to the deliberations and negotiations on the development initiatives take place in the community meetings, it is recommended that the DLM authority provide a record of these deliberations and through public participation office using different available participatory mechanisms, provide feedback on the deliberations. This will ensure that the community is able to see that its views are heard and appreciated.

The study found that development initiatives were not planned with the communities as the DLEH and the SYAC were not discussed in any of the participatory platforms in municipality. The DLM council should invest more on community-based planning with the assistance of local councillors, WCs and CDWs to assess the actual needs of the communities. The study showed that this process did not take place effectively in this local municipality. The DLM authority must document and prioritise development initiatives that arise from the negotiations that would have taken place during the participatory processes. This way, development initiatives are aligned to the grassroots development challenges faced by communities.

It was discovered that community members were not knowledgeable of development activities taking place in the municipality. The study recommends that the DLM authority develop a culture of providing feedback to community members for transparent and accountable decision-making processes in development initiatives. Moreover, feedback builds trust between local authorities, community members, CRs and CBOs. This continuous communication with the community is important to ensure that community members are aware of the development initiatives in the IDP implementation process. These feedback sessions can be conducted through the CDWs, WCs, Ward councillors and online sessions through municipal social media pages and platforms, such as Microsoft teams where dialogue is possible.

Community meetings are common and they are a preferred participatory mechanism by the authorities in DLM. This provides a challenge for community members who are unable to attend them. It is recommended that the DLM explore different mechanisms to publish the results of PP processes in the same way as they are publishing the IDP and IDP reviews i.e. through municipal websites, social media, municipal offices and strategic points in the DLM .In this way, the authority ensure that community members can access discussions and development related decisions to ascertain that their voices in development planning are heard and recorded. This must be in the language that is understood by local communities. As revealed in this study, language played a role in communities taking part in decision-making process in the development initiatives.

This study recommends that staff in the DLM unit responsible for CP be fully trained to ensure meaningful community involvement in decision-making processes. The facilitation of meaningful CP is highly dependent on facilitators who ensure that the deliberations are well documented and presented to the DLM council for considerations in decentralised decision-making processes. To achieve decentralised decision-making processes, the DLM must understand the important role that community play in the affairs of the local government. Furthermore, they must understand the legislated service standards as they deliver development initiatives for the betterment of the community. For these reasons, this study recommends that the municipality prioritise capacity building of elected and appointed representatives of local authority such as local ward councillors and WCs on their role in CP. These role-players can be afforded an opportunity to attend capacity-building workshop by the Department of COGTA on the understanding of the legislation that guides the principle of CP.

Although community meetings, loud hailing and community radio stations are commonly used mechanisms to invite community members to participate in local decision-making processes, these mechanisms have not yielded much of the needed results. DLM authority can adopt differentiated participatory mechanisms that are suitable and unique to the local municipality and each ward. This process requires the

authority to conduct an environmental scan to identify gaps to match with responsive mechanisms in each of the twenty wards that can provide community members with better access to development planning processes.

Since the findings of the study revealed that DLM operated without a clear documented public participation strategy, The DLM council ought to develop its own CP strategy aligned with the National Policy Framework for Public Participation 2007 (RSA, 2007b). The aligned strategy will ensure that members of the local community can actively participate in decision-making processes with their own specific challenges. In addition, the strategy will ensure that the DLM authorities' tasked with facilitation of CP are aware of the steps to take in involving communities in decision-making processes. The aim is to create a plan that will prioritise community members in the local municipality while enhancing the ability of community members to participate in development processes. This will ensure that meaningful decentralised decision-making processes are achieved in local development initiatives and to guard against development initiatives that end up unsuccessful such as DLEH.

The findings of the study revealed that there was political interference in the decisions taken regarding development initiatives, the DLM authority should develop a role classification document (RCD) in the planning of activities for all key stakeholders in CP. The purpose of RCD is to limit the potential for power imbalances and to ensure that the authorities have a strategic role in coordinating CP with those who facilitate the process. The document will also reduce undue pressure and political interferences by stipulating the roles of elected and appointed local government officials, the political and civic organisations. It should elaborate on the roles and functions of local government authorities as stipulated in the local government policies, such as the MSA Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) and in the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998 (RSA, 1998a) when it comes to community involvement process in local government.

Since the facilitation of public participation lies with the MM and the coordination rests with the Office of the Speaker this leaves a vacuum especially with respect to

meaningful contribution to development activities by community members. This study recommends that the DLM authority explore the appointment of a PP manager whose role will be to guarantee that various participants meaningfully are involved in in development-related decision-making and are able to influence and inform decisions. The manager will also be charged with presenting the evaluated suggestions of the communities to the DLM council.

6.5. Suggestions for future studies

The following suggestions are drawn from the empirical findings of the study for future studies.

This study only focused on the decision-making processes in development initiatives. There is a need to explore further the implementation and evaluation processes of development initiatives in local government. Therefore, future studies can focus on these two aspects that affect the manner in which development initiatives are undertaken at local municipalities.

The findings of this study were derived from data collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the community, municipal representatives and focus group discussions with community members. The aim of the study was to explore the ways community are involved in decision-making processes in development initiatives in DLM. A quantitative study can be carried out with a larger population and sample size to provide much more representative quantifiable results in this local municipality. This might add a unique perception on decision-making processes in development initiatives using a different research approach.

In order for community members to participate actively in local development processes, they must trust their community representatives in the municipal council. It is important that the relationship between the two stakeholders be nurtured to ensure that CP frameworks are attained. Future studies can explore the relationship between

DLM authorities and community members to provide a significant understanding of the extent and nature of the relationship with an emphasis on trust.

The findings of this study suggests that the DLM appointed and elected authorities do not practise CP as prescribed in the legislation, local governance prescripts and policy frameworks. This could be linked to the lack of understanding of these legal frameworks guiding CP in local government. Therefore, this study recommends an exploration of the understanding of CP processes to determine the knowledge of DLM authorities on these legislative prescripts on CP.

More studies can be conducted to explore the impact of having a public participation office (PPO) in the Office of the Speaker in the local municipality. While, the MSA specifies that the local MM is responsible for ensuring that CP is carried out in the municipalities, the spatial and organisational distance of the MM office and the office of the Speaker presents potential oversight and accountability challenges. This results in questions such as how the MM is ensuring that the Office of the Speaker does exactly what is required from it. Such research has the potential to identify the obstacles associated with CP mechanisms and processes within the DLM. This is further indicative of an official who is politically elected to assist the Office of the Speaker as the findings of the study suggests that elected DLM authorities were not implementing CP in decision-making.

More research can be conducted to explore the reasons behind the absence of CP strategy within the DLM. This would provide a much-needed understanding of the constraints associated with CP in this local municipality

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6.6. Concluding remarks

Community development is at the core of the functioning of the local government. Improvement of the livelihoods of the locals remains a critical objective in the daily execution of the tasks of local authorities. However, these tasks would not be complete

without understanding the needs and aspirations of the community members. The PD approach, which includes consultations and deliberations on the community development challenges and expected solutions, should be adopted. Community development initiatives that do not follow these consultative processes often lack the support of communities and consequently compromise legitimacy and sustainability. It is for this reason that decision-making processes in development initiatives in local government must reflect community needs. Therefore, it is critical that the DLM council have a documented process which entails how communities are to be consulted in these decision-making processes. The legislation on local government constitutional obligations, the responsibility of the adoption of the PD approach rests with the local council members to involve communities in local government matters. The involvement of community members in decision-making processes is an important pillar to good governance.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: Ethical Clearance Certificate

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520
Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za
Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC
Faculty of Humanities Ethics Office for Research,
Training and Support
Tel: 018 285 2457
Email: Erhabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za

04 November 2024

APPROVAL FOR CONTINUATION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Ethics number: NWU-01080-22-A7
Study title: Exploring the role of the community in decision-making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng Local Municipality, South Africa.
Study leader/supervisor: Prof. M. Molope
Student: T. Moholi
Application type: Single study
Risk level: Low risk

Dear Researcher

You are kindly informed that this application was reviewed for monitoring at the meeting of the North-West University Basic and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC), Faculty of Humanities, North-West University, held on **30/10/2024.** Following the review of the application, it has been decided that the study is approved for continuation.

Suspension	
Continuation	X
Termination	

Approval date: 30/10/2024
Expiry date: 30/10/2025

If you have any questions or need further assistance, please contact BaSSREC.

Yours sincerely

Professor Erhabor IdemudiaChairperson: NWU-BaSSREC

ANNEXURE B: Informed Consent Form in English

NWU®
NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA

Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)

DATE: 07 February 2023

BaSSREC

Authorisation

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

Title of the research project	Exploring the role of community in decision making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng local Municipality.
Ethics number	NWU-01080-22-A7
Principal investigator	Teboho Moholi
Student number	41321154
Address	14 Ribbok Street, 23B Sunkist. Bethlehem 9700
Email address	tebohomoholi@gmail.com
Contact number	0823381756

You are being invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my PhD in Social Science (Development Studies). Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part. Prior to publication of the study's results (or the point that publication is in process), you may also withdraw the data you generate.

This study has been approved by the **Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) of the Faculty of Humanities of the North-West University (NWU-01080-22-A7)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010) and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records to make sure that we (the researchers) are conducting research in an ethical manner.

What is this research study all about?

- This study is an exploration of the role of community in decision making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng Local Municipality, South Africa and will involve the use of a qualitative method.
- The researcher has been trained to use the methods mentioned in the previous sentence.
- Approximately 26 participants will be included in this study.
- The objectives of this research are:
    - To explore the mechanisms that are used by the local municipal authority to involve the community in decision making processes.
    - To identify measures taken by community members to ensure that they take part in the decision making in the local municipality
    - To explore the community members' response to the efforts made by the local authorities to engage them in decision making processes.
    - To examine how the needs of the community members are identified, analysed and prioritised.
    - To assess how community development initiatives are conceptualised and implemented.
    - Depending on the finding, to propose a model that can be used by the Dihlabeng Local municipal authority in enhancing community involvement in local governance decision making process.

Why have you been invited to participate?

- You have been invited to participate because you are a resident in the ward where the research is taking place.
- You have also complied with the following inclusion criteria: The selection criterion which includes individuals over the ages of 25 to 65. The age group is at least knowledgeable of the local municipality and have some level of interest in local governance. The group is residing in the local

municipality for at least a minimum of five years, both males and females can participate in the study

- You will be excluded if you no longer fall in the selection age group and not residing in the wards.

What will your responsibilities be?

- You will be invited to participate in the noted study through focus group discussion.
- You will have **5** days to indicate whether you would be willing to participate.
- You will be requested to sign this Informed Consent Statement before the commencement of the study.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- The direct benefits for you as a participant will probably be enhanced community participation in decision making processes in development initiatives
- The indirect benefit will probably be increased community engagement within the local municipality

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and how will these be managed?

The possible risks in this study, and how these will be managed, are summarised in the table below:

Possible risk	**Mitigation strategy**
COVID 19 risk during focus group discussion.	Due to the potential of Covid-19 infection, the researcher will observe the following rules during focus group discussion data collection: • Should the participants need the researcher to adhere to the restrictions which we applied during the State of National Disaster, the researcher will adhere to them.
Emotional distress of the participants.	The study will cause no emotional distress to any of the participants in the study.
Tiredness and discomfort.	Comfort breaks after every 20 minutes.
Lack of privacy and comfort during interviews due to being exposed to the public.	Data will be collected away from public spaces and in locations where only the researcher and participants can hear the conversation.

- *However, we do believe that the benefits to you and to science (as noted in the previous section) outweigh the risks we have listed. If you disagree, then please feel free not to participate in this study. We will respect your decision.*
- *Should we learn, in the course of the research, that someone is harming you, or that you are intending to harm someone, then we must tell someone who can help you/warn the person you are intending to harm.*

Who will have access to the data?

The following procedures will be observed in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA):

Principle	How will this be done?	When will this be done?
Anonymity	Will be ensured throughout the study. The researcher will use pseudo names to protect the identity of the participants. Only these will be used in the research report.	Will be ensured throughout the study
Confidentiality	Participation of all the participants in the study with remain anonymous. Data will be collected away from public spaces and in locations where only the researcher and participants can hear the conversation.	During the recruitment process. Before the fieldwork commences. During the fieldwork. After the fieldwork has been completed During analysis and the write-up of findings. During the reporting of findings. During the publication of findings
De-identification of data	All personal data will be de-identified to ensure that no personal information links participants with the data provided.	After the fieldwork has been completed. After you, as participant, has signed-off on the interview transcripts/responses/any other relevant information sent to you to check. Before data analysis and the write-up of findings start.
Data storage	Information gathered from the participants will be placed in a lockable cabinet which only the researcher will have access. Data will be coded and stored in a password-protected computerised system	During the recruitment process. Before the fieldwork commences. During the fieldwork. After the fieldwork has been completed During analysis and the write-up of findings. During the reporting of findings. During the publication of findings.
Privacy	*Privacy* will be ensured by not probing unnecessarily if you do not wish to discuss particular matters.	During the fieldwork. During follow-up fieldwork.

Transcription/coding of data	I will not use a *transcriber* for the purpose of the transcripts after the interview. I will not use a *statistician/coder* for the purpose of the transcripts after the interview.	I will be responsible for transcribing the data. Therefore, no other person will have access to the data. I will be required to sign a NWU Confidentiality Agreement before the study commences.
Translation/interpreter services	I will not use a *translator/interpreter* for the purpose of the interviews/explaining the informed consent.	I will not use a translator/interpreter for the purpose of the interviews/explaining the informed consent.

Collection of only relevant personal information:

Collection of only relevant personal information.	I, the principal investigator will only collect personal biographical and opinion-related data about the topic I/we are studying.	I will not be collecting personal biographical information.

What will happen to the data?

The data from this study will be reported in the following ways: through the academic dissertation and an article. In all of this reporting, you will not be personally identified. This means that the reporting will not include your name or details that will help others to know that you participated.

This is a once-off study, so the data will not be re-used

Will you be paid/compensated to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

No, you will not be paid/compensated to take part in the study, but pre-packaged refreshments will be provided before/during/after the study. If participating in the research means that you have to travel especially for the purpose of participating, then your travel costs will be paid. There will thus be no costs involved.

How will you know about the findings?

- The general findings of the research will be shared with you by an academic dissertation
- If you would like feedback on your personal results, then kindly contact me on 0823381756 and tebohomoholi@gmail.com

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact Teboho Moholi (researcher) at 082 338 1756 and tebohomoholi@gmail.com if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the chair of the Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Prof Erharbor Idemudia) at 018 389 2899 or Erhabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I _____ agree to take part in a research study entitled: ***"Exploring the role of community in decision making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng Local Municipality, South Africa. "***

I declare that:

- I provide *informed consent.*
  - Thus, I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
  - Thus, I have had a chance to ask questions to the researcher and all my questions have been adequately answered.

- I provide *voluntary consent.*
  - Thus, I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
  - Thus, I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
  - Thus, I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.

- I provide *specific consent.*
  - Thus, I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publically and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
  - I provide *specific consent.* Thus, I consent to an audio and/or audio-visual recording of the interviews and or focus group discussion.

Signed at (*place*) _____ on (*date*) _____ 20 _____

_____ _____

Signature of participant **Signature of witness**

- You may contact me again ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
- I would like a summary of the findings of this research ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

- I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname: _____
Postal Address: _____
Email: _____
Phone Number: _____
Cell Phone Number: _____

In case the above details change, please contact the following person who knows me well and who does not live with me and who will help you to contact me:

Name & Surname: _____

Phone/ Cell Phone Number /Email: _____

_____

Declaration by person obtaining consent (if not the researcher/primary investigator)

I *(name)* _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) _____ on (*date*) _____20 ____

_____ _____

Signature of person obtaining consent **Signature of witness**

Declaration by researcher/primary investigator

I ***Teboho Moholi*** declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____
- I encouraged them to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that they adequately understand all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) _____ on (*date*) _____2

Signature of researcher **Signature of witness**

Declaration by researcher and participant Personal

face-to-face interviews during Covid-19 restrictions (*if applicable*)

Additional declaration by participant in those instances where the participant requests to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview:

By signing below, I _____, acknowledge the following information related to the required measures regarding Covid-19:

I declare that:

- It is my personal choice and preference to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.
- This requires that I consent to the following strict measures to safeguard the personal health and safety of myself and that of the researcher/interviewer/primary investigator:

  - I consent to the researcher taking my temperature before the interview using a thermometer. ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
  - I confirm that my temperature measured at _____ degrees. ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
  - I consent to use the three-ply mask provided by the researcher. ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
  - I consent to wear the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview. ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
  - I consent to the researcher sanitising the interview context using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before the commencement of the interview. ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
  - I consent to the researcher using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before and during the interview if required. ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Signed at (*place*) _____ on (*date*) _____ 20 ____

_____ _____

Signature of participant **Signature of researcher**

ANNEXURE C: Informed Consent form in Sesotho



Basic Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)

DATE: ……

BaSSREC Authorisation

FOROMO YA DINTLHA LE TUMELO

Sehlooho sa morero wa dipatlisiso	Ho lekola karolo ya sechaba mekhweng ya ho etsa diqeto mererong e kethilweng ya ntlafatso Masepala wa lehae wa Dihlabeng.Afrika Borwa
Nomoro ya melao ya boitshwaro	**NWU-01080-22-A7**
Mofuputsi ya ka sehloohong	Teboho Moholi
Nomoro ya Moithuti	41321154
Nomoro ya ntlu	14 Ribbok Street, 23B Sunkist. Bethlehem 9700
Aterese ya imeile	tebohomoholi@gmail.com
Nomoro ya ho ikopanya	0823381756

U memeloa ho nka karolo morerong wa dipatlisiso o etsang karolo ya PhD ya ka ya Saense ya Sechaba (Development Studies). Ka kopo, iphe nako ya ho bala dintlha tse fanweng mona, tse tla hlalosa dintlha tsa morero ona. Ka kopo o botse mofuputsi dipotso leha e le dife mabapi le karolo efe kapa efe ya morero ona, tseo o sa di utlwisiseng ka botlalo. Ho bohlokoa haholo hore o kgotsofale ka botlalo hore o utlwisise hantle hore na patlisiso ena e bua ka eng le hore na u ka kenya letsoho jwang. Hape, ho nka karolo ha hao ke ka boithaopo mme o

lokolohile ho hana ho nka karolo. Haeba o re tjheh, sena se ke sa o ama hampe ka tsela efe kapa efe. Hape o lokolohile ho ikhula thutong ka nako efe kapa efe, leha o dumela ho nka karolo. Pele ho phatlalatswa diphetho tsa phuputso (kapa ntlha eo khatiso e ntseng e tswela pele), o ka boela wa ntsha dintlha tseo o di hlahisang.

Boithuto bona bo ananetsoe ke Komiti ea Melao ea Boitshwaro ea Dipatlisiso tsa Saense ya Motheo le Kahisano (BaSSREC) ea Legoro la Botho la Yunibesithi Ya Leboea-Bophirima (**YBB. NWU-01080-22-A7.)** mme e tla etswa ho latela ditataiso tsa boitshwaro le melao-motheo ya Setatemente sa machaba sa Singapore mabapi le Botshepehi ba Dipatlisiso (2010) le ditataiso tsa boitshwaro tsa Lekhotla la Naha la Boitshwaro ba Lipatlisiso tsa Bophelo bo Botle. Ho ka nna ha hlokahala hore litho tsa komiti ea melao ea boitshwaro ya dipatlisiso kapa balaodi ba amehang ba hlahlobe direkoto tsa dipatlisiso ho etsa bonnete ba hore rona (bafuputsi) re etsa dipatlisiso ka mokhoa o nepahetseng.

Boithuto bona bo mabapi le eng?

- Patlisiso ena ke tekolo ea karolo ea sechaba mekhoeng ea ho etsa liqeto mererong e khethiloeng ea ntlafatso Masepaleng oa Lehae oa Dihlabeng, Afrika Boroa mme e tla kenyelletsa tshebediso ea mokhoa oa boleng.
- Mofuputsi o rupetsoe ho sebelisa mekhoa e boletsoeng polelong e fetileng.
- Ho tla ba le barupeluoa ba ka bang 26 thutong ena.
- Maikemisetso a patlisiso ena ke:
    - Ho batlisisa mekhwa e sebelisoang ke bolaodi ba masepala wa lehae ho kenya letsoho sechabeng ts'ebetsong ea ho etsa liqeto.
    - Ho tseba mehato e nkuweng ke litho tsa sechaba ho netefatsa hore ba nka karolo ho etseng diqeto masepala oa lehae
    - Ho lekola karabelo ea sechaba boikitlaetsong bo entsweng ke ba boholong sebakeng sa ho ba kenya letsoho litabeng tsa ho etsa liqeto.
    - Ho lekola hore na litlhoko tsa litho tsa sechaba di khetholloa jwang, di hlahlojoa le ho bewa pele.
    - Ho lekola hore na maikemisetso a ntlafatso ea sechaba a nahanoa jwang le ho kengoa tshebetsong.
    - Ho ipapisitse le se fumanoeng, ho sisinya mohlala o ka sebelisoang ke lekhotla la Masepala oa Dihlabeng ho matlafatsa seabo sa sechaba tshebetsong ea ho etsa diqeto tsa puso ea libaka.

Ke hobane'ng ha u memetsoe ho nka karolo?

- O memetswe ho nka karolo hobane o moahi oa lebatooa leo dipatlisiso di ntseng di etswa ho lona.
- Hape o ipapisitse le maemo a latelang a kenyeletso: Maemo a kgetho a kenyeletsang batho ba ka hodimo ho dilemo tse 25 ho isa ho tse 65. Sehlopha sa dilemo bonyane se na le tsebo ya masepala wa lehae mme se na le kgahleho e itseng pusong ya lehae. Sehlopha se lula masepaleng oa lehae bonyane lilemo tse hlano, banna le basadi ba nka karolo thutong.
- O tla be o qheletswe ka thoko haeba o se o le sehlopheng sa dilemo tse kgethilweng mme o sa dulwe mabateng.

Boikarabelo ba hao e tla ba bofe?

- O tla memeloa ho nka karolo thutong e hlokomelehang ka dipuisano tsa sehlopha.
- O tla ba le matsatsi a 7 ho bontsha hore na u ka rata ho nka karolo.
- O tla kopuwa ho saena Setatamente sena sa Tumello ka Tsebo pele thuto e qala.

Na o tla rua molemo ka ho nka karolo phuputsong ee?

- Melemo e tobileng bakeng sa hau joalo ka monkakarolo mohlomong e tla matlafatsoa ho kenya letsoho ha sechaba mekhoeng ea ho etsa liqeto mererong ea ntlafatso le ho netefatsa hore sechaba se susumetsa liqeto tse nkuoang ke balaoli ba lehae haholo-holo mabapi le mokhoa oa boipheliso.

  • Melemo e sa tobang e tla ba maano a betere le a sekametseng sechabeng mabapi le ho kenya letsoho ha sechaba.

Na ho na le dikotsi tse amehang ha o nka karolo lipatlisisong tsee, mme di tla laolwa jwang?

Likotsi tse ka bang teng phuputsong ena, le hore na tsena li tla laoloa joang, li akaretsoa tafoleng e ka tlase:

Kotsi e ka bang teng	**Leano la ho fokotsa**
Kotsi ya COVID 19 nakong ya dipuisano tsa sehlopha.	Ka lebaka la monyetla oa tshwaetso ya Covid-19, mofuputsi o tla boloka melao e latelang nakong ya pokello ya dintlha tsa dipuisano tsa sehlopha: • Haeba barupeluoa ba ka hloka mofuputsi ho latela lithibelo tseo re di sebelisitseng nakong ea Koduwa ya Naha, mofuputsi o tla di latela.
Matsoenyeho a maikutlo a barupeluoa.	Boithuto bona bo ke ba baka khatello ya maikutlo ho barupeluoa.
Tiredness and discomfort.	Ho kgathala le ho hloka boiketlo.
Ho hloka boinotshi le matshediso nakong ea dipuisano tsa lihlopha.	dintlha di tla bokellwa hole le dibaka tsa sechaba le dibakeng tseo ho tsona feela mofuputsi le barupeluoa ba ka utlwang moqoqo.

- *Leha ho le joalo, re lumela hore melemo ho uena le saenseng (joalokaha ho boletsoe karolong e fetileng) e feta likotsi tseo re li thathamisitseng. Haeba u sa lumellane, ka kopo ikutloe u lokolohile ho se nke karolo thutong ena. Re tla hlompha qeto ea hao.*
- *Haeba re ithuta, nakong ea lipatlisiso, hore ho na le motho ea u ntšang kotsi, kapa hore u rerile ho ntša motho e mong kotsi, joale re tlameha ho bolella motho ea ka u thusang/ho lemosa motho eo u rerang ho mo ntša kotsi.*

Ke mang ea tla ba le phihlello ho data?

Mekhoa e latelang e tla hlokomeloa ho ipapisitsoe le Molao oa Tšireletso ea Boitsebiso ba Motho (POPIA):

Molao-motheo	See se tla etsoa joang?	See se tla etsoa neng?
Ho se tsejoe	E tla netefatsoa nakong eohle ea thuto. Mofuputsi o tla sebelisa mabitso a maiketsetso ho sireletsa boitsebiso ba barupeluoa. Ke tsona feela tse tla sebelisoa tlalehong ea lipatlisiso.	E tla netefatsoa nakong eohle ea thuto
Lekunutu	Ho nka karolo ha bankakarolo bohle thutong ho lula ho sa tsejoe. Lintlha li tla bokelloa hole le libaka tsa sechaba le Dibakeng tseo ho tsona feela mofuputsi le barupeluoa ba ka utlwang moqoqo.	Nakong ya tshebetso. Pele mosebetsi o qala. Nakong ya mosebetsi Ka mora hore mosebetsi o phethwe Nakong ea tlhahlobo le ho ngola liphetho. Nakong ea tlaleho ea diphetho. Nakong ea phatlalatso ea diphuputso
Ho hlakisoa ha data	dintlha tsohle tsa hau di tla hlakoloa ho netefatsa hore ha ho tlhahisoleseling ea motho e hokahanyang barupeluoa le data e fanoeng.	Ka mor'a hore mosebetsi oa tšimo o phethoe. Kamora hore uena, jwalo ka monkakarolo, u saene dingoloa / dikarabelo / tlhaiso-leseding efe kapa efe ea bohlokoa e rometsoeng ho uena ho hlahloba. Pele ho qala tlhahlobo ya data le ho ngola diphuputso.
Polokelo ea data	Lintlha tse bokelletsoeng ho tsoa ho barupeluoa di tla beoa ka hara khabinete e notlehang eo mofuputsi e leng eena feela ea tla khona ho e fihlela. dintlha di tla ngodisoa le ho bolokoa ka hara sistimi e sireleditsoeng ka password	Nakong ea tshebetso ea ho hira. Pele mosebetsi oa tshimo o qala. Nakong ea mosebetsi. Ka mora hore mosebetsi o phethwe Nakong ea tlhahlobo le ho ngola diphetho. Nakong ea tlaleho ea diphetho.
Lekunutu	Boinotshi bo tla netefatsoa ka ho se hlahlobe ho sa hlokahale haeba u sa batle ho bua ka litaba tse itseng.	Nakong ya mosebetsi

Ngoliso / khouto ea data	Nke ke ka sebelisa mokopitsi molemong oa lingoliloeng ka mor'a lipuisano. Nke ke ka sebelisa setsebi sa dipalo-palo/khouda molemong oa dingodiloeng kamora tlhahlobo.	Ke tla ikarabella bakeng sa ho ngola dintlha. Ka hona, ha ho motho e mong a tla ba le phihlello ya ditaba tseo o tla mpha tsona. Ke tla hlokeha ho saena Tumellano ya Lekunutu ya NWU pele thuto e qala.
Litshebeletso tsa ho fetolela / toloko	Nke ke ka sebelisa mofetoleli/mofetoleli molemong oa lipuisano/ho hlalosa tumello e nang le tsebo.	Nke ke ka sebelisa mofetoleli/mofetoleli molemong oa lipuisano/ho hlalosa tumello e nang le tsebo.

Pokello ea lintlha tsa botho tse amehang feela:

Pokello ea lintlha tsa botho tse amehang feela.	Na, mofuputsi ea ka sehloohong o tla bokella feela data e amanang le phuputso. Ha ho dintlha tsa botho tse tla hlokahala.	dintlha tsa botho di ke tsa bokelloa bakeng sa thuto.

Ho tla etsahalang ka data?

Dintlha tse tsoang phuputsong ena di tla tlalehoa ka litsela tse latelang: ka lethathamo la thuto le sengoloa. ditlalehong tsena kaofela, u ke ua tsejwa ka bowena. Sena se bolela hore tlaleho e ke ea kenyelletsa lebitso la hao kapa dintlha tse tla thusa ba bang ho tseba hore u nkile karolo.

Ena ke boithuto ba hang feela, kahoo data e ke ea sebelisoa hape

Na o tla lefshoa/matsheliso ho nka karolo phuputsong ee mme na ho na le ditshenyehelo tse amehang?

Tjhehe, O ke wa lefshoa/matseliso a ho nka karolo phuputsong, Kahoo ho ke ha ba le ditshenyehelo tse amehang.

O tla tseba jwang ka diphetho?

- Liphetho tse akaretsang tsa liphuputso li tla arolelanoa le uena ke lengolo la thuto
- Haeba u batla maikutlo mabapi le liphetho tsa hau, ikopanye le nna ka mosa ho 0823381756 le tebohomoholi@gmail.com

Na ho na le ntho e nngoe eo u lokelang ho e tseba kapa ho e etsa?

- O ka ikopanya le Teboho Moholi (mofuputsi) ho 082 338 1756 le tebohomoholi@gmail.com haeba u na le lipotso tse ling kapa u kopana le mathata afe kapa afe.
- ka iteanya le modulasetulo wa Human Social Science Research Ethics Committee (Prof Erharbor Idemudia) ho 018 389 2899 kapa Erhabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za haeba o na le

dingongoreho dife kapa dife kapa ditletlebo tse sa kang tsa rarollwa ka ho lekaneng ke mofuputsi.

- O tla fumana khopi ya tlhahisoleseding ena le foromo ya tumello bakeng sa direkoto tsa hao.

Phatlalatso ka monkakarolo

Ka ho saena ka tlase, ke _____ dumela ho nka karolo phuputsong e nang le sehlooho se reng: ***"Exploring the role of community in decision making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng Local Municipality, South Africa. "***

Ke bolela hore:

Ke fana ka tumello e nang le tsebo.

- Kahoo, ke balile le ho utloisisa tlhahisoleseding ena le foromo ea tumello mme e ngotswe ka puo eo ke e tsebang hantle le ho phutholoha.
- Kahoo, ke bile le monyetla oa ho botsa mofuputsi mme dipotso tsohle tsa ka di arabiloe ka mokhoa o lekaneng.

Ke fana ka tumello ea boithaopo.

- Kahoo, kea utloisisa hore ho nka karolo thutong ena ke boithaopo, mme ha kea hatelloa ho nka karolo.
- Kahoo, nka khetha ho tlohela thuto ka nako efe kapa efe, mme nke ke ka fuoa kotlo kapa khethollo ka tsela efe kapa efe.
- Ka hona, kea tseba taba ea hore nka kopa hore mofuputsi a se tsoele pele ka ho rekota ha ke e kopa.

Ke fana ka tumello e khethehileng.

- Ka hona, ke utloisisa hore seo ke se kenyang (seo ke se tlalehang / se bolelang / ngola / se taka / se hlahisa ka pono) se ka hlahisoa phatlalatsa le / kapa sa qotsoa, empa ntle le ho bua ka boitsebiso ba ka.
- Ke fana ka tumello e khethehileng. Kahoo, ke lumela hore ho rekote molumo le/kapa pono-pono ea lipuisano kapa lipuisano tsa sehlopha.

E saenetsoe (sebakeng)_____ka (*letsatsi*) _____ 20 _____

Tshaeno ea monkakarolo	**Tshaeno ya bopaki**
_____	_____
• O ka ikopanya le nna hape	☐ **Eya** ☐ **Tjhehe**
• Ke kopa kakaretso ea diphetho tsa dipatlisiso tsena	☐ **Eya** ☐ **Tjhehe**
• Ke kopa maikutlo mabapi le tshebetso ea ka / boiketlo ba ka jwalo ka ha ho bonahala lethathamong la lipotso tseo ke di tlatsitseng	☐ **Eya** ☐ **Tjhehe**

Mokhoa o motle oa ho fihla ho nna ke:

Lebitso le Sefane: _____
Aterese ea poso: _____
Lengolo-tsoibila: _____
Nomoro ea mohala: _____
Nomoro ea Mohala: _____

Haeba dintlha tse ka hodimo di ka fetoha, ka kopo ikopanye le motho ya latelang ya ntsebang hantle le ya sa duleng le nna ya tla o thusa ho ikopanya le nna:

Lebitso le Surname: _____

Nomoro ya
Mohala/Emeile: _____

Phatlalatso ya motho ya fumanang tumello (haeba e se mofuputsi / mofuputsi wa mantlha)

Ke (lebitso) _____ ke bolela hore:

• Ke hlalositse dintlha tse tokomaneng ena ho _____
• Ke ile ka mo khothalletsa ho botsa dipotso mme ka ipha nako e lekaneng ya ho di araba.
• Ke khotsofetse hore o utloisisa dintlha tsohle tsa dipatlisiso ka nepo, jwalo ka ha ho boletswe
ka hodimo
• Ke sebeditse/ha kea sebedisa toloko.

E saennwe (sebakeng) _____ ka (letsatsi) _____20 ____

_____ _____

Tshaeno ea mofuputsi **Tshaeno ya bopak**

Phatlalatso ka mofuputsi le monkakarolo

Dipuisano tsa motho ka mong sefahleho le sefahleho nakong ea dithibelo tsa Covid-19 (haeba ho hlokahala)

Phatlalatso ya tlatsetso ya monkakarolo maemong ao monkakarolo a kopang ho nka karolo dipuisanong tsa sefahleho le sefahleho:

Ka ho saena ka tlase, ke _____, ke ananela lintlha tse latelang tse amanang le mehato e hlokahalang mabapi le Covid-19:

Ke bolela hore:

• Ke khetho ya ka le khetho ea ka ho nka karolo lipuisanong tsa sefahleho le sefahleho le mofuputsi.

• Sena se hloka hore ke dumelle mehato e latelang e tiileng ho sireletsa bophelo bo botle le polokeho ya ka le ya mofuputsi/mohlahlobi/mfuputsi wa sehlooho:

- Ke lumella mofuputsi hore a nke mocheso oa ka pele ho lipuisano a sebelisa thermometer. ☐ **Eya** ☐ **Tjhehe**
- Ke netefatsa hore thempereichara ea ka e ne e le likhato tse ___☐ **Eya** ☐ **Tjhehe**
- Ke dumela ho sebelisa mask a lipeo tse tharo a fanoeng ke mofuputsi.☐ **Eya** ☐ **tjhehe**
- Ke dumela ho rwala semonkwana a dipeo tse tharo nako yohle ya lipuisano. ☐**Eya** ☐ **Tjhehe**
- Tumellano ea mofuputsi ho hloekisa moelelo oa dipuisano a sebelisa sanitiser e nang le joala ba 80% pele puisano e qala. ☐**Eya** ☐ **Tjhehe**
- Ke dumella mofuputsi ho sebedisa sehlwekisi se nang le 80% ya jwala pele le nakong ya dipotsolotso ha ho hlokeha. ☐ **Eya** ☐ **Tjehe**

E saenetsoe ho (*Sebaka*) _____ka (*letsatsi*) _____ 20

_____ _____

Tshaeno ea monkakarolo **Tshaeno ea mofuputsi**

ANNEXURE D: Interview Guide for Dihlabeng Local Municipality Authorities

EXPLORATORY INTERVIEWS

Research topic

Exploring the role of the community in decision making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng local Municipality, South Africa.

Research Aim

The aim of this study is to explore ways in which the community in Dihlabeng local municipality is involved in the decision making processes in selected development initiatives.

Research Question 1

What mechanisms are used by the local authority to involve the community members in decision making processes?

a) Please share the local municipal decision making process?

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b) Which processes are followed by the local authorities to ensure that the community members are involved in this process?

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c) With reference to Dihlabeng Local Economic Hub (Ward 16), please explain efforts made by DLM authority to ensure active and meaningful community participation in decision making?.....
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d) With reference to Sivukile Youth Agricultural Cooperative (Ward 17), what did the authority do to ensure that community members are not rubber stampers of decisions that are already taken?

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e) Which evidence can the DLM authority show to illustrate that the community is part of the decision making process?

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f) Where and by whom are decisions made in the local municipality?

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g) What does the DLM authority do to ensure that the decision making process within the local municipality is transparent to the local community members

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Research Question 3

How are the community members responding to efforts made by the local authorities to engage them in decision making?

a) With reference to Dihlabeng Local Economic Hub and Sivukile Youth Agricultural Cooperative, how did the community respond to specific efforts made to involve them in decision making?

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b) Which lessons were learned by the authority from the community response?

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c) What was done with the lessons learned?

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d) How do you evaluate community involvement in the decisions taken by the local authorities?

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Research Question 4

How the needs of the community members identified are be analysed and prioritised in Dihlabeng Local Municipality?

a) How do the local authorities ensure that the community is involved in identifying their development needs?

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b) Describe the specific steps taken to ensure that the community members are given an opportunity by the local authorities to input in the identification of development needs?

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……

c) Was the same process followed when the Ward 16 Dihlabeng Local Economic hub was identified?

d)

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e) Was the same process followed when the Ward 17 Sivukile Youth Agricultural Cooperative project were identified?

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Research Question 5

How are the community development initiatives conceptualised and implemented in Dihlabeng Local Municipality?

a) How was the Ward 16 Dihlabeng Youth Economic hub initiative conceptualised? Evidence of community involvement in decision making? Please explain the process that takes place after identification of community member's needs?

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……

b) How was the Ward 17 Sibukile Youth Agricultural Cooperative project hub initiative conceptualised? Evidence of community involvement in decision making? Please explain the process that takes place after identification of community member's needs?

……
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……

c) How were the decisions regarding implementation of Project made? Evidence of consideration of input towards decision making by community members??

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d) Which measures are taken by the local authorities to ensure the needs are addressed in line with the suggestions made by community members?

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Research Question 6

What model can be used by the Dihlabeng local municipal authority to enhance community involvement in the local governmental decision making process?

a) What are the strengths of the municipality's community involvement in decision making process?

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b) How are they being sustained?

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c) What are the challenges?

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d) How are they being addressed?

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e) How does the authority plan to strengthen community involvement in development decision making process?

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f) What does the authority need (physical and human resources) to strengthen Community Participation in decision-making?

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ANNEXURE E: Interview Guide for ward committee members

Exploratory Ward Committee Member Interviews

Research topic

Exploring the role of the community in decision making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng local Municipality, South Africa.

Research Aim

The aim of this study is to explore ways in which the community in Dihlabeng local municipality is involved in the decision making processes in selected development initiatives.

Research Question 1

What mechanisms are used by the local authority to involve the community members in decision making processes?

a) What processes are followed to ensure that the community is involved in decision making regarding Dihlabeng Local Economic hub development initiatives?
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b) What processes are followed to ensure that the community is involved in decision making regarding Sivukile Youth Agricultural Cooperative development programme initiative?
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c) Which specific roles were played by community members regarding decisions about each selected initiative?
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d) What measures were put in place to ensure that the views communicate needs of the community are considered when these initiatives were conceptualised.

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e) Why was it important that the views of the community members are considered when decisions were made regarding these making processes at ward level?

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Research Question 3
How are the community members responding to efforts made by the local authorities to engage them in decision making?

f) What ways are the community members given an opportunity by the local authorities to input in their development needs?
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g) In your view is the community responding to this measures taken by local authorities to include them in local governance matters? Why?
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ANNEXURE F: Focus Group Guide for Community Members

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Research topic

Exploring the role of the community in decision making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng local Municipality, South Africa.

Research Aim

The aim of this study is to explore ways in which the community in Dihlabeng local municipality is involved in the decision making processes in selected development initiatives.

Research Question 1

Which measures are used by the local municipal authority to involve the community members in decision making processes?

a) Please explain how the local authorities engage you on local governance matters in the local municipality?

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b) How are you participating in the decision making processes of the local authorities?

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c). How do you inform the local authorities of your development needs?

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Research Question 2

What do community members do to ensure that they take part in decision making in the Dihlabeng Local Municipality?

a) How important is it that you are consulted in the decision making processes in the local municipality?

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b) Are you able to have influence on the development initiatives taken by the local authorities?

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c). How do you ensure that you participate in the consultation processes?

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d). Please explain how frequent you are consulted and take part in the consultative processes?

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Research Question 4

How are the needs of the community members identified, analysed and prioritised in Dihlabeng Local Municipality?

a) In what way are the local authorities responding to your development needs?

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b) How are the community needs reflected in the local authority programmes? How are they prioritised?

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Research Question 5

How are the community development initiatives conceptualized and implemented in Dihlabeng Local Municipality?

a) Do you think your community needs are linked to the municipality development initiatives? Why?

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b) How is the local authority responding to your needs?

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……
……

c) In your opinions how are local authorities prioritizing community development needs?

……
……
……

ANNEXURE G: Letter of Granted Permission from Dihlabeng Local Municipality

E-mail: records2@dihlabeng.co.za

LEGAL SERVICES ..... DEPARTMENT

MR T L T MOHLAKOANA ..... Enquiries

Please address reply to: MUNICIPAL MANAGER

Our Reference CS4/1/1/1/1

Your Reference .....

OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL MANAGER

22 December 2022

Mr T D Maholi
14 Ribbok Street
Sunkist 23B
BETHLEHEM
9701

Sir

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT A STUDY.

The Municipality refers to your letter dated 6 October 2022 and its content thereof.

The Municipality wishes to inform you that your request to conduct a study in Ward 16 and 17 Dihlabeng Local Municipality together with some other requests stipulated in your letter has been approved and you may start to conduct a study as soon as January 2023.

Further note that you have stated in your letter of request that you will not force anyone to give any information and you reassured that a person that has already given you information may withdraw their statement if they feel to do so.

You are requested to share the outcome of your study with the Municipality for enhancing our community participation processes and systems.

Hope you find the above in order.

Yours faithfully

K J Masekoane
ACTING MUNICIPAL MANAGER

HEAD OFFICE
9 Muller Street East
PO Box 551
Bethlehem
9700

Tel: 058 303 5732
Fax: 058 303 4703

Website:
dihlabeng.gov.za
E-mail:
records2@
dihlabeng.co.za

CLARENS UNIT
Tel: 058 256 1411

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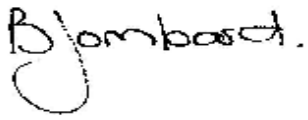
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PROOF READING AND EDITING

Date: 09/10/2025

To whom it may concern,

This is to confirm that the dissertation, titled *Exploring the role of the community in decision-making processes in selected development initiatives in Dihlabeng Local Municipality, South Africa,* submitted by Teboho Moholi (Student number: 41321154) has been edited according to the requirements specified for the degree of ***Doctor of Philosophy in Social Sciences with Development Studies*** at the North-West University.

Yours sincerely,



Brenda Lombard

18 Bordeaux Crescent
Zevenwacht Village, 7580

Mobile: 0836751795
e-mail: brenlombard@gmail.com

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