

AN EVALUATION OF THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY BASED PLANNING IN INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING PROCESS IN UMJINDI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

T. Moyo and S.S. Madlopha
University of Limpopo

ABSTRACT

Community Based Planning (CBP) was adopted in 2009 by the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (DCOGTA). This methodology is aimed at enable local government to deepen democracy by allowing citizens to be active participants in their own development. It was also to enable communities to participate in the Integrated Development Planning Process (IDP) and its related budgeting processes so that their priority developmental needs would be taken on board. Potentially therefore, an effective CBP machinery is one of the mechanisms that can advance the goals of developmental local government. This paper is concerned about the apparent 'disconnect' between CBP and the IDP/budgeting process in the case of the Umjindi Municipality in Mpumalanga Province, a situation that calls into question, the very notion of developmental local government. Based on a comprehensive field study in which community members and municipal officials were interviewed, it was observed that indeed, a 'disconnect' exists. It was also evident that, even though there is some *semblance* of community engagement by the Municipality, in reality, the community is marginalised or excluded from the IDP budgeting processes that are so central to making development happen. It was also found that the modalities of the IDP/budgeting processes have become more complex and more removed from the community to an extent where political and economic considerations lead to priorities being placed elsewhere and not community development. Part of the problem was the weak capacity of ward committees to influence the IDP process and to negotiate adoption of CBP priorities. In order to resolve the 'disconnect', the paper strongly recommends that the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (DCOGTA)

should add, as part of the performance indicators for local government, mandatory inclusion of key CBP development priorities into the IDP/budgeting processes. The Department should also invest in capacity building of ward committee members in order to strengthen their negotiating capacity so to ensure integration of CBP development priorities into IDPs and budget allocations.

Keywords: Community Based Planning, Developmental Local Government, Community Participation, Community Mobilisation, Community Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

As mandated under Section 152 of the South African Constitution (1996), local government is expected to play a developmental role by maximising both social development and economic growth for the betterment of all citizens. The concept of developmental local government therefore has its genesis in the Constitution. It is defined as 'local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives' (RSA, 1998: 23). Such a definition places communities at the centre of development, calling for their active involvement in the design and delivery of developmental programmes. Integrated development planning, budgeting and performance management are identified as the primary tools/approaches for developmental local government (ibid). These critical elements, approaches and outcomes of developmental local government are legislated through the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) and the Municipal Finance Management Act. All these aspects were supposed to be addressed through the new dispensation of planning. Community Based Planning (CBP) was adopted by

the National Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (DCOGTA) in 2009, following a pilot study on 8 local municipalities between the years 2001 to 2003 conducted countrywide (AICDD and Development Works: 2006). It is a methodology which seeks to allow local government to deepen democracy even further by allowing citizens to be active participants in their own development.

Williams (2006:197) defines community participation as the direct involvement or engagement of ordinary people in the affairs of planning, government and overall development programmes at local or grassroots level. CBP has been advocated in local government, mainly to improve quality of the plans, quality of the service and community's control over development (International Institute for Environment and Development Report: 2004: 44). Other expected benefits include; i) strengthening ownership of planning process and outcomes; ii) unlocking stakeholder value and support for development initiatives; iii) increasing transparency and accountability for local development processes; and iv) increasing investment growth within local authority itself (CCDS: 2012: iii). The paper investigates the problem that, despite the policy intention of linking community empowerment and redistribution to development, community engagement in municipal planning and budgeting processes remain riddled with challenges (DCOGTA, 2009:18). This could arguably be attributed to the fact that whereas the IDP as the principal strategic planning instrument of the municipality has developed over the years both in process and as a product, CBP has remained largely experimental and delinked from the IDP/budgeting process. Another dimension of the problem is that, whereas there has been extensive research on the IDP (Hlongwane, 2010; Myeza, 2009) and its relation to public participation (Van Rooyen, 2009), there has been no systematic review of the role of CBP in the IDP/budgeting processes in a local municipality. This is the gap that the study tried to close.

The research gap on the CBP is confirmed by Maselwanyana (2007:27) who contends that in the past, planning was very technical in nature, with little or no participation from other role-players such as communities. The author also argues that it planning was unconcerned about the social and economic dimensions of development such as poverty alleviation, social health and welfare. Instead, it furthered the aims of the apartheid dispensation which were to promote special and racially

segregated, social and economic development. Thus, even though CBP was conceived, as (Chimbuya and Goldman 2004) note, as a methodology to increase the participation of communities in planning, it remains idealistic. The paper therefore aims to evaluate the role of the CBP in IDP process of Umjindi Municipality in Mpumalanga. Its specific objectives are two-fold. Firstly, to examine the concept of CBP and its application in the municipality under study. Secondly, to evaluate the relationship between the CBP and the IDP. Thirdly how it influences the effectiveness of CBP. The rationale for the study was to try and explain why, despite the developmental mandate of local government, communities are not making strides in terms of social and economic development, particularly in rural and semi-rural communities.

It is based on a case study research which was conducted in the Umjindi Municipality in Mpumalanga Province. The key research questions that were investigated were: What is the role of CBP in the IDP/Budget process? What is the nature, character and practice of CBP? and what is the relationship between CBP and the IDP? Based on the premise that community based planning (CBP) was introduced to bridge the divide between the meso-(municipal) and micro- (community) levels of planning as outlined by Chimbuya and Goldman (2004) and to consolidate community-driven development, the paper tries to assess the extent to which there is synergy and a functional relationship between CBP and IDP/budget processes.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

A qualitative research method was used in order to investigate the dynamics of the relationship between CBP and the IDP and how those influence the effectiveness of the CBP. Specifically, a case study approach was adopted by focusing the study on the experiences of a particular municipality, namely, the Umjindi Municipality as indicated. Leedy and Ormrod (2010:94) argue that qualitative research involves looking at characteristics, or qualities, that cannot easily be reduced to numerical values' and 'typically aims to examine the many nuances and complexities of a particular phenomenon'. Indeed, the role of CBP in the IDP/Budgeting process is too complex, and multifaceted phenomena to be quantified in numerical values, at least if richer insights are to be generated. Froggatt (2001:433) also add that in qualitative research, it is assumed that reality is

socially constructed and not objectively given. The aim of qualitative research is to explore underlying social processes and value in their particular social context, to lay open the individuals' experiences and inferred meanings. The population of the study consisted of councillors and ward committees, and the political offices/departments responsible for IDP, budget and/or CBP within the Umjindi Local Municipality. A small sample of 30 was purposively selected from that population. Semi-structured interviews were used to interview the secretaries or chairpersons of all nine ward committees in the municipality. The aim of the interviews was to gather community perceptions and perspectives on CBP/IDP/budget processes. It should be noted that ward committees are the structure which is established through Municipal Systems Act 2000 Act, chapter 4 at a local government level to represent the community at large in all matters of development. The ward committee is constituted by all formations within a specific ward, i.e. civil society, none profit organisation, business formations, etc. All participants were informed in writing that participation was voluntary. They were also assured that they would be protected from unwarranted physical or mental discomfort, distress, harm, danger or deprivation of any kind. They were also assured that all correspondence as well as the information which they shared, would be treated with the professionalism and that in the final reporting and dissemination of the findings, their names would not be disclosed. In order to analyse the data, content analysis was applied. Neuman (2000:292) define content analysis as a technique of gathering and analysing the content of text, where text refers to the words, meaning, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes or any message that can be communicated. Stemler (2001) also advocates the use of this method because it is a 'systematic and replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding'.

In this study, content analysis was applied by examining the community based plans of each ward and assessing which of their priority issues were subsequently incorporated in the IDP of the municipality and the extent to which they were ultimately implemented. The study was carried out in the Umjindi Local Municipality, one of five local municipalities under Ehlanzeni District Municipality, located in the southern low veld of Mpumalanga Province. The area is 174 771 ha with a population 67 156 persons (Statistics South Africa, 2011).

3. DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT, INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLANNING (IDP) AND COMMUNITY BASED PLANNING (CBP)

Integrated development planning is based on the theory of decentralized governance. Sikander (2015:175) explains it by pointing out that 'a significant dispersal of power away from the centre, by extending choice, encouraging initiative and innovation, and enhancing active participation, is likely to do more for the quality of government and the health of democracy than its centralization and concentration'. Decentralized governance enables people to participate more directly in governance processes and can empower people previously excluded from decision making. By allowing local communities and regional entities to manage their own affairs and through facilitating closer contacts between central and local authorities, decentralization enable more responses to people's needs and priorities and makes development more sustainable through genuine ownership (Sikander 2015:174). In the context of decentralised governance, the IDP seeks to promote representative democracy as well as development at the local level. Developmental local government is local government that is committed to 'work with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives' (RSA, 1998: 23). Integrated Development Planning (IDP) is the tool that local government uses in identifying, designing and implementing development programmes in order to meet the needs of a municipality. The IDP was designed to be participatory in terms of involving all stakeholders.

As observed by Harrison, Todes and Watson (2008) as cited in Edoun (2012:103), it is 'a participatory approach that integrates economic, sectoral, spatial, social, institutional, environmental and fiscal strategies in order to support the optimal allocation of scarce resources between sectors and geographical areas and across the population in a manner that provides sustainable growth, equity and the empowerment of the poor and the marginalised'. Clearly, by virtue of its implied developmental agenda, the IDP has to be a participatory process that should actively involve communities who are or should be the ultimate beneficiaries of local development processes.

The CBP would allow municipalities to give greater effect to the requirements of the White Paper and the

Municipal Systems Act, 2000. Rietbergen-McCracken (2003:4) view 'participatory' development as participation in development. Mansuri and Rao (2003:3) emphasize that the ultimate goal of CBP is to reverse existing power relations in order to create agency and give voice to the poor, while allowing the poor to have more control over developmental issues. Based on their extensive experience in community development in South Africa, Chimbuya and Goldman (2004) share a similar perspective and emphasize that CBP is about enabling community participation in planning so as to improve the quality of plans, of services, and of improving the ability of communities to act in support of their own development. Maselwanyana (2007:28) explains that, in terms of policy, an IDP should be informed by the community for example, on issues such as the effective use of scarce resources acceleration of service delivery through municipal funding directed to the least serviced and most impoverished areas. It is therefore clear from the above that there should be synergy between the IDP and CBP. In such a context, and as argued by Koma (2012:58), the role of local government is to exercise the kind of political leadership which is able to bring together coalitions and networks of local interest towards a shared vision. In essence, the integration of CBP into the IDP process is about forging a shared development vision where communities present their priority development issues and then municipalities, as institutional vehicles for delivery, should utilise the IDP to prioritise, budget for and implement those developmental priorities.

According to Gumbo (2009:5), community based planning requires that the municipality should have a conceptualised plan which all stakeholders should be informed of. The process of developing the ward plan is very much similar and related to the IDP planning process. The community plan also goes through the phase of identifying challenges, formulating a vision, mission and strategies to deal with the challenges, identifying projects to implement, integrating the projects with other social and economic goals of on-going development processes and finally, getting the plan approved. There was evidence that all the above phase was followed by the municipality in developing their ward based plans which then later on informed the final IDP's. Each ward plan prepared a budget allocation that reflected resource requirements for their plans.

Despite the many positive perspectives on CBP, the model is not without its critics. As explained in

Mason and Beard (2008:246), some critics argue that participatory models have failed to deliver the progressive and social transformative outcomes promised by their proponents. From the literature review that is outlined above, some fundamental issues emerge. Firstly, there is a strong theoretical underpinning that ideally, CBP ought to be an integral part of the integrated development planning process and that therefore, there has to be a strong and functional synergy between municipalities and communities. Secondly, such synergy is fundamental to the achievement of the developmental goal of local government given that constitutionally, this sphere of government was designed to deliver such a mandate. Thirdly, and by implication, the success of local government in fulfilling its developmental mandate has to be measured by, among other criteria, the extent to which it fosters effective CBP and integrates the developmental priorities of the communities that it serves.

4. THE 'DISCONNECT' BETWEEN IDP AND THE CBP

One of the fundamental issues that emerge from the literature review above is the dichotomy between the ideal and the real. This raises the fundamental question as to why reality turns out to be quite different, if not radically so, from such an ideal. Could this be due to what Govender, Khan and Moodley (2007:69) allude to in their observation that 'globally, there is a growing gap between the poor and institutions of government; that while the range of institutions that play important roles in poor people's lives is vast, poor people are excluded from participation in government'. While such a statement requires further empirical analysis and verification, suffice to say, there is concern about this 'disconnect' between institutions of government and the people who are both governed and who also should rightfully participate in and benefit from effective governance systems. In the context of South Africa, Williams (2006:201), tries to explain this dissonance by arguing that the Constitution does not identify clear measurements of the success and of community participation in development planning at the grassroots level. He blames disconnect on what he refers to as 'the bureaucratic institutions that hail from the oppressive and exclusionary relations of power of the apartheid era'. In that regard, he argues that most of the senior official planning bureaucracies who were directly responsible for the implementation of the apartheid planning frameworks are the same machineries that are expected to implement, in

the new South Africa, participatory development planning practice at grassroots level.

Coetzee and Graaff (1996) offer some possible explanation. In their analysis, they suggest that a number of variables have to be considered for local government and civil society to be developed. Amongst other considerations, they propose a critical analysis of the power relations and structures which exist and shape society. Such a power analysis should pose critical questions such as (a) who are the significant decision makers and influential people in a particular area (b) whose interest do these influential decision makers serve (c) how are members of the population generally excluded from decision making process and (d) to what extent do present structures of production, particularly land ownership and agriculture production, affect local participation in decision making. In the case of this study, the question was what power relations and structures shaped the nature and character of CBP and its relationship with the IDP and how, these combined to determine outcomes with respect to the effectiveness of the CBP planning model. Citing a study that was undertaken by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Selogiloe-Masemola (2003:17), give as reasons for the failure of municipalities to promote community participation in IDPs, some of the following reasons: (a) IDPs did not consider the rationale from the perspective of the "recipient" of development; (b) did not take into account the plural nature of the parties who have a stake in development; and (c) failed to recognise power imbalances in the community. The failure has led to a number of public protests which the country has experienced in the period 2005 to 2009.

5. MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

The evidence showed that community members were aware of the CBP and had an understanding of its purpose. Most of the respondents who were interviewed confirmed that they had attended community meetings. They also concurred that the CBP assists them in identifying and documenting their priorities. That in itself is an important step because at least, there is a process in motion where the voice of the community can be heard. There was lack of clarity about whether or not the issues raised by community members at meetings were dealt with or not and also whether feedback was received regularly or not. There was also some disagreement as to whether issues raised by communities are always addressed and if timeframes

are ever met. Members also confirmed that the municipality communicates any service delivery delays. While community participation is legislated as a requisite component of policy development and planning and budgeting, the mechanisms and instruments for the practical roll-out of such is left to municipalities to conceptualise and implement. In the case of the Umjindi Municipality, the research found evidence that the Municipality was aware of CBP and was making some effort to implement it by communicating with the community in order to identify their developmental needs. There was also evidence that the IDP process in the Municipality was functional to the extent that IDPs have been designed, implemented and evaluated over a number of years. The Municipality fully understands the processes involved. With respect to CBP, there was evidence that the Municipality involved, in the IDP process, ward committees in their capacity as representatives of communities. Participants also understood the meaning of CBP and how it was supposed to work. These communities were invited, through the ward councillors, to IDP and other related meetings and had the opportunity to make inputs through that process.

With respect to the link between the CBP and the IDP/budget allocation process, the study revealed that even though the majority of participants explained that they had participated in the CBP and IDP meetings, more than half of the respondents had no knowledge about the municipal capital budget allocated to their ward. Another finding was the substantial difference between the capacities of communities and municipalities. Whereas it appeared that the municipality was very knowledgeable about the IDP and its related budgeting and implementation processes, the knowledge of the community seemed blurred when it came to substantive matters such as for example, i) Whether their developmental priorities had been integrated in the IDP; ii) Whether or not a budget or resources had been allocated towards implementation of those issues or not iii) Capacity to raise questions or challenge on budget matters.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is consensus in the literature that the machinery of Community Based Planning is a necessary pillar of a developmental local government. Its logic lies in its potential to enable local government to deepen the democratic process at the micro-level

by allowing citizens to be active participants in their own development. CBP was designed to be an integral part of the Integrated Planning Process (IDP) so that community development priorities would be integrated into the planning, budgeting and implementation systems of municipalities. Potentially therefore, CBP can be an effective strategy to promote development at the local level. However, in the context of the study at Umjindi Municipality, the study found that there was some disconnect between CBP and the IDP particularly with respect to the allocation of budgetary resources. While cognisant that the findings of the study cannot be generalised to the whole of local government in South Africa, given the qualitative nature of the research, it however brings out some important issues for reflection. One is the functionality of the CBP process itself. Even though participants knew of and had a measure of understanding about CBP, there was not convincing evidence that there was strong buy-in and confidence in it largely because of frustration over what they perceived to be lack of transparency on the part of the Municipality to reveal or demonstrate whether or not their development priorities had been integrated in the IDP both in terms of the issues as well as allocation of budgetary resources.

It was not clear whether the Municipality actually failed on transparency or it was the Ward Councillors, representing the community, who may have failed to communicate effectively with their constituencies. The scenario raises questions about the effectiveness of the CBP as a strategy for community development within an environment where communities have needs but lack the control over resources that are required to implement them and also where they actually do not have the capacity for implementation themselves. Even if communities are to develop and sustain a functional structure in the form of CBP, it will not serve their needs as long as there are no effective mechanisms for integration of their development priorities into the Municipal IDP budget processes. All this is contrary to the expectations which are encapsulated in the argument by Mansuri and Rao (2003:3) who, as indicated earlier, emphasize that the ultimate goal of CBP is to reverse existing power relations in order to create agency and give voice to the poor, while allowing the poor to have more control over developmental issues. In this case, the agency and voice of the community is too weak in relation to that of the Municipality especially with respect to budgetary resource allocations. Fundamentally, therefore, the disconnect casts a shadow on the whole notion of developmental local governance.

Another issue that the study raises is whether in fact, the modalities of the IDP/budgeting processes have become so complex and more removed from the community to an extent where representatives of communities who attend IDP meetings, either fail to understand the processes or to influence them as part of a strategy to advance the interests of the community. The study findings also revealed weak capacity of some of the ward committees to influence the IDP process and to negotiate adoption of CBP priorities.

Some interventions are necessary in order to improve development outcomes through the CBP and IDP processes. Although the easiest option might be that the Municipality should take responsibility and address the problem, this may not be adequate. The fact that IDP budget allocations are largely unknown to the community might reflect more deep seated problems such as a rift in the priorities of communities who reside at the micro-level and those of the municipality which operates on a macro-level in spatial, economic and policy levels. A coordinated effort from all spheres of government seems to be the best option. Thus, the feasibility of CBP within local government would require all spheres of government not to recommit in terms of integrated planning but also in terms of ensuring that resources are allocated where they are needed most whilst ensuring their effective and efficient use.

There is a fundamental question which also arises from the study and that is whether there has been an attitude change and mind shift from the planners as the country has transitioned from a previous dispensation where community development was actually marginalised for the Black population to a democratic era in which there is a constitutional mandate for developmental local government. Has the reorientation of the planning bureaucrats to promote meaningful community participation occurred or not? These are some of the gaps that still exist and should be addressed through community based planning. As much as local government officials might find their developmental mandate to be quite daunting, developmental local government demands that community level planning be nurtured, developed and integrated into municipal planning systems and budgeting. Transparency and accountability on the utilisation of budgets would also strengthen the planning processes at the micro and macro level. This is in-keeping with the democratic ethos of South Africa.

It orders to deal with the challenge of mind sets that may now be an anachronistic in the era of democratic transformation, it will be important to build the capacity of the Municipality in order to further nurture and cultivate a developmental mindset that is consistent with the principle of developmental local governance. As capacity appears to be an issue with Ward Councillors and Secretaries as well, DCOGTA should consider devising strategies to build the capacity of this target group, both in terms of the CBP process and also the IDP processes. Umjindi Municipality should also consider improving communication between the Municipality and the communities it serves (assuming the problem is only about communication on budget matters). However, if indeed, budget priorities are not taking on board, the priorities raised by communities, then the Municipality has to address the issues. The need for continuous mobilisation in order to improve public participation in CBP at a ward level should also be emphasized. In all Council's sittings, issues raised by communities through ward committee meetings should be discussed and feedback on what has been done can be provided to ward councillors to present during meetings. Participants also recommended the need to develop a strategy that will assist the municipality to improve communication through various media platforms e.g. local radio stations, newspapers, among others. Where possible, campaigns, door to door, road shows can be used as another mechanism to improve stakeholder feedback on priorities or service delivery achievements. The timing of CBP meetings should be done during convenient time for residents to participate meaningfully to their own development. The sentimental statement that says 'no development for us without us' should be upheld by the municipality to avoid having disgruntled communities. Proper stakeholder analysis should be done so that corrective measures can be put in place on which sectors will require targeted consultation on what matter in accordance to their needs.

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