



The Effectiveness of Participatory Governance in Budgetary Monitoring and Evaluation in an Information Age: A Case of Fetakgomo-Tubatse Local Municipality

E. Zwane; Mamabolo M. N

University of Limpopo, South Africa

E-mail: engeline.zwane@ul.ac.za

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Abstract

Deepening participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation is critical to ensuring that local residents' rights to meaningful engagement in municipal governance are realised. It symbolises a paradigm shift in the relationship between municipalities and local residents, particularly in terms of promoting transparency and accountability in the use of municipal financial resources to achieve positive service delivery outcomes. However, proffering opportunities for residents to meaningfully engage in budgetary monitoring and evaluation processes is often met with mixed reactions within municipalities' governance structures. This paper evaluates the effectiveness of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation in the information age in the case of Fetakgomo-Tubatse local municipality. The objectives were to assess participants' understanding of the importance of participatory governance implementation in budgetary monitoring and evaluation, the scope and purpose of the implementation process, associated benefits and barriers, the efficacy of information dissemination and accessibility relating to the outcomes and impact of the process, and the degree of ICTs use towards enhancing timely dissemination and accessibility of the information. The study used a mixed method case study research design. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews and a self-administered semi-structured questionnaire were used to collect primary research data from a purposive and snowball sample of municipal officials (N=8) and ward committee members (N=10). The data was analysed using a seven-stage mixed method data analysis framework developed by Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003). The paper provides the main findings that led to the conclusion that participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation is implemented ineffectively in the Fetakgomo-Tubatse local municipality; recommendations on how to strengthen its effectiveness and avenues for future research are provided.

Keywords: *Effectiveness; Participatory Governance; Budgetary Monitoring and Evaluation; Information Age; Fetakgomo-Tubatse Local Municipality*

1. Introduction

The re-organisation of local government after 1994 heralded new changes in municipal governance structures (Gumede & Sipholo, 2014). Essential was a fundamental shift from a top-down, centralised decision-making approach to a more inclusive and people-centric approach (Ntliziywana, 2017). The result of this paradigm shift was the emergence of participatory governance as a mechanism for involving citizens in public governance structures. Thus, participatory governance represented a breakthrough to advance the involvement of citizens in public decision-making processes (Modise, 2017). Embodied in creating meaningful spaces and opportunities for citizens to influence and share control over decisions affecting their lives, the inefficiencies of participatory governance strategies have become apparent.

The majority of citizens are often disempowered and prevented from engaging in informative exchanges with state institutions about decisions affecting their lot (Gumede & Sipholo, 2014). This situation potentially marginalises citizens' voices and reduces them to passivity, making them consumers of readily-made decisions rather than co-governors in public institutions (Quick & Bryson, 2016). This situation is complicated by the lack of effective responsiveness within public institutions to adopt and implement participatory governance by strengthening partnerships with citizens and maximizing their engagement in decision-making processes (Masiya, Davids & Mazenda, 2019). Therefore, participatory governance has little practical meaning for many citizens, as it offers limited meaningful opportunities for them to engage in public decision-making as empowered citizens. This situation is all too typical of South Africa's local sphere government.

Twenty-seven years after the reform of South Africa's local government, progress in deepening participatory governance in local government is still significantly slower. Opportunities for inclusive decision-making are rarely offered to residents, except in the case of irregular and fragmented consultations, which are considered to encourage participatory governance (Mbhele, 2017). This situation underscores the apparent increasing disconnect between residents and community decision-makers, and raises serious concerns about further alienating residents' engagements in municipalities' affairs (Tshoose, 2015). The failure of local municipalities to integrate participatory governance into all facets of decision-making seems to be the result of institutional neglect. According to Matebesi and Botes (2017), the lack of interests and capacity to invest resources (i.e. effort, time and money) in the realisation of participatory governance threatens to thwart the creation of spaces for residents' involvement in municipal governance structures. As such, there appears to be little understanding of the importance and benefits of participatory governance and knowledge of how participatory governance can be put into practice within local municipalities (Modise, 2017; Tshoose, 2016). Nowhere is this limited understanding of the essence of translating participatory governance into practice more evident than in municipal budgetary monitoring and evaluation.

Notwithstanding the growing demands for meaningful engagement of residents in budgetary monitoring and evaluation to oversee the effective, efficient and economical use of public fiscal resources (AGSA, 2018-19), little practical change continues to be seen in this regard. Attempts by residents to exercise oversight, promote transparency and accountability by municipal officials appear to be severely constrained within municipal governance structures (Marais, Quayle & Burns, 2017). Access to timely, accurate and reliable information which is a vital asset for residents' informed engagement in budgetary monitoring and evaluation remains a major challenge (Mathews & McLaren, 2016). This situation is permitted to subsist though parallels the responsibility bestowed unto local municipalities to find innovative ways to broaden residents' access to pertinent information and put into action best participatory governance practices.

However, when it comes to budgetary monitoring and evaluation, the need to truly engage residents by providing the right information, in the right format, at the right time and for the right purposes, cannot be overstated (AGSA, 2018-19). It should be considered essential to prepare and/or empower residents for informed and meaningful engagements (Sekgala, 2016). However, there has been insufficient research into what information needed for meaningful engagements in budgetary monitoring and evaluation is accessed by residents and provided by local municipalities. Contradictions in acknowledging the role of residents in budgetary monitoring and evaluation can be attributed to this situation (Mathews & McLaren, 2016). This is because there is a lack of consensus on how wide to open the window for effective resident engagement; an observation that further undermines the realisation of residents' constitutional and social rights to participate in municipalities affairs. This paper examined the effectiveness of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation in the information age in the case of Fetakgomo-Tubatse local municipality. The next section looks at the status of participatory governance implementation in budgetary monitoring and evaluation in municipalities in the South African context.

2. Status of the Implementation of Participatory Governance in Budgetary Monitoring and Evaluation in South Africa's Local Municipalities

Since the reforms within local government decades ago, participatory governance is still heralded as an innovative strategy to embed the inclusive engagement of residents in public decision-making (Munzhedzi, 2021; Van Der Walt, 2017; Xavier et al., 2017). However, there is evidence that while efforts have been made to introduce participatory governance into municipalities' governance structures, this appears to be working poorly. Local municipalities, despite being required by law, do not seem to be able to encourage residents to engage in meaningfully in local government matters (Piper & von Lieres, 2016). Many of the residents possess no adequate information which translates into knowledge of the processes and workings of municipal governance machinery (Marais, Quayle & Burns, 2017; Matebesi & Botes, 2017; Quick & Bryson, 2016), thereby inadvertently being excluded from imputing their voices in decisions making. As a result, residents are prevented from ensuring that municipal officials are accountable for their decisions, which sometimes serve to advance their own interests rather than those of the public.

The increasing interest of local residents in effective engagement in public decision-making has not been met with equal and satisfactory responses (Matebesi & Botes, 2017; Ntliziywana, 2017). A major concern, however, is the lack of effective responsiveness on the part of municipalities. There is limited evidence of how local municipalities are incorporating best practice strategies to support and encourage meaningful citizen engagement in decision-making processes. This situation contrasts with the developmental role of local municipalities, which requires the creation of spaces for the engagement of residents in all matters of local government (Gumede, 2021; Naidoo & Ramphal, 2018). Significantly, the role of local municipalities as represented in their development mandate should not end with just providing information as a valuable source of information and active engagement. Municipalities must play a supportive role in creating opportunities for meaningful residents' engagement. However, the importance and benefits of implementing participatory governance in practice within municipalities still seem to be misunderstood. Hence the growing concern of local residents that participatory governance is left to chance.

In the context of budgetary monitoring and evaluation, no empirical data is available on how participatory governance is integrated and implemented in practice (Mathews & McLaren, 2016). Although widely used in other developing countries (e.g. Brazil and India) in a different form such as participatory monitoring and evaluation (Mujuru, 2018; Murei, Kidombo & Gakuu, 2017), local researches have paid less attention to exploring the extent of its applicability and usefulness to municipalities. Therefore, the functionality, usefulness and effectiveness of participatory governance in

budgetary monitoring and evaluation in municipalities remain largely unexplored and poorly documented. To date there is limited specific evidence of circumstances (i.e. contextual and otherwise) for effective implementation of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation in South Africa's local communities.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study's theoretical foundation was provided by rational choice institutionalism, reasoned action, and planned behaviour theories. The next section explains rational choice institutionalism, reasoned action and planned behaviour theories, as well as their significance to the study.

3.1. Rational Choice Institutionalism

The rational choice institutionalism (RCI) hypothesises how institutions are formed and how individuals within them behave in the face of predetermined preferences aimed at maximising the utility of the institutions and the results of their strategic interactions. This theoretical approach suggests that the set of rules that institutions establish have an impact on the behaviour of the actors inside the institutions in terms of what is expected of them in improving collaboration, providing information, and enforcing norms that minimise ambiguity. In other words, rational choice institutionalism contends that institutions should provide strategies and sequences of alternatives to influence actors, as well as emphasise how strategic engagement with other role players should be organised to produce policy results. When viewed through the lens of rational choice institutionalism, Municipalities are important public institutions that are founded and/or created by laws. The laws within which municipalities execute their assigned responsibilities constitute formal rules that establish contractual relations between themselves and those being served (Reddy, 2018). That is to say, the legislative framework within which municipalities function informs, shape and guide the behaviours and conduct of municipal officials through incentives and sanctions. These incentives and resultant sanctions are meant to create order, lessen conflict and ensure the realisation of mutual gains (Farrell, 2018).

This theoretical approach is significant to understanding how the interaction between municipalities and citizens should be structured in pursuance of the public good. This theoretical approach advances, for instance, that all actors in public institutions should comply with the set institutional rules; execute their obligations and responsibilities attached to their public positions in the best interests of the public (not aggrandise their own selfish interests) and be held to accountable for decisions and actions (Czada & Windhoff-Heritier, 2019). Such accountability, as rational choice institutionalism puts forward, should be enforced by the principal (i.e. parliament or political cabinet) to make the agent (a public institution) act or behave in the manner in which the principal would appreciate (Farrell, 2018).

In the study, the use of rational choice institutionalism is pertinent to understanding the manner in which participatory governance including its significance and benefits are construed by actors (i.e. municipal officials and ward committee members) within local municipalities. It will further help the researcher understand, through capture of the participants' accounts, the circumstances that influences the implementation and subsequent effectiveness of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation. This is so because in spite the legislative requirements placed on municipalities to encourage the involvement of communities in matters of local government (Section 152 (1) (e) of the Constitution (Act 108 of 1994); develop a culture of municipal governance that complements formal representative government with a system of participatory governance (Section 16 (1) of the Municipal Systems Act) and ensure that residents rights to have access to information on the state of affairs of municipalities including their finances (Section 5 (1) of the Municipal Systems Act) municipalities continue to fail in honour of and compliance with these legislative provisions. Viewed within the rational choice institutionalism,

these behaviours and conducts of non-compliance to formal institutional rules within local municipalities should be sanctioned because of their defective and costly nature. Thus, when municipalities as public agencies and officials within them fail to cooperate with residents owing to interdependent nature of their relationship, remedial measures need to be invoked to enforce compliance and sanction defection through legally recognised means.

3.2. Theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour

These theories derive their origin from the works of Fishbein and Ajzen (2010). Central to the theory of reasoned action is the relationship between individuals' beliefs, attitudes, intentions and behaviours. According to this theory of reasoned action, an essential and accurate determinant of behaviour is behavioural intention that is ascertained by attitudes and subjective norms towards the behaviour in question (Abraham & Sheeran, 2017). On the other hand, the theory of planned behaviour proposes that attitudes and subjective norms must be directly measured through perceived behavioural control. On this note, this theory advances that an individual's motivation is influenced by the level of difficulty of a specific behaviour and the perceived extent of success or failure when performing a particular activity (Armitage & Christian, 2017).

In the context of this paper, these theories are crucial to enhance an understating of the motivations or lack thereof within local municipalities towards instituting participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, they are pertinent to aid explain the degree to which officials within local municipalities perceive their competence towards ensuring residents easy access to accurate and timeous information through the use of information and communications technologies. That is to say, if the essence of instituting participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation is not recognised within local municipalities or a dearth of technical know-how exists among municipal officials, they may be less motivated, disengaged and unlikely to implement participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation as well as engage with innovative information and communication technologies to accelerate dissemination and access of information essential to enhance meaningful residents engagements in budgetary monitoring and evaluation, particularly as informed and empowered residents.

4. Defining Participatory Governance

Participatory governance, as defined by Lovan, Murray and Shaffer (2017) entails a governance strategy that seeks to empower citizens to utilise the resources of the state to make decisions on matters that directly concern them. Per Geibel and Heb (2018) participatory governance involves a regulatory framework in which the task of running public affairs is not solely entrusted to government and the public administration but include cooperation between state institutions and civil society groups. In this paper, therefore, participatory governance refers to the collection of institutional and organisational plans that inform, guide, and structure the interactions of residents and municipal officials to bring order, reduce conflict, and realise collective benefits in decision-making.

4.1. 'Placing' Participatory Governance within Budgetary Monitoring and Evaluation

The concept budgetary monitoring and evaluation constitute of three separate, interrelated and interdependent sub-components namely budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. Viewed in the context of the 'public' (related to government and the people), budgeting refers to a process mainly concerned with acquisition and utilisation of fiscal resources for meeting specific goals and/or purposes that are in the public interests (Holzer & Schwester, 2016; Lustig, 2018). Defined by Zwane and Mzini (2016:352) monitoring denotes a "routine, on-going, internal activity which is used to collect information on a programmes activities, outputs and outcomes to track its performance." Per Sikhosana and Nzewi

(2019:478) evaluation is a “systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results” intended to ascertain the relevance of the activity, assess the accomplishment of objectives, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability.

In this vein, the concept budgetary monitoring and evaluation as used in this paper, refers to an internal, continuous and systematic process which integrate the inputs and feedback of the public in gathering and analysing data on the outcomes and impact of budget utilisation. When implemented in budgetary monitoring and evaluation, participatory governance will give effect to the rights of local residents to be effectively engaged in influencing the decisions within municipal affairs particularly in promoting transparency and accountability in public fiscal utilisation. However, to achieve this endeavour there has to be a rethink and redefinition of the relationship between municipalities and local residents. Circumstances that sustain the exclusion and disregard of local residents’ views and inputs in budgetary monitoring and evaluation need to be understood, challenged and revised. However, this remains an essential gap in research literature that this paper seeks to address in order for local municipalities to deepen participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation.

5. In Search for The Meaning and Scope of Participatory Governance

According to Xixin and Yongle (2018) participatory governance appears to be a less understood area of governance. Per Marshall *et al.* (2021) it remains a grey area in literature and continues to be regarded as synonymous to participatory democracy and public participation. For instance, Muse (2016) relates participatory governance to participatory democracy and defines it as a form of democratic governance in which the interests and activities of the people are involved in the day to day running of government. Closely related, thereto, is the definition offered by Enaifoghe and Adetiba (2019) whereby participatory governance is put in the same purview as public participation. In this regard, participatory governance is considered to be a process through which the public become involved in agenda setting, decision making and policy formulation in an organisation. These myriad of meanings attached to participatory governance tends to overshadow its integral meaning and scope particularly in municipal governance systems.

However, Johnson (2013) contends that participatory governance is distinct from participatory democracy and public participation. This author indicates that participatory governance is more than mere or token participation. It is about constant and continuous deliberation, consultation and discussions with citizens with the end goal of ensuring their empowerment and enabling their oversight of decisions and actions of public officials. This view of what participatory governance actually entails differs from the interpretations offered by Muse (2016) and Sebola (2014). With that said, these differing views do not, in any way, consider the contributions made by these scholars as insignificant. They indicates, however, a gap in literature wherein participatory governance is defined and given meanings that are representative of the views of those tasked with putting strategies for its actual implementation. This implies that without adequate capture of perspectives of those representing local communities on what participatory governance actually means for them, it will continue to lack clarity and meaning for local communities. In this vein, it becomes imperative as this study suggests that efforts be expended towards revealing the manner in which participatory governance is understood within municipal governance structures. This endeavour is pertinent to this study as the researcher holds that soliciting the perspectives of both municipal officials and ward committee members on what actually participatory governance means will be essential to gaining in-depth understanding of how it is perceived in local municipalities.

6. International Perspectives on Participatory Governance

According to Carcaba *et al.* (2017) participatory governance should be integrated in the governance aspects of public institutions. This is so because participatory governance is an essential

component of good governance. However, Xixin and Yongle (2018) indicate that though participatory governance has long been recognised as an essentiality in governance structures across public institutions, its implementation and efficacy remain doubtful. Attributed to this paucity of effective implementation of participatory governance, as Johnson (2013) points out, is the limited understanding within public institutions governance structures on the distinction between participatory governance and mere consultation. More precisely, participatory governance is more than consultation or mere involvement in the affairs of public institutions. It is a multifaceted process that warrants that citizens are provided with pertinent information about the workings of public institutions (Dutu & Diaconu, 2017). Such information should be furnished to citizens with an expressed intent to empower them to better understand and become enlightened to take part in decision making processes. Thus, Govender and Ramodula (2020) further state that effective and meaningful participatory governance can only be truly realised in public institutions when the public begin to consider themselves, owing to being empowered, as in its true sense, as co-governors but not clients of the public institutions.

In this vein, Rajkotia and Gergen (2016) emphasises that participatory governance necessitates that citizens perceive themselves as stakeholders in public governance structures. That is, not as passive recipients of decision making processes that appear, at face value, to be soliciting their active involvement while covertly working against their need for empowerment. This is so because through citizens' effective and meaningful engagements in the affairs and decision making processes of public institutions, the support that the latter's decisions and resultant outcomes would receive shall undoubtedly be commendable (Enaifoghe & Adetiba, 2019). That is to say, as Gustafson and Hertting (2016) assert, participatory governance should be paired and implemented inextricably with empowerment.

This assertion accentuates that recognising and attending to the information and empowerment needs of residents must be given utmost priority if meaningful participatory governance is to be realised. Importantly, Altschuler and Corrales (2013) point out that though citizens were likely in the past to think of themselves as having no authority to engage in matters that impact on their lot, today they are more likely to think of themselves as co-owners of public institutions. While Enaifoghe and Adetiba (2019) are aware of the apparent dichotomy of citizens thinking of themselves as either co-owners or clients, mirrors only a half of the story. Hence, this study posits that the dearth of empirical data on the meanings that citizens ascribe to participatory governance, especially in the context of budgetary monitoring and evaluation is a great concern that warrants a systematic inquiry.

According to Xixin and Yongle (2018) issues of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation has become topical in public institutions in recent times. That is, it continues to engender considerable interests as the demands for accountability and transparency are ever-growing. Despite the growing public interests, an understanding of what the benefits of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation actually are diverges broadly and has become vastly subjective. Nonetheless, participatory governance is considered crucial towards giving citizens a voice and control over matters that has the potential to improve or change their lot. It is that dimension, as Carcaba *et al.* (2017) points out, through which citizens become aware of their need to make a difference.

7. Participatory Governance Post-1994: A South African Dimension

The emergence of participatory governance in the South African context was heralded by changes in systems of governance post-1994 democratic elections. Owing to the exclusion of citizens' engagement in the affairs of public institutions pre-democracy, entrenching participatory governance became a significant endeavour for the new public administration (Govender & Ramodula, 2020). Citizens' engagements in public institutions governance structures emerged as an ideal transformative mechanism to foster transparency and accountability in public institutions. This recognition of the essence of creating spaces for citizens engagement in governance structures, as Altschuler and Corrales (2013) suggest,

indicated a significant shift in paradigm from an top-down exclusionary approach to public governance towards a human-rights approach. Thus, Matebesi (2017) concurs that a move towards participatory governance in South African public institutions represented a monumental exercise that added a new dimension to the concept of participatory democracy.

According to Rajkotia & Gergen (2016) the acknowledgement of the significance of participatory governance meant that citizens' engagement in the affairs of the public institutions was to be integrated in all realms of governance. This is so because participatory governance had the potential to guide public decision making and ensure that citizens' voices are included in public decisions. To be more precise, Lekala (2019) assert that participatory governance was an innovative strategy to offer citizens opportunities to partake in public decision making in order to own up to the decisions taken and work diligently towards their implementations. Thus, participatory governance was perceived within the South Africa's public governance structures to be a suitable mechanism for empowering citizens.

However, Matebesi (2017) indicates that though participatory governance was expected to be entrenched within public institutions governance structure, there is still little known on how it is being implemented in the local sphere of government. This scarcity of information on its implementation in the local sphere of government should be a great concern considering the legal requirement for local government to institute participatory governance in matters of its governance. Thus, the nature and scope of participatory governance in local government, especially in local municipalities remains unknown. Skenjana, Kimemia and Afesis-Corplan (2017) consider this situation as problematic given that local municipalities, as the feet and legs of national government, are ideally positioned owing to their closeness to citizens to promote participatory governance.

7.1. Positioning Participatory Governance within the Local Sphere of Government

South Africa's local government had been the last sphere of government to undergo significant changes post the democratic dispensation. This sphere of government assumed a developmental mandate in its new role of being an implementing agent of the national policies (Taaibosch & Van Niekerk, 2017). Central to the changes in the nature of local government had been the concerted efforts by the national government's to foster responsiveness within municipalities (Tshoose, 2015). Thus, within their more inclusive, people-oriented and development-focused role, municipalities had to transform or evolve from focusing only on provision of basic services to changing their governance structures (Quick & Bryson, 2016). This transition was purported to eliminate barriers that prevent citizens from engaging meaningfully in the affairs and decision-making processes of municipalities. According to Matebesi and Botes (2017) this changes in the role of municipalities coincided with increased concerns and discontentment within communities regarding constant exclusions and suppression of their voices in municipal decision making processes. These challenges, as expressed by communities, were in contrast with the national government agenda to redress the injustices of the past which excluded the majority of citizens particularly Black Africans from actively and meaningfully engaging in public governance structures (Themba & Selepe, 2020).

Maropo (2018) indicates that the status quo within municipalities warranted a change amidst growing demands by citizens to be meaningfully engaged and have access to information on how municipal decisions are being made. Per Reddy (2018) this period marked a turning point in municipal governance. Aptly put, this era influenced a shift towards participatory governance with the promise of transparency, accountability and participation as its main core components (Ntliziywana, 2017). Importantly, participatory governance became a legislative requirement that citizens be positioned at the centre of all decision makings processes in municipalities. This repositioning of citizens engagements as a priority in decision making processes became an essential tenet of the developmental role municipalities had to adopt and integrate in their governance systems (Nkuna, 2016). Thus, the White Paper on Local

Government (1998) requires municipalities to commit themselves to working with residents in a quest to discover innovative ways to meet their empowerment needs. To achieve this objective, Maropo (2018) points out, that municipalities should collaborate with and make certain that residents are involved in municipal decisions making. However, Themba and Selepe (2020) states that the essence of collaborating with residents will not be sufficient within municipalities if it is not accompanied by concerted efforts to adopt and integrate mechanisms that are effective to promote such collaboration. On this note, participatory governance became a significant measure to promote meaningful collaboration between citizens and municipalities.

However, Matebesi (2017) notes that the shift within municipalities towards participatory governance has not achieved its intended outcomes. This is despite an emphasis which continues to garner momentum within local government for municipalities to transform towards more inclusive residents engagements. Of great concern, however, is that participatory governance seems not to be well understood as an essential measure to foster meaningful collaboration between citizens and municipalities within local government. This is consequent to the dearth of empirical data on how accurately are municipalities implementing participatory governance in their institutional systems. Nevertheless, Lekala (2019) contend that there appears to be insufficient comprehension within municipalities with regard to their developmental role in promoting participatory governance. As Matebesi (2017) further posits, it remains unknown whether the nature of changes the municipalities underwent resulted in significant changes in their power structures. In order to determine the effectiveness with which municipalities implement participatory governance in their decision making structures, Koma (2018) suggests that examination of the role of municipalities within their developmental framework particularly in promoting participatory governance in its affairs be undertaken.

7.2. The Significance of Participatory Governance in Municipal Governance Structures

Participatory governance is considered to have potential benefits for the overall governance in public institutions. When implemented effectively, Wilson *et al.* (2018) proposes that participatory governance could yield desired results for inclusive citizens' engagement and give legitimacy to public decisions. Per Weidenstedt (2017) inclusive citizens' engagements, as central to participatory governance, can enhance confidence in citizens to claim their rights while offering them opportunities, knowledge and capabilities to influence decisions that affect their lives. This is so because participatory governance is regarded as a synecdoche of good governance. More precisely, Gustafson and Hertting (2016) state that the essence of participatory governance is that it encourage the voices of citizens to be heard.

Furthermore, participatory governance has the benefit when implemented carefully and thoughtfully within municipal governance structures to foster transparency and accountability. Given Roelofs (2019) assertion that municipalities continue to fall short on achieving transparency and accountability, instituting participatory governance within their structures can help redress deficiencies in governance. However, there continues to be little knowledge within South Africa's local municipalities on what benefits and significance is attached to participatory governance. With this dearth of empirical data on either the perceived and actual benefits of participatory governance for local municipalities, ascertaining the effectiveness of efforts expended towards realising the benefits of participatory governance in local municipalities will continue to prove challenging for communities being served.

7.3. Participatory Governance as an Empowerment Avenue

Gustafson and Hertting (2016) perceive participatory governance as inextricably linked to empowerment. This view is shared by Modise (2017) who indicates that participatory governance cannot be dissociated from its empowerment nature. In this vein, participatory governance cannot be considered effective and meaningful if it does not seek to consciously bring about improvement in citizens understanding of the state of affairs in their municipalities. This signifies, as Gustafson and Hertting

(2016) suggest, that the institutionalisation of participatory governance in municipal governance systems should be directed towards enhancing citizens' capabilities to actively engage in, negotiate with, influence and hold accountable municipal officials pertaining to decisions taken which are in the public interests. However, Chaudhuri (2016) argues that, in as much as participatory governance continues to be implemented haphazardly and left up to chance in public institutions, its essence in empowering citizens to exercise sufficient oversight will have no deep implications. This is so because the inextricable nature of participatory governance and empowerment seems to be a greatly contested ideal in municipalities.

However, Muse (2016) indicates that barriers that impede empowerment of citizens to engage meaningfully in the affairs and decision making processes of municipalities are countless. They include the dearth of easier access to information pertinent to municipal decisions making (Marais, Quayle & Burns, 2017); perceptions among municipal officials and public representatives of the essence of inclusive decisions making and non-compliance to legislative requirements for including citizens in municipal governance systems (Matebesi & Botes, 2017). These barriers, as Taaibosch and van Niekerk (2017) points out, are detrimental to affording citizens with opportunities to act as co-governors and partners in decisions as well as initiatives that seek to entrench their engagements with municipalities.

Per Ntliziywana (2017) this situation prevents citizens from attaining requisite skills and competencies critical for their contribution to the common public good within municipal governance. Further, it is in contrast with the increasing demands by citizens to be capacitated to influence their future through unrestricted but legitimised access to decision-making processes in their local municipalities. Nevertheless, Quick and Bryson (2016) state that opportunities for citizens engagements are seldom offered within municipalities owing to perceptions of citizens not been adequately skilled to comprehend and add value to decisions and processes through which such decisions are made.

7.4. Situating Participatory Governance within Budgetary Monitoring and Evaluation

Budgetary monitoring and evaluation remains a significant tenet of municipal functionality (Fourie, 2019). As an essential phase in the public budgeting process, central to budgetary monitoring and evaluation is the need to ensure that public money is utilised effectively, efficiently and economically. Pauw *et al.* (2009:1-3) defines public money as "money which is owned publicly, in the context of the state and to which benefit the public is entitled." With this being said, municipalities are invariably anticipated to execute their assigned expenditure responsibilities financed through public money with as little wastage and misappropriation as possible (Auditor-General, 2018-19). Further, the municipalities should ensure that the outcomes for which the public money received were intended for are constantly monitored and evaluated. However, the shocking state in which municipalities' finances are currently raises great concern for local communities who continues to bear the brunt for substandard services delivery consequent to evidenced misappropriation of public funds in municipalities (Ncgobo & Malefane, 2017).

Owing to this situation, municipalities have seen a rise in demands for transparency and accountability in how public money and subsequent decisions informing its utilisation are made. As Glasser and Wright (2020) accurately puts it, citizens are constantly demanding to know where the money goes and to what benefit has the public money been to improving their welfare through effective services rendered. Thus, Ncgobo and Malefane (2017) further adds that citizens demands for meaningful engagements in budgetary monitoring and evaluation can no longer be regard as optional for municipalities. This situation implies, as Sikhosana and Nzewi (2019) suggest, that municipalities should treat citizens engagements in budgetary monitoring and evaluation as an essentiality whose perpetual ignorance undermines the very nature of citizens inclusion in municipal decisions making. In this vein, the significant role of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation becomes even more important.

According to Muthomi & Thurmaier (2021) the institutionalisation of participatory governance within the context of budgetary monitoring and evaluation is crucial to enabling citizens to exercise oversight and enforce accountability to ensure efficacious use of public money. However, Kumagai, Sruti and Helene (2019) indicate that little research has been undertaken to explore the nature and scope for citizens' inclusion in budgetary monitoring and evaluation. Further, there is dearth of empirical information on the benefits that citizens' inclusion in budgetary monitoring and evaluation processes provides for citizens and municipalities alike. Consequentially, the budgetary monitoring and evaluation black-box appears to remain closed for citizens to see and know how it works.

8. Research Methodology

The aim of the study was to examine the effectiveness of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation in the information age in Fetakgomo-Tubatse Local Municipality. The local municipality of Fetakgomo-Tubatse, which was the focal point of this study, is a category B municipality formed by the dissolution and merger with the Fetakgomo Local Municipality. The objectives were to assess municipal officials and ward committee members' understanding of participatory governance and its significance in the context of municipal governance; examine the scope and purpose of budgetary monitoring and evaluation; develop an in-depth understanding of the benefits and barriers linked with implementing participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation; develop insights into the efficacy of information dissemination and accessibility regarding the outcomes and impact of budgetary monitoring and evaluation and the degree of ICTs utilisation to enhance timeous dissemination and accessibility of the information. To achieve the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated to guide the collection of primary research data: What do municipal officials and committee members understand about participatory governance and its importance in the context of municipal governance? What is the scope and purpose of budgetary monitoring and evaluation as implemented in Fetakgomo-Tubatse Local Municipality? What are the benefits and barriers associated with implementing participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation? How effective is the dissemination and accessibility of information on the outcomes and impact of budgetary monitoring and evaluation? What is the level of ICT use to improve the timely dissemination and accessibility of the information?

A pragmatic epistemological approach was adopted by the researcher to capture the participants' understanding of the complex nature of the phenomenon (i.e. participatory governance) under investigation. Without being limited to the use of a particular research method, the researcher focused on what approaches or procedures would work best in understanding the perspectives of the participants. Thus, the participants perspectives could not be isolated from their situations and the specificities of the setting in which they occurred, a condition in which pragmatic epistemology was most appropriate. A convergent mixed method case study research design chosen by the researcher enabled the collection of first-hand descriptive information about the participants' experiences as well as numerical explanatory data about their perceptions of the effectiveness of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation as implemented in the local municipality. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods in this study helped to overcome the limitations of using either method alone, resulting in more comprehensive and complementary data that improved an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied and helped to elaborate and clarify the key findings.

8.1. Methodology

The selection of two groups of participants, municipal officials and ward committee members was conducted through the use of non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Primary research data were collected from ten ward committee members and eight municipal officials using a self-administered semi-structured questionnaire and face-to-face semi-

structured interviews. The participants were involved with the Fetakgomo-Tubatse Local Municipality's Public Participation Unit, Local Economic Development and Transformation Department and Integrated Development Plan Unit. The municipal officials were full-time employees (not on a learnership, internship, or apprenticeship) with more than two years of experience in their respective positions. The selected ward committee members had served on the local municipality's ward committee for more than a year. Four interviews with municipal officials were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, while four others were not due to participants' reluctance to provide consent to be audio-recorded. Only one distributed semi-structured questionnaire was not returned, therefore the response rate for completed and returned semi-structured questionnaires was 90%. A research data management plan was developed and implemented to ensure appropriate handling of the research data and protection against unauthorised access by persons not directly involved in the study. When providing verbatim quotations, pseudonyms were used to de-identify and anonymise the participants' real identities. The data was analysed using a seven-stage mixed method data analysis framework developed by Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie (2003).

The researcher used the epistemological standards devised by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to demonstrate rigor (establish trustworthiness) in the study's processes and findings. These standards include credibility (truth value), dependability (consistency), confirmability (neutrality), and transferability (applicability). The data gathering protocols developed by the researcher were pilot tested to confirm the truth value. Peer debriefing was also done to allow for questions and critiques of the research process and activities, as well as cross-checking of the obtained and analysed data with the conclusions reached. By allowing an independent postgraduate candidate to analyse, critique, and validate the selected themes and descriptors against the transcribed material, the researcher assured dependability. The researcher used reflexivity and bracketing to continuously check probable bias and ensure that the researcher's subjective opinions did not enter into the data, resulting in confirmability. In order to determine the transferability of the findings, thorough explanations of the study setting were provided, including the sampling techniques and criteria used to select the participants.

9. Discussion of Findings

The key findings of the study are based on the themes and sub-themes that emerged from an in-depth analysis of the data collected. The results report on the participants' understanding of participatory governance and its importance in the context of municipal governance. In addition, they delve into the scope and purpose of budgetary monitoring and evaluation as implemented in the Fetakgomo-Tubatse local community, revealing insights into the perceived benefits and barriers associated with implementing participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation. Determination of the effectiveness of information dissemination and accessibility on the outcomes and impact of budgetary monitoring and evaluation was carried out, including the use of ICT to improve the ease of information dissemination and accessibility.

9.1. Understanding Participatory Governance and its Importance in the Context of Municipal Governance

Results showed that participants closely associated participatory governance with active resident engagement, mutual consultation, collaborative partnership and co-governance. Regardless of the participants' responses in this regard, there seems to be uncertainty about the contextual meaning of participatory governance, particularly in relation to municipal governance. Some participants indicated that:

“The primary role of municipalities is to serve their residents...to succeed in this endeavour, they should not treat residents as their clients but should regard them as co-owners of the institutions...and the residents must become actively engaged in its [municipalities] affairs.”

“There should be reciprocal relationship and consultations between the municipality and its residents...particularly when it comes to issues of governance...so participatory governance to me equate to a process of reciprocal consultation between [municipal] officials and the residents.”

“In my opinion, there is no difference between participatory governance and co-governance...I mean, at the centre of each of them is the need for residents to be involved in the control of the municipality.”

Participants' understanding of participatory governance as a concept and practice is largely based on knowledge acquired through political engagement rather than through in-service training, supervision, continuous professional development and professional/academic training. The lack of adequate understanding among participants of what participatory governance entails is attributed to the lack of context-specific practice guidelines developed by the local community to guide and inform their knowledge. However, the participants were able to explain the importance of participatory governance in the context of municipal governance. According to the interpreted data, the importance of participatory governance is based on the need to empower residents for active citizenship; promote responsiveness and transparency; strengthening the accountability of officials; prevent self-aggrandisement over the public good and improve oversight over executive decision-making. Some of the participants declared that:

“Should there have been no tendencies of veils of secrecy in how certain decisions are being taken within the municipal governance structures...our people would have no need to rise up to protest.”

“...across the many municipalities, officials are increasingly attempting to become a law unto themselves...they often do as they wish, disregarding their obligations to be answerable to the residents who placed them into office.”

“...left to govern on their own [municipal officials], they may be more than likely to subvert the interests of the residents...an undesirable situation which should be prevented through the residents becoming watchdogs.”

9.2. Scope and Purpose of Budgetary Monitoring and Evaluation as Implemented in the Municipality

When examining the scope and purpose of budgetary monitoring and evaluation as implemented in the Fetakgomo-Tubatse local municipality, it was found that its implementation is limited to making decisions about spending and allowing performance to be tracked against set targets. These results indicate that budgetary monitoring and evaluation is viewed in the local municipality as an activity aimed at demonstrating compliance with public finance legislation. Similarly, the research findings show that the goal of budgetary monitoring and evaluation in the setting of the local municipality is to reduce waste and misappropriation of funds, as well as to promote transparency and accountability in the use of public funds entrusted to the municipality. Some of the participants indicated that:

“Budgetary monitoring and evaluation serves no any other purpose than to inform decisions on the local municipality's expenditure.”

“Budgetary monitoring and evaluation is a helpful process for determining whether the funds given to the municipality did what they were planned and allocated for...which is important to tell if the funds have been wasted or misappropriate.”

However, it appears that the budgetary monitoring and evaluation process as a crucial feedback loop for providing local residents with information on the process outcomes and impact, as well as establishing trust and legitimacy of the subsequent decisions informed by and emanating from the process, is being given little priority. Because of the absence of human capacity with competence in information and knowledge management, information provided to local residents about the outcomes and impact of budgetary monitoring and evaluation falls far short of their expectations. In this vein, some participants indicated that:

“...unless they [municipal officials] engage in the processes of re-skilling on these matters to correctly understanding what needs to be done and which is the best way to do so...then we must just forget about expecting them to do a good job”

“Some of them have been there [with the local municipality] for many years...they are just using their experience and this is very dangerous because the tools [ways of doing things] they used and succeeded ten years ago may not be relevant for today’s situation.”

9.3. Perceived Benefits and Barriers Linked with Implementing Participatory Governance in Budgetary Monitoring and Evaluation

The interpreted data show a greater awareness of the perceived benefits of implementing participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation. These benefits include the need to monitor officials' decisions; ensuring effective execution of their assigned responsibilities related to the effective, efficient and economical use of public finances and promoting transparency (openness) and accountability. These perceived benefits as mentioned by the participants are not realised in the context of the local municipality due to the barriers encountered. The lack of implementation (practice) guidelines; insufficiently capacitated (skilled) personnel; lack of appreciation of the importance of participatory governance across municipal governance structures; delayed willingness to strengthen its implementation in budgetary monitoring and evaluation; inactive citizenry and apathy stemming from declining interests towards active engagements in municipal decision-making processes and occurrences are some of the cited barriers. Some participants declared that:

“There should be guidelines enacted at the strategic management echelons of the municipality to aid in the appropriate implementation of participatory governance...without them [the guidelines] it is difficult to assess how good we are doing in this regard.”

“We [public participation officials] are understaffed but endeavour to do our utmost best with the little human resource capacity we have. Though we are often limited in the scope of what we are able to do, we do not always succeed but significant strides are being made.”

9.4. Efficacy of Information Dissemination and Accessibility on the Outcomes and Impact of Budgetary Monitoring and Evaluation

Given the importance of information dissemination and accessibility on the outcomes and impact of budgetary monitoring and evaluation, this study discovered a lack of responsiveness and growing dissatisfaction with the local municipality's information dissemination mechanisms. The print records (booklets and leaflets) of the local municipality's summaries of information, which are kept at municipal offices and government offices in the area, limit the information's wider accessibility. Because of their low levels of functional literacy, the usage of the English language in the compilation of the information, as well as the descriptive statistical (numerical) character of the information provided, the information is incomprehensible to the local residents. The lack of a timely response to the information obstructs its significance and usability in terms of empowering local residents to participate in budgetary monitoring

and evaluation processes in an informed, purposeful, and meaningful way, as well as pursuing accountability on the part of municipal officials. Some of the participants indicated that:

“There should be significant improvements in how the information is given...even though we are able to place print copies at important nodal points within the proximity of the local residents including clinics and other state buildings, few of the residents are able to recognise them [information booklets].”

“The use of the English language is at times an impediment because almost 82.2% of our people speak Sepedi and of these people only 24.3% has matric and almost 16.0% have no formal schooling...so they are less likely to understand the information contained in the leaflets and booklets being distributed for their attention.”

“By virtue of the information being statistically descriptive in nature, it renders itself more likely not to be understood by a less trained eye...I mean for persons with limited technical knowledge of basic accounting or statistics...the information may be less meaningful and unusable to know how the finances have been used and what impact they have had.”

9.5. ICTs Utilisation in Enhancing the Ease of Information Dissemination and Accessibility

Participants, on the other hand, rated the usage of ICTs as crucial in improving the ease of information dissemination and accessibility. However, the study found that the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support timely dissemination and accessibility of information on the outcomes and impact of budgetary monitoring and evaluation in the local municipality has a slow uptake and delayed receptivity. The increased prevalence of digital divide in the local municipality; increased susceptibility of ICTs usage to hacking; proneness to misuse by persons with malicious and ulterior motives; and legal implications associated with ICTs utilisation in disseminating information on the outcomes and impact of budgetary monitoring and evaluation are among the factors that discourage receptivity and use of ICTs to enhance the dissemination and accessibility of information on the outcomes and impact of budgetary monitoring and evaluation in the local municipality. In this regard, some of the participants indicated that:

“Having used ICTs myself, I am aware of the myriad of benefits that abound in using them especially in distributing information to many people in no time...but I am not really aware of how, for instance, the municipality can use ICTs at a larger scale to disseminate information on budgetary monitoring and evaluation outcomes because their usage also have serious limitations and are vulnerable to hacking.”

“The digital divide and the absence of reliable and affordable internet connections remain a major challenge which may be faced by both the municipality and local residents...because most of them [local residents] are not adequately internet connected. Be that as it may, the usage of ICTs should be further explored as the need for their usage remains an inescapable future for this municipality.”

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings revealed a dearth of clearly articulated and coherent context-specific practice guidelines to inform and guide participatory governance implementation. Due to a lack of coherent guidelines, different interpretations are attributed to the notion and practice of participatory governance, making it difficult to achieve clarity on its true contextual meaning and utility. Insufficient understanding of the utility of participatory governance and its relevance in the context of municipal governance is

attributed to a lack of best practice guidelines that should serve as sources of knowledge for municipal officials. The limited scope of budgetary monitoring and evaluation processes, whose major focus is regarded by participants to be only on informing expenditure decisions and enabling performance tracking against defined municipal targets, has serious implications for inclusive residents' engagements. The lack of human capacity with competence in information and knowledge management adds to the budgetary monitoring and evaluation process receiving little attention as a feedback loop to provide residents with timely information on the procedure's outcomes and impact. Due to barriers that impede its efficacious implementation, the perceived benefits associated with the implementation of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation have not prompted the local municipality to foster its effective implementation and actualisation of associated benefits. The descriptive statistical nature, modes of dissemination used, and language utilised in its compilation have a negative impact on the ease of access, comprehensibility, and usability of information on the outcomes and impact of budgetary monitoring and evaluation in the pursuit of transparency and accountability. The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is not being fully explored and exploited in order to improve local residents' timely and effective access to information on budgetary monitoring and evaluation outcomes and impacts. As a result, this study revealed that in the context of Fetakgomo-Tubatse Local Municipality, participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation in an information age appears to be ineffectual.

In the case of the local municipality of Fetakgomo-Tubatse, recommendations are proposed to improve the effectiveness of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation in the information age. To inform and guide municipal officials' understanding and knowledge of participatory governance, context-specific guidelines must be developed and disseminated. The availability of the guidelines will help provide clarity about the contextual meaning and practice of participatory governance, as well as its utility in the context of municipal governance. In addition, the guidelines must indicate appropriate ways to improve the implementation of participatory governance in budgetary monitoring and evaluation processes and decisions. There should be an expansion in the scope of budgetary monitoring and evaluation to facilitate and provide meaningful opportunities for inclusive residents' engagements. The meaningful engagement of residents in budgetary monitoring and evaluation processes and decisions, particularly through the timely provision of easily accessible and understandable information, is critical to building trust in the process and gaining legitimacy for its subsequent decisions. Re-assessment of the methods of information dissemination used should be conducted to determine their effectiveness in providing residents with accurate and easily understandable information on the outcomes and impact of budgetary monitoring and evaluation decisions. Given the financial constraints faced by the local municipality, it can be difficult to hire new officials with expertise in information and knowledge management. It is therefore recommended that retraining of officials involved in budgetary monitoring and evaluation processes be carried out, to help them acquire sufficient information and knowledge management skills to support prioritisation of the budgetary monitoring and evaluation process, as a feedback loop to timeously proffer residents with the information they need.

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