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A Review of Mechanisms Used to Improve Community Participation in the Integrated Development Planning Process in South Africa: An Empirical Review

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Abstract: In 1996, the government of South Africa introduced the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) policy process to transform municipal administration, integrated planning and service delivery. One of the IDP policy's key aspects is community participation in the planning process. South Africa is still struggling to achieve their duty of delivering basic services due to ineffective community participation. The article primarily appraises the mechanisms for improved community participation in the IDP process. It is underpinned by the New Public Management (NPM) theory, which promotes management reforms, participatory planning, and decentralising power among municipalities and communities. This study adopted a mixed-methods research approach. It is conducted in the Tzaneen municipal area in Limpopo Province. It is also found that some of the mechanisms to facilitate community participation are no longer relevant and effective in the COVID-19 pandemic era. Public meetings are no longer seen as an effective and safe means of public discussion due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Disaster Management Act: Amendment of Regulation (Act 57 of 2002) that restricts the physical contact of large groups of people, which has implications for public meeting attendance. The study concludes by recommending that the Tzaneen municipal area should design mechanisms that make it easier for marginalised and previously disadvantaged people to participate in municipal planning and decision-making processes freely and without prejudice. Lastly, the study recommends that the municipality adopt the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and E-participation to facilitate effective community participation in the IDP process.

Keywords: community participation; E-participation; IDP process; mechanisms; municipality; South Africa

1. Introduction

Dyum (2020) posits that Integrated Development Planning (IDP) is a five-year strategic plan or policy for development in a municipality launched in 1996 by the government of South Africa. It serves as the principal strategic management mechanism for improved community participation and ultimately enhances service delivery for all. Mogoba (2012) indicates that every municipality in South Africa is obligated by different legislation, such as the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) and *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (1996) to initiate and develop an IDP that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people. Again Dyum (2020) indicates that “the IDP becomes the principal development plan of the municipality at the local level and stands supreme. An IDP is defined as a five-year strategic plan for development in a municipality, and it acts as the primary strategic management instrument according to Mogoba (2012) cited in Dyum (2020, p. 3). It should also be aligned with the provincial government, district municipality, and local government to promote intergovernmental coordination by facilitating interrelated communication systems Dyum (2020). It includes strategies to identify and sustain economic development to uplift communities. This strategic plan is informed by change, as it

enforces a formal participatory governance system. It also call for the direct participation of community members and civic organisations to form part of government operations and decision-making” (Dyum 2020). Similarly, Section 35(1) of the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000), states that the IDP “is the principal strategic planning instrument OR mechanism which guides and informs all planning and development, and all decisions concerning planning, management, and development, in the municipality”. Asha and Makalela (2020) also indicate that the IDP is one of the mechanisms that promote a participatory and integrated approach in which all concerned stakeholders are consulted. IDP is subject to an annual review procedure to improve service delivery and the municipality’s administration’s efficacy. The IDP is one of the major instruments local municipalities have in managing their new developmental responsibility, according to *The White Paper on Local Government* (1998). In this regard, Molaba (2016) state that the approved IDP should be reviewed annually to accommodate internal and external changes. When changes are observed, communities and other relevant stakeholders ought to be consulted using different mechanisms such as public meetings, hearing and group discussion. The authors of this article argues that it is crucial to emphasize that the IDP is not set in stone; rather, it is the result of an ongoing process that must take into account how communities’ needs and circumstances are changing, how municipal responsibilities are changing in terms of how they are divided between different local functions, how delivery functions are being decentralised from other spheres, and how the philosophy of developmental local government is being unpacked and put into practice. In order to ensure that the IDP is flexible and responsive to changes without losing sight of the vision and long-term developmental goals of the municipality, this dynamic process involves contingency planning and ongoing annual review of the IDP. For instance, failure to annually review the IDP, this would mean that the municipality is undermining the provision of Section 34 of the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000 which requires that IDPs be reviewed each year in order to address comments from the Member of the Executive Council (MEC)) and changing circumstances.

In this regard, community participation should be distinguished as a process whereby community members, business owners, non-governmental organisations, and municipal delegates gather to discuss or dialogue to resolve issues like service delivery challenges (Mathebula 2015). Themba and Selepe (2020, p. 1) also outline that there should be “an active engagement of the community in the planning process and decision-making. Community participation should be encouraged as it is a legal right”. Chapter 4 of the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) addresses community participation in the IDP process. Section 152(1) of the Republic of South Africa Constitution, 1996 also states that communities should participate in municipal affairs. The Act mandates that the Greater Tzaneen Municipality establish a culture that fosters participatory democracy, thus encouraging local citizen participation in municipal matters, such as IDP and budgeting.

2. Problem Statement

Mamokhere et al. (2021) posit that the COVID-19 pandemic presented several unmatched challenges in all spheres of government. UNESCO (2020) posits that the COVID-19 pandemic has spread to every country. It began in Asia, Europe, and the United States before spreading to Africa, and no place has been freed, socially, culturally, or economically, including the Tzaneen municipal area. In that regard, all organs of the state, including the local government, have been mandated to be pre-emptive and reactive to the COVID-19 pandemic by placing procedures directed to control the pandemic outbreak. Moreover, this COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to poor community participation in many municipalities. The researcher(s) argues that the COVID-19 pandemic reformed how things are and used to be done, including community participation in the IDP process. Due to these reforms, some municipalities struggle to successfully and efficiently implement IDP and community participation, while others have easily drifted to virtual community participation. Marston et al. (2020) found that some municipalities struggle to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic because there is a lack of resources and capacities to con-

duct virtual community participation. Therefore, the lack of resources results in a lack of community involvement in the annual review or consultation of the communities in the development processes.

Again, there are still other issues that hinder effective and active community participation in the IDP process. This is despite numerous laws and mechanisms that encourage community participation in the IDP. [Mathebula and Sebola \(2019\)](#) assert that “service delivery challenges persist due to poor community participation in the IDP process due to obsolete mechanisms, primarily in local municipalities”. [Asha and Makalela \(2020\)](#) concur that South African “local municipalities are struggling to effectively implement the IDP process due to many socio-economic challenges such as COVID-19, mismanagement and corruption. The planning and application of IDPs are not resulting in sustainable services, especially in rural areas”. Lastly, [Mathebula’s \(2018\)](#) study in Mopani District Municipality about the IDP and service delivery revealed that the IDP process, which is a tool for improved community participation and service delivery, is not properly, efficiently and effectively applied to provide the services that are envisioned.

The persistence of poor community participation is a result of obsolescence mechanisms which are not incorporated to address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and other socio-economic challenges. The IDP plan should reflect the community’s needs and aspirations by placing mechanisms that promote active community participation. Nevertheless, the municipalities still struggle with citizen involvement in policy formulation and decision-making processes in this era. This is even applicable to other public institutions and agencies that must promote effective community participation due to the requirements of many established legal acts. Besides, the COVID-19 pandemic inconsiderably changed the activities of municipalities and their possibilities and measures used for citizen engagement. In the other words, COVID-19 has radically changed South African lives. Rural communities have been particularly hit hard by the strict lockdown rules which limited group discussions and face-to-face public meetings. With that being said, this article aims to review the mechanisms used to improve community participation in the IDP process using Tzaneen municipal area as the case.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the New Public Management (NPM) as a theoretical lens. According to [Gruening \(2001, p. 1\)](#), [Van de Walle and Hammerschmid \(2011, p. 193\)](#) and [Rubakula \(2014\)](#) “believe that the NPM has its origins in public-choice theory and managerialism as way back as the late 1970s and early 1980s”. There has been contestation across the world by practitioners, civil society and scholars of public management and other disciplines as to whether NPM is a theory or not. [Maserumule \(2009\)](#) claims that the nature and origin of NPM remain a subject of knowledge contestation. Some scholars believe that the NPM must not be considered a theory ([Gruening 2001](#); [Bourgon 2007](#); [Diefenbach 2009](#); [Osborne et al. 2013](#)). However, [Osborne et al. \(2013\)](#) indicate that we should accept NPM as a theory with its imperfections, just like other theories. Again, [Maserumule \(2009\)](#) claims that “NPM is part of modernism, which has several ideological, philosophical, theoretical, and empirical contestations in the greater body of knowledge”. [Munzhedzi \(2020b\)](#) concur that NPM has been the dominant paradigm in public administration theory and practice ever since the 1980s. The theory has been on a mission to remove the “old administrative model after severe criticism for its inability to deliver public services and goods to the people. NPM is depicted as a normative conceptualisation which is different in many ways from traditional public administration. The NPM theory asserts that public officials and representatives of the contemporary world should increase citizens’ value. The theory emphasises that municipalities and responsible officials or representatives ought to engage communities to improve the efficacy of public sector production” ([Islam 2015](#)). For South African municipalities to ensure that service delivery is adequately provided, they must resort to the NPM approach and introduce reforms to their legislative frameworks ([Bardill 2000](#)). It is clear that “the South African municipalities experienced reforms since

1996 that were strongly forced by the failure of centralisation strategies. The government has opted for a decentralised government, which is one of the aspects of the NPM. Decentralisation promotes effective community participation in the municipal administration (Mathebula 2018). For instance, at the municipal level, the IDP adopted in 1996 emphasises community participation planning, which is by the NPM's guidelines (Bardill 2000). Since 1996, the IDP process has been reformed through different legislation to cope with the rising needs. By following the NPM approach, the South African local government sphere passed many pieces of legislation to reform their operations. For instance, the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) makes obligatory provisions for the participation of stakeholders like local businesses, non-government organisations, and communities in the municipal IDP and budgeting processes (Munzhedzi 2020a).

Moreover, Gruening (2001), cited in Munzhedzi (2020b), concurs that the NPM has several theoretical elements. It is a significant theory that greatly influences local government performance, productivity, and public expenditure, amongst others. As a sphere closest to the people, the local government has its legislative framework in South Africa that derives from the provisions of the NPM. Most South African municipalities have adopted most of the elements behind NPM. These elements include, among other things, "decentralisation of powers, participatory planning, effectiveness and efficiency", which emanates from the Municipal Finance Management Act (2003) (Act 53 of 2003) and the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000). However, this study focuses more on the principles of participatory planning during municipal planning and implementation. The statement implies that community participation is the cornerstone of the municipal strategic planning (IDP) process. Therefore, Munzhedzi (2020b) indicates that "participatory planning and decentralisation are more relevant in that municipal planning and implementation are decentralised for participation by a multiplicity of stakeholders at the local sphere of government".

According to Munzhedzi (2021, p. 3), community participation in municipal affairs is one of the most imperative elements of NPM, which facilitates participatory planning over democratic mechanisms and structures. Kalimullah et al. (2012, p. 13) assert that local government in line with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 and "NPM should be people-centred and community-oriented and that its responsibility should be that of empowering its citizens and the entire community to ensure that there is self-governance in their communities. This is particularly in contrast to the perception that local communities in municipalities are merely recipients of municipal services and do not have to be actively involved in the planning of municipal programmes". Moreover, a survey was done by the HSRC for the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). The survey revealed that 45% of the participants are discontent with municipal services and performance (Vivier and Wentzel 2013, p. 240). However, the researcher argues that this is not the good intention of the NPM, which tries to ensure community participation in the strategic planning processes of municipalities and ultimately enhance service delivery. There should be community involvement in the IDP and municipal budgeting processes. However, this community participation has fewer opportunities to be achieved. Hence, it is obligatory in the Municipal Systems Act (2000) (Act 32 of 2000).

According to Munzhedzi (2021, p. 3) in his study, community participation indicates that it is often conducted in compliance with the purpose of the legislative provision. "The public meetings called by the municipalities are often poorly attended, particularly in the rural areas, and often municipalities do not invite the public to meetings". This theory is relevant in this study based on its aspect such as decentralisation of power, participatory planning, efficiency and effectiveness. The NPM intends to ensure that communities in respect of their race, age, wealth and gender are involved in the decision-making process, thereby affording the local communities to have a voice in the affairs of their municipalities. The NPM also emphasises the inclusivity of citizens in municipal planning, such as IDP. The NPM, as indicated initially, encourages the inclusion of citizens in policy formulation and decision-making processes. The NPM's goal is to reform traditional public administration to improve its capability and effectiveness as a government (Rosta 2011, cited in Zwane 2020).

Therefore, it can be affirmed that including communities in municipal planning affairs and decision-making plays a major role in advancing the value of communities' life (Rosta 2011, p. 5; Zwane 2020).

4. Research Methods and Design

A mixed-method research approach was used to investigate and describe the mechanisms for improved community participation in the IDP process. A mixed-method research approach is defined as quantitative and qualitative research approaches (Morse 1991). This research design was used because it allows the researcher(s) to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms for improved community participation in the IDP process while also achieving balanced results by combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research designs. By merging both qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher(s) ensured reliability and validity in data analysis through analytical, descriptive, comparative, and statistical analysis. These designs were considered the most appropriate because they addressed the research problem. This study was conducted in the Tzaneen municipal area in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The researcher(s) adopted both probability and non-probability sampling techniques based on the nature and scope of this study. Probability sampling is preferred as a method whereby a large group of people has a preferable chance to participate in a study (Salkind 2012, p. 96). Simple random sampling also known as probability sampling was used to randomly select respondents to participate in the study. Four hundred (400) online closed-ended questionnaires (surveys) were randomly distributed electronically and completed by the community members of the Tzaneen municipal area. The researcher(s) also interviewed ten (10) key informants from the Tzaneen municipal area using non-probability sampling method to ensure validity and reliability. The researcher(s) interviewed this population because they believed they would provide concrete, contextual, in-depth, and significant information. The sample size in this study was four hundred and ten (410) participants within the Tzaneen municipal area. Data collection in this context is seen as the precise, systematic gathering of information relevant to the research purpose or specific objectives, questions, or hypotheses of a study (Burns and Grove 2005). For this study, the researcher used multiple data collection techniques deriving from primary and secondary data. The study adopted a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Thus, quantitative empirical data was collected using electronic closed-ended questionnaires, while qualitative empirical data was collected using a face-to-face semi-structured interview guide.

Given that, this study adopted both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. In this manner, empirical data gathered through electronic closed-end questionnaires were analysed using Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistical data was used to analyse the data. Thus, frequencies, tables, bar graphs, and pie charts were used to present and interpret the results. On the other hand, qualitative data collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews were analysed utilising the thematic content analysis method and NVivo. Data collection and analysis were done until saturation was reached.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Presentation of Quantitative Findings

This study intended to appraise the mechanisms for improved community participation in applying the IDP process. This objective is intended to discover and understand the mechanisms for improved community participation in the IDP process of the Tzaneen municipal area. Some questions emanate from this object and are analysed below.

5.1.1. Forums, Structures and Mechanisms

The question asked to participants in this section was whether participants are familiar with forums, structures and mechanisms available to participate in the IDP process (e.g., IDP meetings, etc.). The findings are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Level of Familiarity with forums, structures and mechanisms.

	Frequency	Percent
No	225	56.2
Yes	175	43.8
Total	400	100.0

Source (Mamokhere and Meyer 2022).

Table 1 above shows if community members of the Tzaneen municipal area are familiar with forums, structures and mechanisms available to participate in the IDP process. The findings above indicate that the majority of the respondents, constituting 225 (56.2%), probed for 'No', which means that the communities are not familiar with forums, structures, and mechanisms available to participate in the IDP, while the minority of the respondents, which constitutes 175 (43.8%) probed for 'Yes', which means that they are familiar with forums, structures and mechanisms in place to foster community participation in the IDP process within the Tzaneen municipal area.

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that majority of the participants in the Tzaneen municipal area are unfamiliar with the various forums, structures, and mechanisms available to engage communities in the IDP process. According to the researcher(s), these findings might be due to a lack of education in the municipality's failure to engage the community in the many forms, structures, and mechanisms available. Furthermore, this finding is unconstitutional because it contradicts the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) requirement. A municipality shall create suitable systems, structures, and procedures in line with Section 42 of the Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000).

5.1.2. Most Used and Applied Mechanisms by the Municipality

In this section, the question asked of community members was to indicate the mechanisms that are mostly used by the municipality to facilitate community participation in the IDP process in their area. Which mechanism (s) does your municipality best apply during consultation or preparation of the IDP? The findings on this question are presented in Figure 1: Most Used Mechanisms and Best Applied below.

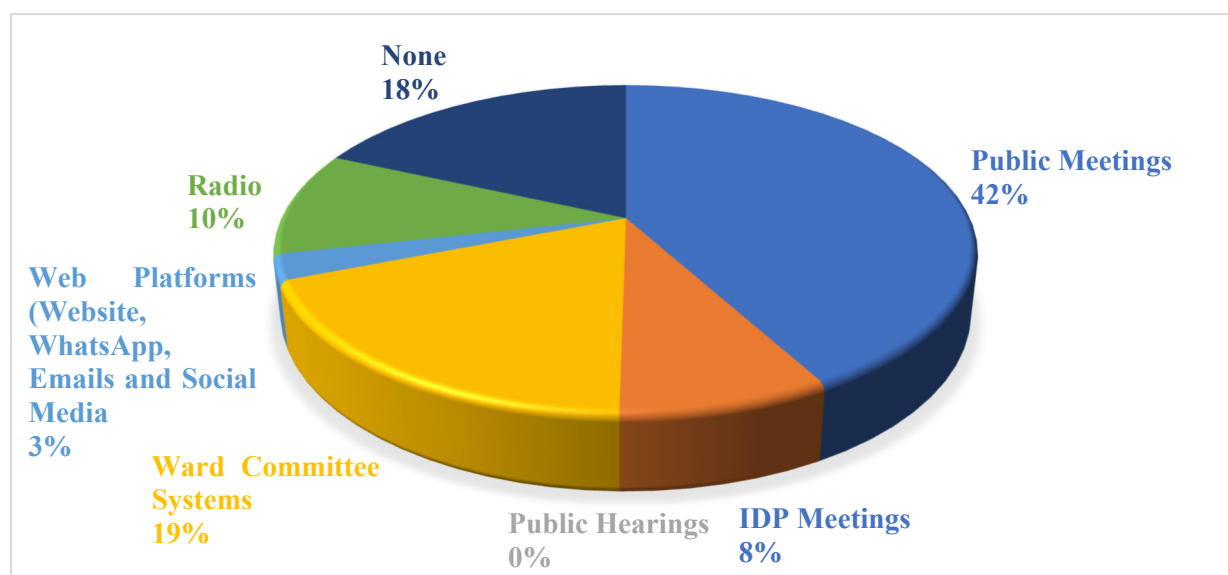
**Figure 1.** Most Used Mechanisms and Best Applied. Source (Mamokhere and Meyer 2022).

Figure 1 conveys the mechanisms that are mostly used and applied by the municipality to facilitate community participation in the IDP process. The findings below indicate that the majority of the respondents, which constitutes 168 (42%), believe that the Tzaneen

municipal area best applies public meetings to facilitate community participation in the IDP process, and 75 (19%) of the respondents also indicate that the Tzaneen municipal area also best applies the Ward Committee System to facilitate community participation in the IDP process. Another 73 (18%) indicated that ‘None’ means that the municipality applies no best mechanisms to ensure that everyone has the right to participate in the IDP. However, some of the respondents, which amount to 41 (10%), further indicated that the ‘Radio’ is used as a mechanism to facilitate community participation in the IDP process, and 33 (8%) of the respondents indicated that the IDP meetings are best held to facilitate community participation. The remaining 10 (3%) indicated that the ‘Web platforms (Website, WhatsApp, E-mails, and Social Media are also used to facilitate community participation in the IDP process in the Tzaneen municipal area.

In this sense, it can be concluded that the Tzaneen municipal area makes the best use of public meetings to encourage community engagement in the IDP process. As a result, the researcher contends that public meetings enable community members to express their preferences and discuss issues that impact their area. The municipality supports community involvement in the Tzaneen municipal area, according to the findings. However, IDP meetings are not prioritised as they should be, according to the researchers. The public meetings are more generic, whereas the IDP sessions focus more on development initiatives and service delivery. Musyoka (2010, p. 8) indicates that “since the IDP involves the participation of several stakeholders, the municipality must adopt an appropriate approach and also put in place appropriate structures to ensure effective participation”.

5.1.3. Level of Community Participation Based on the Mechanisms

In this section, the researchers asked the community members to rate community participation based on the municipality’s mechanisms. How would you rate the level of community participation in the IDP process in your area?. The findings of this question are presented in Figure 2: The Level of Community Participation based on the Mechanisms below.

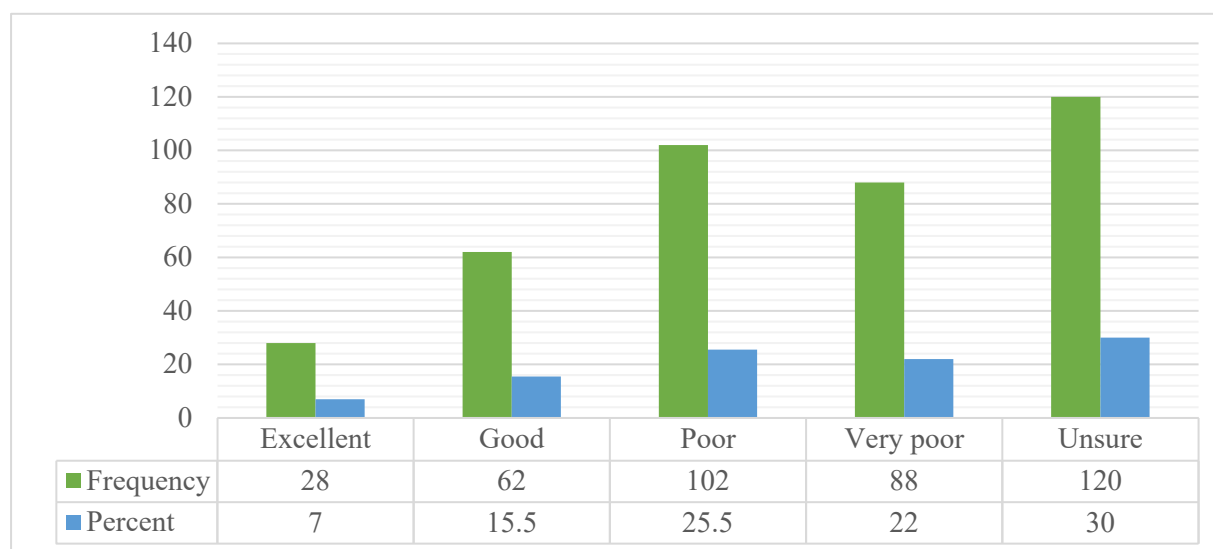


Figure 2. The Level of Community Participation based on the Mechanisms. Source (Mamokhere and Meyer 2022).

Figure 2 above rates community participation in the IDP process using community members’ perceptions in the Tzaneen municipal area. Out of the 400 sampled participants, it’s found that the majority of the respondents, which amounts to 120 (30%), are unsure if the mechanisms best facilitate community participation or not. The other respondents, constitute 102 (25.5%), indicated that the mechanisms are poor, and 88 (22%) of the respondents indicated that they are very poor as they do not promote community participation

efficiently and effectively. In contrast, the minority of the respondents, which constitute 62 (15.5%), indicated that the mechanisms are good, and only 28 (7%) of the respondents indicated that the municipality excellently applies the mechanisms.

It is unclear if the mechanisms used by the Tzaneen municipal area are excellent or very poor in this regard. Instead, the researcher(s) concludes that the municipality's mechanisms are medium based on the facts above. As a result, the Tzaneen municipal area should observe and comply with the Municipal Systems Act's regulations (Act 32 of 2000). In this manner, "each municipality, including the Tzaneen Municipality, must establish appropriate mechanisms, processes, and procedures that involve the local community in the development, implementation, and review of the municipality's performance management system, and, in particular, allow the community to participate in the setting of appropriate key performance targets for the municipality" by Section 42 of the above Act.

5.1.4. Delivered Projects and Services as Stipulated in the IDP Document

In this section, the researcher(s) questioned if the municipality delivers all projects and services identified by the communities as stipulated in the IDP document based on the analysis and identification of projects in different mechanisms. The findings of this question are presented in Figure 3: Delivered Projects and Services as Stipulated in the IDP Document below.

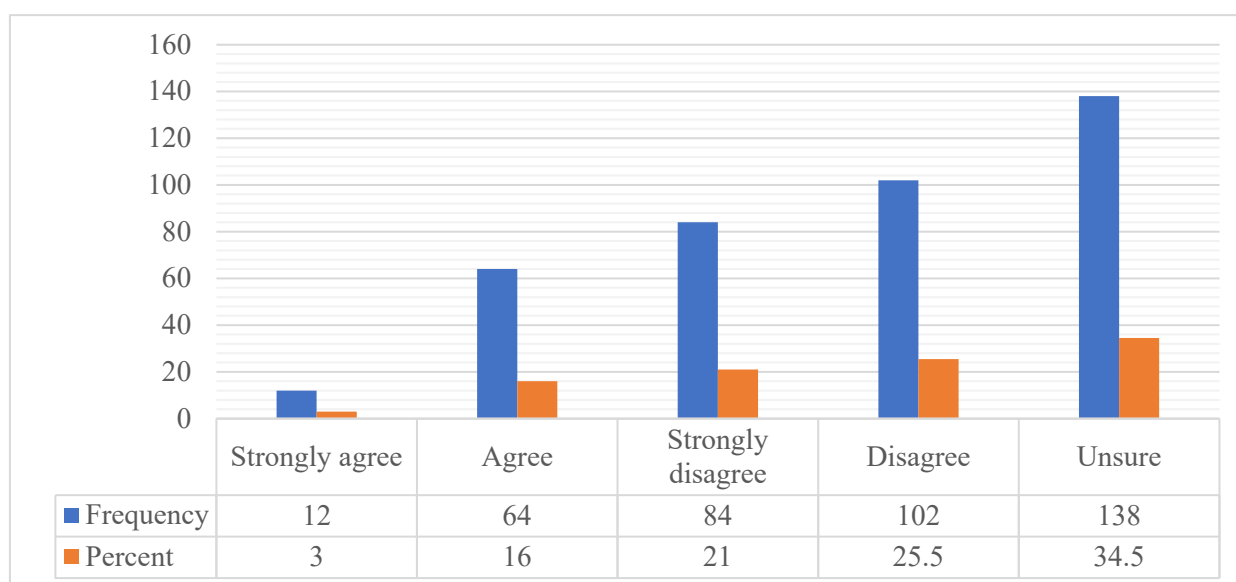


Figure 3. Delivered Projects and Services as Stipulated in the IDP Document. Source ([Mamokhere and Meyer 2022](#)).

Figure 3 above shows whether the municipality's identified projects and services are delivered as stipulated in the IDP. Out of the 400 sampled participants from the Tzaneen municipal area, 138 (34.5%) respondents are unsure whether all the projects and services are delivered. It is further found that most of the respondents, amounting to 102 (25.5%), disagree, and 84 (21%) of the respondents strongly disagree that not all the projects and services are delivered. In contrast, the minority of the respondents, constituting 12 (3%), strongly agree, and 16 (16%) of respondents agree that the municipality should provide all the services and projects identified and stipulated in the IDP for the Tzaneen municipal area.

Unsurprisingly, most services and projects are not carried out according to the IDP. [Mamokhere et al. \(2021\)](#) report that despite the government's promise to enhance basic service delivery to all people, South African municipalities continue to confront severe service delivery and governance issues. Budget restrictions, inadequate leadership, a lack of enthusiasm and knowledge among communities to engage in the IDP, and unethical

behaviour make the execution of services and projects a significant problem. All of this obstructs the implementation of projects and services.

5.1.5. Implementation and Completion of Projects

Again, the researcher(s) asked community members if, in their area, there were any projects identified during the consultation and approved by the IDP forum that are still not implemented or incomplete. The researcher(s) directly asked this; are there any projects identified during the consultation and approved by the IDP forum that are still not implemented or incomplete in your area?. The findings of this question are presented in Figure 4: Implementation and completion of the projects below.

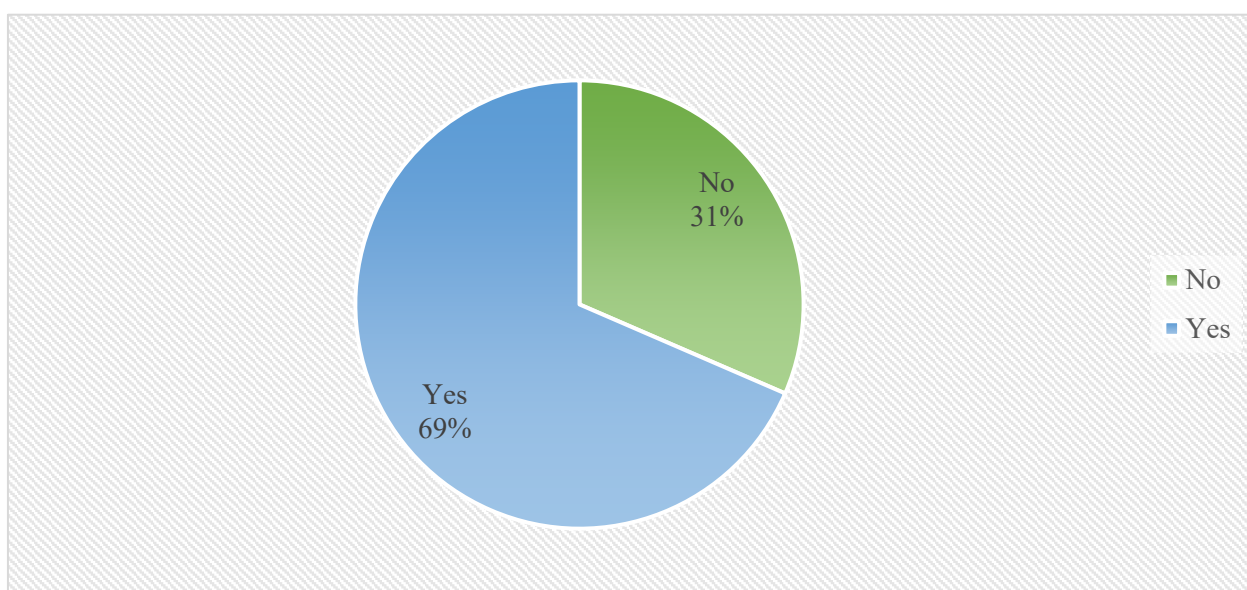


Figure 4. Implementation and completion of the projects. Source ([Mamokhere and Meyer 2022](#)).

Figure 4 above indicates if there are projects that were identified and approved by the IDP forum that are still either not implemented or completed by the municipality. The findings above show that the majority of the respondents, constituting 274 (69%) in the Tzaneen municipal probed for Yes, which means there are still projects that are not yet implemented and completed, while the minority of the respondents, which constitutes 126 (31%) probed for No, which means that there are no incomplete projects, all the projects are implemented.

In this regard, the findings above contradict the implementation by [Pressman and Wildavsky \(1973\)](#), who see the “implementation as to carry-out, accomplish, fulfil, produce, and complete”. As a result, it can be concluded that the Tzaneen municipal area is not effectively executing and sustainably finishing its initiatives. Section 152(1) of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that “the municipality must guarantee the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner”. As a result, the researcher(s) encourages the Tzaneen municipal area to guarantee that all services and projects are finished to provide true value for money. The researcher(s) further argues that community participation must be promoted to ensure that municipalities are held responsible and accountable for undelivered projects and services.

5.2. Presentation of Qualitative Findings

The main objective of this study was to appraise the mechanisms for improved community participation in the Tzaneen municipal area. This object is intended to understand the mechanisms that the municipality applies to facilitate community participation. The key informants were interviewed to understand the application of those mechanisms that

facilitate community participation in the IDP process. Some themes or sub-themes emanate from this study's objective, and the findings are carefully analysed and presented below.

5.2.1. Understanding Community Participation

The researcher's theme for the key informants was to determine if they understood what community participation meant in line with the IDP provision. According to the researcher, this theme is significant and crucial to the study since it may help determine the level and understanding of community participation in the IDP process. The municipality can use a variety of mechanisms to encourage community members to participate in the IDP. The responses are articulated below.

The response from one of the key informants was that;

"Community participation is an important aspect of the IDP because it allows the stakeholders to propose, negotiate and monitor their projects". While the other key informants indicated that; "It is a method of incorporating the community in decision-making about developmental projects or programmes in their area".

The findings above concur with the existing literature. In this context, "community participation is seen as an active process whereby beneficiaries or communities influence the direction and execution of development projects rather than only receiving a share of project benefits" (Bamberger 1988), while Malatji (2019) implies that community participation is "a process through which a community mobilises its resources, initiates and assumes responsibility for its development initiatives, and participates in the planning and implementation of all development projects for the benefit of the community as a whole".

5.2.2. Communities Involvement in the IDP Process and Decision-Making

The theme that the researcher(s) posed to the key informants was whether the Tzaneen municipal area involves the communities in the IDP process and decision-making. The municipalities must involve communities in the IDP process and decision-making as prescribed by the South African laws. The responses are articulated below.

All the key informants concurred that;

"Yes, during the IDP Representative Forum, the Mayor presents the plans, and the stakeholders, including the communities, are given a chance to comment and give input. The following inputs and comments were received from stakeholders in the compilation of the 2021–2022 IDP; Senakwe, Matipane to Morapalala road upgrading to tar or paving, Street maintenance in Tzaneen town, Street lights at Letaba River Estate, Constant power outage at Flora Park, Abandoned borehole project at Mohlababa Cross, water, boreholes, paving of internal streets, new primary school, electricity in extensions, maintenance of tar road, sanitation, RDP houses, jobs, community hall, Apollo lights at bus stops, and Water shortage at Banana among others."

In this regard, it can be affirmed that the Tzaneen municipal area does provide communities with opportunities to participate in municipal affairs using appropriate mechanisms.

5.2.3. Mechanisms to Facilitate Community Participation

The theme that the researcher(s) posed to the key informants was whether there were mechanisms or methods in place in the municipality to facilitate community participation in the IDP process. The Municipal Systems Act (Act 32 of 2000) is required to establish appropriate mechanisms to facilitate community participation in municipal development affairs. The responses are articulated below.

Most of the key informants indicated that;

"We used various means to reach out to community members, including through SMS, social media, word of mouth and loud hailing. We also used community development facilitators, community development workers, Ward Committees, traditional leaders, and other groups to help facilitate community participation".

While another key informant indicated that;

“Yes, the community participation for 2020/2021 IDP/Budget was done through the media, social media, internet, radio, e-mails, website, WhatsApp groups, pamphlets, etc., due to the National Disaster Management Act and COVID-19 regulations. We also provided the transport and catering during the consultation process”.

The findings above concur with the existing literature and recommendations made by many current studies about the COVID-19 pandemic and community participation. A study conducted by [Enwereji and Uwizeyimana \(2020, p. 16873\)](#) indicates that many communication tools are and were used before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate community participation in the IDP process. “Several studies also show that new media are the most effective communication tools to be applied in the community participation and IDP process during the COVID-19 pandemic, and these include Short Message Service (SMS), WhatsApp group messages, Facebook messages, electronic mail (e-mail) and Zoom virtual presentations”. As a result, the results are also backed up by a legal provision requiring the municipality to implement suitable mechanisms, processes, and structures to allow community members to participate in developing the IDP. The municipality is urged to promote a participatory democracy culture in which community members are at the centre of development decisions that affect them.

5.2.4. Effectiveness of the Mechanisms

The researcher(s) wanted to appraise if the Tzaneen municipal area’s mechanisms to facilitate community participation in the IDP process are effective. The theme posed to the key informants was whether adopted mechanisms are effective in facilitating community participation in the IDP process. The responses are articulated below.

All the key informants responded to the theme by indicating that;

“Yes, since the communities’ and other stakeholders’ levels of participation have improved over time. The municipality has successfully and fruitfully involved communities and other stakeholders. Despite our efforts to ensure that communities are informed prior to the public meetings, community turnout is minimal”.

The researcher(s) argues that the South African municipalities, including the Tzaneen municipal area, must adopt effective mechanisms to ensure that community members and other stakeholders are active participants in the IDP process and have a greater interest in participating.

6. Discussion

Many empirical and theoretical studies have been conducted globally and in South Africa to comprehend the correlation between the IDP process and community participation mechanisms ([Mamokhere and Meyer 2022](#)). In this study, it is found that some of the mechanisms to facilitate community participation are no longer relevant and effective in the COVID-19 pandemic era. In this study, it is found that the Tzaneen municipal area is dependent on public meetings to encourage community participation. Figure 1 above shows that 42% of the respondents indicated that the municipality best applies public meetings to consult community members about the IDP projects. Therefore, it is argued that during level five to two of lockdown, public meetings were no longer seen as an effective and safe means of public discussion due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Disaster Management Act: Amendment of Regulation (Act 57 of 2002) that restricts the physical contact of a large group of people at those levels or stage. Again, these findings are partially similar to the study conducted by [Zwane \(2020\)](#), who indicated that “the public meetings called by the municipalities are often poorly attended, particularly in the rural areas”. The study appraised the forums, structures, and mechanisms available to foster community participation in the IDP process. Despite the Municipal System Act requirements, it is found that the majority of the sampled population is not familiar with the mechanisms in place to foster community

participation. Of the 400 respondents sampled, 56.2% said they were unfamiliar with the forms, structures, and mechanisms available to participate in the IDP process. Again, even though the mechanisms are in place to encourage community participation in the Tzaneen municipal area, it is also found that the mechanisms are poorly implemented. Similarly, even in the COVID-19 pandemic, the Tzaneen municipal area still prioritise public meetings as the appropriate mechanism of community participation. At the same time, emphasis should be placed on the use of the new media and 4IR. The findings of this study are unfavourable, as it is revealed that there is poor community turnout in the Tzaneen municipal areas' IDP process due to poor forums, structures, and appropriate mechanisms.

Equally, the findings of this study concur with several theoretical and empirical studies that have been conducted globally about the IDP process and community participation mechanisms. According to the study conducted by [Zwane \(2020, p. 97\)](#) titled; "Community participation in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) of the Umzumbe Local Municipality". It is found that the Umzumbe Local Municipality is not committed to the IDP. From the respondent's perspective, "a total of fifty-five per cent (55%) of the respondents chose the option of "No" and felt that there was no commitment or effective mechanisms by the municipality to encourage community participation. While 45% believe the municipality demonstrates a commitment to identifying IDP issues through public participation". According to [Zwane \(2020, p. 98\)](#), it is clear that communities in Umzumbe Local Municipality believe their municipalities are unconcerned about IDP issues. Therefore, the results show a lack of participation among communities and the municipality. Qualitatively, [Zwane \(2020\)](#) takes a different view from the IDP Manager, who indicates that communities were constantly engaged in IDP related matters during the public participation gatherings by inviting inputs and ensuring that these were forwarded to the relevant units of the Umzumbe Local Municipality for consideration during the IDP planning processes". A study by [Themba and Selepe \(2020\)](#) from Mbombela Local Municipality found out that "the residents of Matsulu were not engaged, at all times, in municipal matters, particularly when it came to policy and decision-making. The findings show that 87% of the respondents (community members) were not fully involved in the processes of decision and policy-making of the municipality. The study further posits no effective mechanisms to foster community participation. The municipality is only reliant on physical public meetings, which are poorly attended, and some community villages are often not invited". On the other hand, in his study, [Dyum \(2020, p. 51\)](#), in an attempt to understand the meeting attendance level or manner in the IDP, found that meetings are attended by "a very small number of people". Therefore, it can be affirmed that there is a lack of interest or knowledge of community participation processes ([Dyum 2020](#)). However, it can be argued that a lack of interest or participation occurs because communities have little knowledge of these meetings, and the municipalities are not even educating the communities or developing innovative ways to encourage community participation.

Based on the study conducted by [Ndou \(2019\)](#) titled; "Challenges militating against community participation in the Integrated Development Plan Process in Thulamela Local Municipality", it was found that "76% of the respondents agreed that community members are actively participating in the IDP process. This indicates that community members of Thulamela Local Municipality actively participate in the IDP process. Ninety per cent of the respondents agree that active community participation in the IDP process plays an important role in the improvement of basic service delivery" ([Ndou 2019](#)). In contrast, [Malatji \(2019\)](#), in his study, indicates that "the majority of the participants in Tickyline village in the Tzaneen Municipal area do not participate in development projects because some meetings are held at odd times, particularly during the initial phases of the projects". Thus, this study's researcher(s) argues that the time for meetings could also be a challenge. If municipalities could be more reliant on new media as a mechanism, community participation could be more effective and fruitful. Lastly, [Naidoo and Ramphal \(2018\)](#), in their study conducted at Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa, revealed that the municipality does not conform to the public participation processes and the Batho

Pele principles when implementing the IDP process. The public participation process and the Batho Pele principles require communities to be informed, consulted, involved, collaborative and empowered using variety of mechanisms.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study reviewed the mechanisms used by municipalities to improve community participation in the IDP process, using the Tzaneen municipal area as a case. The study found that the mechanisms that facilitate community participation in the IDP process are obsolete “Outdated” in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Fourth Industrial Revolution where technology is predominant. It found that the mechanisms that facilitate improved community participation are poor, and there is a persisting lack of community participation in municipal affairs. It further found that the Tzaneen municipal area relies on physical public meetings to facilitate community participation in municipal planning (IDP) and decision-making, which is challenging to implement in this era of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the study propose recommendations to be used to improve community participation in the IDP process. The study recommends the following:

The Greater Tzaneen Municipality (GTM) should design mechanisms that make it easier for marginalised and previously disadvantaged people to participate in municipal planning and decision-making processes freely and without prejudice. Because most of the respondents in this study stated that they were not adequately encouraged to engage in the IDP process due to obsolete “outdated” mechanisms, it would be beneficial to all the stakeholders if the municipalities adopt e-participation while taking note of the old and previously disadvantaged people without access to technological tools or mechanisms. E-participation should be adopted by using a variety of electronic media, including radio and television shows, emails, the Internet, Zoom video conferences, social media sites like Facebook, and Group discussions on WhatsApp should be used to improve community participation during and post COVID-19.

Community participation in the IDP process can also be improved by constantly educating and encouraging stakeholders to actively participate in the planning and implementation phases of the IDP through roadshows and other means of engagement. The communities’ accessibility to the IDP process should also be strengthened and promoted.

Although there are several mechanisms which the municipality can use to facilitate community participation in the IDP process, the study recommends that those mechanisms need to be strengthened to ensure the effectiveness of community participation as it is found that most of the mechanisms are obsolete and not effective enough. Furthermore, the community can also establish an independent community organisation, which will serve as their platform to identify their needs and challenges instead of relying on the municipality to organise public meetings and hearings. This can promote self-reliance and community ownership.

Lastly, it is found that some of the mechanisms to facilitate community participation are no longer relevant and effective in the COVID-19 pandemic age. Public meetings are no longer seen as an effective and safe means of public discussion due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Disaster Management Act: Amendment of Regulation (Act 57 of 2002) that restricts the physical contact of large groups of people. This has implications for public meeting attendance as noted in the findings. Therefore, the study recommends that the municipality adopt the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) to facilitate effective community participation in the IDP process. The municipality should also strengthen its electronic participation (e-participation) mechanisms such as websites, internet, databases, SMS, emailing, and social media platforms to facilitate and improve community participation.

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