Chapter 1
Grounding Community and Urban Governance Through Ward Committees at eThekwini, Durban, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

South Africa is premised on the democratic principles of local governance, decentralized service delivery, and development. Although ward committees do not have any executive power, they are regarded as key linking micro structures between communities and the municipality, respectively. In this chapter, ward committees are perceived as the community elected and legislated structures institutionalized to entrench local governance and accelerate decision making more particularly in services delivery and development at ward community level. The author argues that the effectiveness of ward committee structures depends on the interface of five elements: participation, representation, accountability, deliberation, and collective action. This is a qualitative empirical chapter and the data are solicited through the use of research instruments such journals, government documents, and some selected interviews with ward councilors and ward committees in 110 wards at eThekwini Municipality

INTRODUCTION

Post-apartheid local government is constitutionally assigned a democratic and developmental role which requires this sphere of government to render services and promote local governance. Scholars of local government such as Amtaika (2013), Picard & Mogale (2015) and Maharaj & Reddy (2008, 2015) categorise the roles of local government into utilitarian and civic duties. The utilitarian role, according to Amtaika (2013, p. 3), has to do with service delivery while civic duty deals with the promotion of citizen participation in local democracy. Accordingly, municipalities do not only deliver public services, but are also commissioned to preserve life and liberty through creating space for democratic participation and

civic dialogue (Shah, 2006, p. 2). In this regard, De Vries (2015, p. 67) argues that local government is purposed to effectively and efficiently deliver services and further provide a forum for citizen input into service delivery, geared towards enhancing its quality. As an equal government partner, local government is charged with the responsibilities of creating a conducive environment within which local citizens can exercise the Freedom Charter phrase 'the people shall govern' Mogale (2003, p. 219), working within the developmental framework, contends that local government is premised on linking development, service delivery and local citizen participation. As a decentralised sphere, local government is a political decision-making structure where citizens are provided with a platform for participation and it can be used as a vehicle to hold politicians transparent and accountable (Amatiaka, 2013, p. 48). In addition to these roles, Kroukamp & Lues (2008, p.126) postulate that local government is also charged with the responsibility of stimulating local economic development.

The failure to uphold the roles stipulated in the Constitutions and other local government legislations cascaded into the numerous deficiencies which have resulted in service delivery strikes (Duncan 2015 & Runciman, 2017). Thus, poor service delivery, as highlighted by scholars and government reports, should be understood within the broader challenges faced by local government in general. These challenges range from poor implementation of policies, the legacy of autocratic and bureaucratic apartheid local government (Ismail, Bayat and Meyer, 1997), and a lack of administrative capacity and co-ordination (Tapscott, 2008). Tshishonga (2015, p. 169) adds that the challenge faced by the local government is to bring democracy and development into the local sphere through citizen participation. Despite the local democratic processes inherent in the new local government system, residents of a municipality might still be alienated from it due to local government's incapacity to deliver basic services (South African Cities Network, 2004, p. 136; Mogale, 2003, p. 226). According to Reddy and Maharaj (2008, p. 70), the challenge of service delivery is daunting considering that demand for service exceeds the resources available. Local government's failure to fulfil its mandate and perform effectively has led to the widespread disillusionment which results when communities lose trust in institutions (Tapscott 2008, p. 226). Thus, people's distrust of local government has led to a 'democratic deficit' and 'participation fatigue'. Tapscott (2008, p. 226) argues that these challenges indicate that people are 'growing tired with the rhetoric of participation and empowerment without any material gain'. These predicaments are further aggravated by the non-compliance of politicians and officials with municipal by-laws and a breakdown of communication between the local polity and its constituency (ibid, p. 229).

According to Sikhakhane & Reddy (2011, p. 85), one of the major challenges faced by municipalities in South Africa is a lack of quality service delivery and accountability. Service delivery entails the provision of the basic necessities required by the citizens of municipalities to survive socially and economically and live a decent life. The delivery of sustainable services (such as water, electricity, houses, etc.) depends on the enactment of the developmental mode of local government. Van der Waldt (2007, p. 34) argues that such a framework also depends on responsible and accountable municipal functionaries, as well as good relations between them and the local citizenry. Smit & Cronje (2002, p. 192) further argue that the concept of accountability, whether political, legal or professional, demands responsible employees to account for the outcomes, both positive and negative. However, most scholars argue that 'service delivery' protests are often symbolic of non-functioning local government (Atkinson, 2007, Tshishonga, 2015). Protests in South Africa are a legacy of the resistance struggle against apartheid separate development and imposed local authorities. Service delivery protests have become a debated phenomenon. The service delivery protests are multifaceted. Atkinson (2007, p. 53) reported that 2005 saw mass protests, marches demonstrations, petitions and violent confrontations in many towns. The

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