

THE EFFECTS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ON LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES

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Abstract:

In recent years, the concept of Local Economic Development (LED) has gained prominence to enhance the economic well-being of communities at the grassroots level. In South Africa, a country marked by a history of inequality and spatial disparities, fostering LED has become crucial. Public participation is crucial in shaping the LED trajectory in South African municipalities. By analyzing existing literature, this article underscores the importance of inclusive and meaningful engagement of citizens in the process of LED, highlighting its benefits and challenges. In other words, this article explores the effects of public participation on LED in South African municipalities. This study adopted a qualitative research methodology. The study specifically reviewed secondary data to understand the effects of public participation on local economic development in South African municipalities. In conclusion, to address public participation challenges in LED, local government should design participation processes that actively involve all segments of the population, especially marginalized and historically disadvantaged groups.

Keywords: Public Participation, Local Economic Development, Inequality, Poverty, Unemployment

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the concept of local economic development (LED) has gained prominence as a means to enhance the economic well-being of communities at the grassroots level. In South Africa, a country marked by a history of inequality and spatial disparities, fostering LED has become crucial (Todes & Turok, 2018; Makamo, 2020). A critical factor that has emerged in this pursuit is the role of public participation – the involvement of community members in decision-making processes that impact their local economies (Makamo, 2020). The adoption of public participation in local government in South Africa emerged as a response to the profound inequities and injustices of the apartheid era, seeking to establish a more inclusive and democratic society. This transformative step aimed to integrate all societal sectors and ensure equitable access to essential services, positioning public participation as a cornerstone of South African local governance (Mpehle, 2012; Khaile et al., 2021). Scholars, however, have grappled with the intricate nuances of this concept within the field of public administration and development studies. For instance, Mathebula (2016) highlighted the

potential for misleading interpretations of community engagement (hereafter used interchangeably with public participation) due to a lack of comprehensive conceptualization, leading to challenges in forming robust theoretical frameworks.

Nevertheless, Mathebula further emphasized that public participation in local government addresses historical injustices and promotes integration among societal sectors, particularly following the end of apartheid in the 1994 elections (Mathebula, 2016; Khaile et al., 2021). Public participation in the context of local economic development refers to the active and meaningful involvement of community members, stakeholders, and relevant actors in the planning, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation of strategies, projects, and policies that contribute to the economic growth and improvement of a specific geographic area or municipality. This engagement process seeks to empower citizens by providing them opportunities to contribute their insights, ideas, and preferences, thereby influencing local economic development initiatives (Mamokhere, 2022). Public participation in LED aims to foster inclusivity, transparency, and accountability, ensuring that the economic benefits generated by development efforts are equitably distributed among various population sectors. It encompasses a range of activities, from information sharing and consultation to collaborative decision-making, all with the overarching goal of harnessing local knowledge and expertise to drive sustainable economic progress while addressing the unique needs and aspirations of the community (Masango, 2003; Waddington et al., 2018). This article explores the effects of public participation on LED in South African municipalities.

Problem Statement. South Africa's post-apartheid era has seen significant efforts to address historical inequities and promote inclusive development across its municipalities. One vital approach is public participation, which involves engaging citizens in decision-making processes regarding local economic development (LED) initiatives. While public participation is widely acknowledged as essential for democratic governance and equitable development, its effects on LED outcomes in South African municipalities remain a subject of considerable exploration and debate (Mpehle, 2012; Mathebula, 2016). Despite growing interest and investment in participatory processes, there needs to be a more comprehensive understanding of how public participation influences various facets of local economic development, such as policy formulation, resource allocation, community empowerment, and social cohesion. The multifaceted nature of this relationship demands a comprehensive examination to discern both the benefits and challenges associated with public participation in shaping LED trajectories within the context of South African municipalities (Haldane et al., 2019).

Mkhize and Mutereko (2022) indicate that the political leaders or the elite have a high level of multi-engagement, but people at the grassroots level must be better aligned. The study by Mamokhere (2022) indicates that the lack of public participation at the grassroots is a severe challenge. Communities are not involved in identifying their desired services, needs, and socioeconomic development. The persistence of poverty at the grassroots is causing the failure of local municipalities to engage communities in government programs such as LED and integrated development plans (IDP). Therefore, it is only fair that local economic development programs are more critical than ever, as they can help the state address poverty, unemployment, and gender imbalance in society. The most profound cause of poverty is not a lack of assets but a lack of effective governance that stems from the inability of pioneers to use public resources to achieve public benefits properly (Egharevba et al., 2016; Kgobe, 2020). Sections 24 and 27 of the South African Constitution (1996) call for establishing a framework for a Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP), part of the LED strategy to alleviate poverty in vulnerable regions. Poor participation in LED has led to community protests, resulting in loss of life and property damage (Netswara & Kgalane, 2014; Mamokhere, 2023). Therefore, with less public participation in LED and

IDP planning, violent protests could occur as decisions about services and projects to be provided do not reflect the needs, hopes, and uncertainties (challenges) of the public (Tsheola, 2012; Kgobe, 2020; Mamokhere, 2022; Kgobe & Mamokhere, 2023). Based on the above discussion and statement of the problem, this article aims to explore the effects of public participation on LED in South African municipalities.

Theoretical Framework. Understanding theoretical approaches to the question, interpreting, and predicting the issues under study is essential. In this paper, a threefold theoretical approach is taken. Specifically, this paper draws on the following theory: People-Centered Theory and the Ladder of Citizen Participation Theory.

People-centered Development Theory. This article is based on the people-centered theory, which places the individual and the community at the development center. People-centered development is a process that enables individuals in society to reach their full potential by building capacity and mobilizing local resources to improve living conditions following their own goals (David et al., 2009). People-centered development is preferred because micro-level development thinking prioritizes people's interests and needs. Consequently, according to this study, local economic development should put people first and allow community members to choose, prioritize, direct, and determine their development. The latter is a vehement rejection of South Africa's colonial and disempowering past and the fragmented technocratic or top-down decision-making process (Makalela, 2019). As a result, today's democratic government is committed to people-centered development. The country's development plan emphasizes a people-centered approach as a starting point for correcting the inequalities of past development projects as a socioeconomic policy framework. With its building blocks, the people-centered development approach promotes the following elements: public participation, social learning, empowerment, and sustainability (David et al., 2009). As a result, local economic development should become one of the cornerstones and principles of people-centered growth. People-centered theory emphasizes local people's active involvement, empowerment, and agency in shaping and benefiting from development initiatives. This approach recognizes that development outcomes are more sustainable and effective when driven by the needs, aspirations, and priorities of the people served (Makalela, 2019). Adopting people-centered development theory by South African municipalities can improve local economic development. Contextual understanding, identifying stakeholders, participation assessment, empowerment and capacity building, inclusivity and equity, and continuous feedback process are critical in building the partnerships between the state and society to drive South Africa's rural development transformation (Levin, 2018).

Contextual Understanding. The previous emphasis on local development revolved around the challenges associated with pervasive poverty (Wedchayanon & Chorkaew, 2014). Therefore, municipalities must comprehensively understand the socio-political and economic landscape inside local communities in South Africa. In addition, the analysis encompasses the examination of historical legacies, disparities in wealth distribution, systems of governance, and policy frameworks that have impacted the progress of regional economic growth. The primary objective of contextual understanding is to acquire knowledge on effective strategies for enhancing the well-being of individuals residing in South Africa, with a particular focus on those living in poverty (Zadawa & Omaran, 2020). The comprehension of context is of utmost importance to situate the study within the unique difficulties and potential advantages of various citizens. Furthermore, the people-centered theory posits that the municipality bears the onus of evaluating the local economic development function by engaging in a discourse regarding the roles and obligations of all levels of government. This endeavor aims to provide lucidity and guidance to the municipal economic development function (SACN, 2019).

Identifying Stakeholders. Municipalities do not drive economic development, but rather facilitate economic development through service delivery and partnerships” (SACN & SALGA, 2017; SACN, 2019). To effectively engage in the implementation of LED initiatives, municipalities must undertake the crucial task of identifying the primary stakeholders involved. These stakeholders encompass diverse entities, including local government agencies, community organizations, business associations, civil society groups, and individuals who may be marginalized within society. Furthermore, implementing a people-centric ideology will guarantee that South African municipalities can discern the various roles, interests, and power dynamics of diverse stakeholders in Local Economic Development (LED). The theory of people-centeredness places significant emphasis on the cruciality of establishing partnerships among governmental entities, the private sector, and civil society.

Furthermore, it underscores the need to forge connections between rural regions and municipalities, fostering a cohesive and interconnected societal fabric (OECD, 2019). This human-centric methodology shall facilitate the assimilation of light-emitting diodes (LED) in rural regions, enabling them to adapt to transformative circumstances and construct auspicious trajectories. The South African government has embraced a paradigm shift towards decentralization to effectively address the diverse and intricate local requirements, as expounded upon (Zadawa & Omaran, 2020). The implementation of decentralization serves the purpose of inclusively engaging and integrating various stakeholder groups previously marginalized during apartheid planning into the Framework of Local Economic Development (LED) planning.

Participation Assessment. According to Khambule (2018), the efficacy of light-emitting diodes (LEDs) is contingent upon the degree of engagement exhibited by civil society, businesses, and local government entities. Furthermore, proponents of the pro-poor paradigm contend that this approach directly engages marginalized communities and their respective organizations (Lukhele & Thanyani, 2018). Municipalities must assess the magnitude and caliber of public engagement in regional economic development endeavors. Facilitating expeditious dissemination of indigenous knowledge by local collaborators is paramount in perpetuating the trajectory of local economic advancement (Thani, 2020). To achieve this objective, implementing a people-centric methodology will guarantee that during the evaluation of participation, municipalities undertake an assessment that includes diverse stakeholder factions in the decision-making procedures, substantial and constructive dialogue, and the availability of information and resources to communities.

Empowerment and Capacity Building. By embracing the paradigm of people-centered theory, municipalities can effectively scrutinize the extent to which public participation initiatives foster community empowerment and facilitate the development of collective capabilities. The potential for success within communities is contingent upon the collective ability of said community and its local governing bodies to effectively navigate and address escalating tensions while simultaneously embracing the indispensable role of leadership, as posited by Wedchayanon and Chorkaew (2014) in their scholarly work. It is imperative to bestow upon the local people the necessary tools and resources to facilitate their developmental trajectory actively. When engaging in the strategic planning of LED initiatives, municipalities must adopt a people-centered approach. In doing so, they must also ensure that communities have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage and effectively participate in the various LED processes actively. It necessitates an intricate process of enhancing one's abilities by utilizing indigenous knowledge and active involvement in available resources. It is accomplished by employing a participatory action research or action learning approach, which serves as the fundamental methodology for development (Vlaenderen, 2001; Wedchayanon & Chorkaew, 2014).

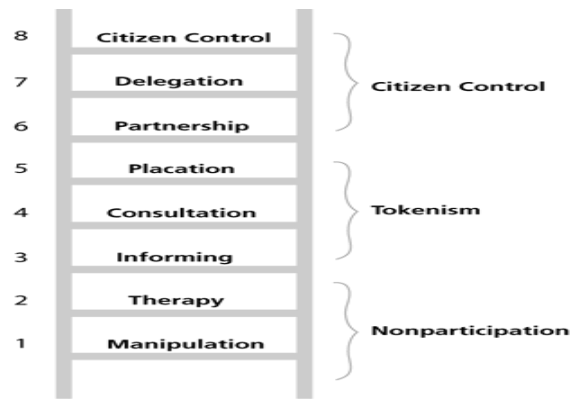
Inclusivity and Equity. Municipalities must be able to assess the inclusivity and equity-promoting nature of their participation processes. In societies transitioning from conflict or grappling with intricate emergencies and fragility, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, utilizing the Local Economic Development (LED) approach assumes paramount importance. This approach entails the direct engagement of local stakeholders from the inception of the local economic recovery process, as the International Labour Organisation emphasized in 2017. Both public and private entities at the local level must assume dual roles as active participants and recipients of the local economic resurgence. By capitalizing on the dividends of peace and leveraging aid, they can contribute to the prioritization and execution of operations to revitalize the local economy. It can be achieved through local dialogue, collaborative assessment, strategic planning, and optimizing local procurement of goods and services. Ultimately, these efforts will yield substantial benefits for societies grappling with the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO, 2017).

Continuous Feedback Process. A comprehensive examination that prioritizes the human element is a perpetual endeavor, as it engenders an unceasing cycle of constructive input. Municipalities must establish and employ mechanisms that facilitate a perpetual flow of feedback from the community. Maintaining a high level of responsiveness to the ever-evolving circumstances and needs of the community is crucial, thereby ensuring the efficacy of development initiatives. The efficacy of the individuals-centric methodology is contingent upon the specific regional circumstances and the unwavering dedication of relevant parties to authentic cooperation and empowerment (Mamokhere, 2022).

Ladder of Citizen Participation Theory. The Ladder of Citizen Participation theory, developed by Sherry Arnstein in 1969, has garnered significant acceptance and recognition within academic discussions. Arnstein's (1969) definition of citizen involvement is highly significant within the context of the United States since it emphasizes the crucial significance of public interaction within the planning process. One of the most prominent conceptual frameworks in democratic citizen involvement is the "Ladder of Citizen Participation." The theoretical framework explains the mechanisms by which institutional and political entities can either limit or enhance the ability of individuals to act, thereby defining how public empowerment, control, and influence in governance can be strengthened (Arnstein, 1971). According to Arnstein (1971), civic involvement is a fundamental aspect of democracy, requiring a legitimate power transfer to be appropriately classed as such. Similarly, Mnguni (2018) defines citizen participation as the proactive engagement of communities in policymaking. This involvement includes essential activities such as assessing needs, establishing priorities for local development initiatives, and formulating Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and LED projects.

Eight distinct stages characterize the Ladder of Citizen Participation concept. The sequential stages serve as factors for allocating authority in circumstances characterized by significant decision-making (Mamokhere, 2022). Therefore, developing effective tactics for citizen participation to achieve strategic goals is crucial. According to Arnstein (1971), a comprehensive citizen participation framework consists of eight levels: Citizen Control, Delegation, Partnership, Mediation, Consultation, Information, Therapy, and Manipulation. The hierarchical delineations proposed by Arnstein hold significant relevance in this discourse, as they intrinsically encourage strong and proactive citizen participation. Therefore, adopting the procedures encompassed by Arnstein's citizen participation theory arises as a recommended course of action for local governance institutions. Arnstein's theoretical framework delineates stages facilitating a community's methodical and all-encompassing engagement. The ladder of citizen participation theory encompasses a hierarchical progression consisting of Manipulation, Therapy, Information,

Consultation, Mediation, Partnership, Delegation, and eventually Citizen Control, arranged sequentially. The ladders of the citizen participation steps are shown below in Figure 1.



Arnstein's Ladder (1969)
Degrees of Citizen Participation

Figure 1. Ladder of Citizen Participation

The researchers propose that community participation is a crucial technique for effectively managing planning processes, specifically in the context of LED. The proponents argue that this involvement can be directed by a perceptive examination of the stages outlined in Arnstein's Ladder of Public Participation. The underlying assumption of this claim is that the active participation of the public in the planning processes can significantly improve the effective execution of community-focused initiatives, such as LED programs. The need for public engagement goes beyond simply adhering to regulations; instead, it takes on the role of a necessary element for legitimacy. The third stage of the ladder, appropriately named "Information," holds significant importance within the overall scheme. Significantly, this phase is recognized as the fundamental basis for commencing a path toward genuine and significant public involvement.

Nevertheless, it is essential to highlight that current practices frequently exhibit a one-way flow of information, characterized by a lack of feedback systems and limited negotiation leverage (Mamokhere, 2022). One could argue that this seeming constraint undermines the larger objective of fostering public engagement. The researchers emphasize that the one-way character of this phase limits the ability of the public to participate actively, creating a disconnect between widespread expectations and institutional actions.

The researchers have highlighted a significant issue about the challenges that may arise when attempting to achieve meaningful public participation, specifically in municipal settings, particularly concerning LED initiatives. The lack of this aspect signifies a deviation from the constitutional responsibility that municipalities must openly distribute relevant information. Based on the analysis provided by Rowe and Frewer (2005), there are numerous ways local governments might promote the development of efficient channels for receiving feedback. These techniques comprise various modalities, including disseminating information through media releases, public notifications, active involvement through community committees, and organizing community gatherings. Public involvement should extend beyond mere adherence to procedural requirements to foster a thriving environment for public participation and mitigate risks such as community manipulation (stage 1) and apathy. The researchers argue that the fundamental strength of the phenomenon rests in its capacity to bring about significant changes, promoting active exchanges that deliberate and influence desired results. This viewpoint aligns with the argument by Kgobe and Mamokhere (2021) that public engagement, when characterized by substantive interaction and

deliberation, can achieve diverse objectives beyond superficial compliance with legislative requirements.

Legislative Framework and Policy Landscape in South Africa. The legislative framework for public participation in LED within South African municipalities is primarily guided by the Municipal Systems Act of 2000 (Act 32 of 2000) and the Municipal Finance Management Act of 2003 (Act 56 of 2003). These legislative instruments emphasize the importance of involving local communities in decision-making processes related to LED initiatives. The Municipal Systems Act mandates that municipalities adopt mechanisms and processes encouraging public participation in matters affecting local governance, including economic development. Furthermore, it requires municipalities to develop and implement LED strategies informed by the local community's needs, preferences, and priorities, ensuring that citizens' input shapes the direction of economic growth. The Municipal Finance Management Act complements this framework by requiring municipalities to allocate resources transparently and equitably, considering the developmental needs identified through public participation. Together, these legislations underscore the necessity of engaging citizens, stakeholders, and local businesses in LED planning, execution, and assessment, ensuring that development efforts are aligned with the aspirations of the communities they serve (Mashamaite & Lethoko, 2018).

The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000) assigns municipalities responsible for promoting social and economic development while ensuring equitable access to affordable services and encouraging active engagement of local communities in municipal affairs. This legislative framework offers guiding principles, mechanisms, and processes essential for municipalities to fulfill their developmental mandate effectively. A vital requirement of this Act is that municipalities undertake an integrated development planning process, leading to the creating of an Integrated Development Plan (IDP). This IDP is pivotal in enabling local governments to achieve their objectives and realize their developmental responsibilities, as outlined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Section 25(1) of the Act mandates that each municipal council, within a stipulated timeframe after commencing its elected term, adopt a unified, comprehensive, and strategic plan. This plan acts as a nexus that aligns, integrates, and harmonizes various developmental strategies while incorporating proposals for the municipality's growth. Notably, the IDP delineates the development priorities and objectives of the municipal council, encompassing critical elements such as Local Economic Development (LED). South African municipalities must formulate an LED strategy and seamlessly integrate it into the overarching IDP. The strategic implementation of LED emerges as a paramount mechanism through which local municipalities fulfill their developmental responsibilities, according to the stipulations of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (117 of 1998). Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (from now on referred to as the 1996 Constitution) provides that municipalities shall cooperate with other relevant stakeholders within their jurisdiction in local government matters.

Further, this section states that municipalities must promote social and economic development to create business and employment opportunities for the local population. One of the strategies municipalities use to promote their local economies is local economic development (LED). The 1996 Constitution established the obligations of municipalities in socio-economic development. It describes the objectives of local government, which include promoting social and economic development and encouraging the involvement of communities and community organizations in local government affairs. All these goals can be linked to LED as a basis for strategy formulation and implementation.

An Overview of Local Economic Development in South African Municipalities. Before deliberating on the need for developmental local government, the effects of public participation on LED, and the shortcomings of LED in South African municipalities, this article finds it appropriate to provide a brief background of LED. In terms of its history, LED as an alternative strategy for development dates to the 1960s in the high-income nations of the north (Rodriguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2005; Meyer, 2014; Kaywood, 2021). The emergence of LED in the developed world, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), was attributed to social and economic challenges, including the failure of traditional top-down, slow economic growth and poverty, changes in the national and international economy, failed structural adjustment programs, and states' inability to intervene at the local level, among others (Nel, 2001; Helmsing, 2003; Mensah et al., 2013; Kaywood, 2021). To stimulate local economies to respond creatively to changes in the domestic and international economic environment, local economic development (LED) is a multifaceted and multisectoral process with end goals such as creating jobs, eradicating poverty, and redistributing wealth. LED is not a once-off activity or project. It is a continuous and ongoing process to respond to low economic growth and high unemployment and to stimulate the economy to create new job opportunities (Meyer, 2014). This article adds that LED is a lifetime activity because the population is continuously growing. Therefore, this creates competition for jobs in the labor market. Such circumstances necessitate the local government to continuously invest in local economic development programs to respond to socioeconomic dilemmas within various demarcations (Meyer, 2014; Kaywood, 2021). LED is a societal empowering tool since the initiative seeks to create a better standard of living for all, if not previously disadvantaged, households. It is seconded by Helmsing (2003), who stated that the World Bank unpacked LED as an instrument that aims to develop the economic potential of a local area by advancing its economic future and a better life for everyone. On the other side, Capkova (2005), World Bank (2002), and Pieterse (2006) perceived LED as the efforts by the local government sphere to invest in the provision of financial services, infrastructure development, technical and information assistance, training and development, provision of quality services and empowerment and regeneration of disadvantaged localities. In an attempt to provide clarification on the concept of LED, the Un-Habitat (2005) viewed LED as a concept that encompasses strategies that are described as process-oriented, non-prescriptive endeavors that include three elements: (i) local values, such as reducing poverty, meeting basic needs, creating local jobs, and integrating social and environmental values; (ii) economic drivers, such as utilizing value-added resources, developing local talent, retaining local income, and fostering regional cooperation; and (iii) development, which includes the importance of structural change and the quality of development. This article closes by stating that, in essence, LED could be summarized as a concept that uses resources, thereby creating a local economy that dictates the flow of money from one community to the other, with the exchange of goods and services as the key element.

Meyer (2014) indicates that Local Economic Development in South Africa is centered around creating resilient and inclusive local economies that capitalize on regional opportunities, address specific community needs, and contribute to overarching developmental objectives like economic growth and poverty eradication. However, LED's challenge in South Africa is that many local municipalities need comprehensive, actionable economic growth strategies, rendering them ineffective in tackling poverty and unemployment. A coherent planning process involving all local stakeholders is crucial for LED outcomes. This process unfolds gradually, encompassing all segments of society and every aspect that impacts the local quality of life, emphasizing areas that require heightened support (Sekhampu, 2010; Mokoena, 2019).

Role of Local Economic Development in South African Municipalities. Mokoena (2019) indicates that Local Economic Development is crucial in addressing various socioeconomic

challenges within South African municipalities. It is a strategic approach that aims to stimulate economic growth, create employment opportunities, and improve residents' overall quality of life. Here is how LED contributes to crucial areas like poverty alleviation, tackling unemployment, community entrepreneurship, and investment, as well as skills and capacity development:

Poverty Alleviation. Enaifoghe et al. (2023) indicate that LED initiatives directly contribute to poverty alleviation by fostering economic activities that generate income and improve living conditions. By promoting local businesses, supporting micro-enterprises, and encouraging value addition within communities, LED initiatives help to lift individuals and families out of poverty. For instance, when local entrepreneurs and businesses thrive, they create job opportunities and increase money circulation within the local economy, benefiting a broader population segment (Ipinnaiye et al., 2023).

Tackling Unemployment. Addressing unemployment is a significant challenge in South Africa, and LED can play a vital role. LED initiatives expand job opportunities by promoting economic activities and creating an enabling environment for businesses to grow. It can include not only formal employment but also informal and self-employment opportunities. Additionally, targeted skills development programs that align with local economic needs can enhance the employability of residents, further contributing to reducing unemployment rates (Jili et al., 2017; Ipinnaiye et al., 2023; Ubong et al., 2023).

Community Entrepreneurship and Investment. LED encourages community members to participate actively in the local economy as entrepreneurs and investors. By fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and supporting business start-ups, municipalities can empower individuals to take control of their economic destinies. Investment in local businesses and projects not only contributes to economic growth but also strengthens community bonds and pride, as residents have a stake in the prosperity of their area (Jili et al., 2017; Ubong et al., 2023).

Skills and Capacity Development. Detlor et al. (2022) indicate that LED initiatives often focus on building the skills and capacities of individuals, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. Training programs, workshops, and vocational education opportunities provided through LED efforts can enhance the local workforce's skills, making them more adaptable to the demands of the changing economy. It, in turn, improves employability, supports business growth, and contributes to a more resilient and self-reliant community (Ubong et al., 2023).

Effects of Public Participation on Local Economic Development in South African Municipalities. The Integrated Development Plan is essential in formulating local economic development programs. The engagement of local people through open collaboration should help them through local economic development programs. Concerning the IDP process, LED was developed to meet the needs of people marginalized by the apartheid government and to drive social and economic change (Mamokhere, 2022). Mkhize and Mutereko (2022) believe that the level of participation of relevant stakeholders should be high and consistent across all communities in South Africa. Due to inadequate public participation, local economic development initiatives in communities are characterized by high poverty rates, unemployment, poor service delivery, mismanagement of scarce resources, and illiteracy (Koma, 2012). Poor public participation in LED leads to the community experiencing violent protests regarding service delivery. Public participation is seen as a method of strengthening local economic development at the grassroots level of governance through inclusive democracy and as a compelling component of bias-free governance (Enaifoghe & Cotties, 2019). Public participation in local economic development ensures that people have a voice in their development and informs communities about what people lack at the grassroots level and what they need for a better life. The addition to citizen participation in modern times affects and shapes a conversation from LED, which has also led to the development

of various assemblies, symposiums, meetings, and hearings, to name a few example models (Barnes et al., 2003). Such meetings and gatherings occur among residents and offices. This article assumes that resident participation and public participation are used interchangeably. In this sense, the two terms are used in the same proportion to avoid misunderstanding and ambiguity. Regardless, no regulatory agency or other experts could claim to know what residents are (Sebola, 2017). In this way, public participation is essential in much of the governed country so that residents can communicate their needs and concerns. Nevertheless, residents are strongly urged to participate in the strategies planned and selected by the respective powers (Sebola, 2017).

Public participation strengthens people's commitment to issues that impact them (Mauger, 2019). It enables policymakers to perceive the development needs of residents. LED is a critical mathematics that focuses on private fulfillment and ensures better access to financial organizations. Involving residents leads to a different way of dealing with things (Mauger, 2019). Things previously kept secret or secret in the dark become public to be known to all accomplices or material people for whom they were normal (Mauger, 2019). It makes the planning framework LED less complex. Resident participation keeps resources from being wasted that is not set in stone by the overall population (Merino, 2018; Nahiduzzaman & Aldosary, 2019). It is ensured that the South African government strives for choice for all to the extent that the interests and needs of the overall society are considered an open process (Sebola, 2017). Residents are not offered the opportunity to have input, and decisions are made without considering their alternative viewpoints and commitments at a fundamental level (Merino, 2018; Hasan et al., 2019). Separately, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that local government should encourage the participation of organizations and local people in development activities that affect their lives. It is also about meeting the basic needs of organizations by promoting social and economic development. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa emphasizes local legislators' need for public participation, particularly in sections 151 to 154. In the development and strategy organization, it is claimed that the opportunities for individuals to participate in shaping their economic development have been neglected overall (Zhang, 2019; Hoffman, 2019). It likewise has implications for socioeconomic development at all levels of government. Despite various anomalies, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is still important in ensuring substantial, integrated local government development planning that addresses residents' issues. The Municipal Structures Act (Act 117 of 1998) states that local government should ensure residents' participation in planning LED. However, the state government needs some help in ensuring participation. The lack of public participation inconveniences residents (Meier et al., 2013).

Often, residents need to be made aware of the nature, scope, reach, and impact of the economic organizations that are available to them (Meier et al., 2013). They also do not have the opportunity to participate in planning LED, so they must opt for the robust circuit on issues affecting their lifestyle (Maphunye & Mafunisa, 2008). Resident participation is a tool that makes residents feel needed and valued and that their benefits and economic development needs are being heard (Maphunye & Mafunisa, 2008). Most South African residents are concerned about the problems associated with LED. It is due to misguided planning (Meier et al., 2013). Any planning requires the immediate or incidental involvement of accomplices. When planning is nonsensical, savings are squandered, and LED programs need to be more adequately implemented (Maphunye & Mafunisa, 2008). Inadequate or lack of funding directly impacts the achievement of development goals (Meier et al., 2013). Section 8 of the public participation framework allows South Africans to discuss their development needs. It can help agencies plan how to communicate administrative services to the public (Meier et al., 2013). For instance, in certain areas, there are increased levels of indigence and unemployment and water, electricity, and medical services shortages. Therefore, it is essential that

citizens can express their wishes and that authorities are supported in assisting to ensure that the needs of local people are met competently. In an unexpected bend, public participation ensures all partners have the data they need to participate (Marutha, 2011). The reason for public participation is the certainty that residents' information will influence decisions. It promotes informed decisions by perceiving and communicating the needs and welfare of all, including chiefs (Marutha, 2011). One Batho Pele standard emphasizes ensuring residents can communicate their wishes (Das, Laishram, and Jawed, 2019). In summary, the study by Mamokhere (2023) indicates that protests in the form of public participation affect policy development and implementation. The following are some of the effects identified by his study;

- Policy Formulation and Implementation
- Community Empowerment and Ownership
- Resource Allocation and Prioritization
- Social Cohesion and Trust-Building

Public Participation Challenges Facing Local Government in Facilitating Local Economic Development Planning and Implementation in South African Municipalities. While the effects of public participation on LED are generally positive, challenges must be addressed. Ensuring that participation processes are inclusive and representative of all population segments is a significant hurdle, particularly in contexts where historical inequalities persist. Additionally, there is a need to strike a balance between participatory decision-making and the need for efficient and timely project implementation (Brady, 2020). The task of facilitating local economic development planning and implementation within South African municipalities is marred by many public participation challenges. These challenges include limited community engagement and inclusion, often due to historical inequalities and social disparities (Huchzermeyer & Karam, 2018).

Additionally, inadequate access to information and communication channels further hampers citizens' involvement in decision-making processes (Van Donk et al., 2019). Moreover, low civic education and awareness levels constrain practical public input, as many residents need more understanding to engage meaningfully (Van der Walddt et al., 2017). The persistence of bureaucratic hurdles and administrative complexities within local governance further deters citizens from actively participating in economic development planning (Coetzee & Van Niekerk, 2016).

This section further outlines explicitly the challenges of local economic development in the context of South Africa. LED Implementation challenges include lack of capital, inadequately trained staff, and human barriers such as work ethics, inadequate information systems, lack of systematic feedback, lack of clearly defined responsibilities, lack of poverty reduction targets, the politicization of LED initiatives, and failure to integrate the various LED partners (Tebele, 2016). Khumalo (2015) and Nyawo and Mubangizi (2015) accentuated that African LED faces obstacles, including communication breakdowns and a lack of community involvement in the LED process. It is inclusive of South Africa. For instance, Masuku, Jili, and Selepe (2016) cited the capacity limitations of municipalities as the challenge of LED promotion, along with poorly formulated national LED policies that could not provide strategic direction for LED success. One of the obstacles to reaching South Africa's targeted growth rates and development is a need for more workers with the necessary skills (Masuku et al., 2016). The lack of appropriate competencies on the part of municipal executives and officials is poignantly highlighted as a barrier to local government's ability to carry out its constitutional responsibilities in the Report on the State of Local Government in South Africa, which was commissioned by the Department of Cooperative Governance and published in 2009. Project management, program management, development planning, and management competencies are a few of them (Report on the State of Local Government in South Africa, 2009). The Fifteen Year Review Report on Government, issued in 2008, indicates that the challenges to state capacity have

more to do with skills and institutional arrangements than a lack of money and other resources. To deploy resources effectively and efficiently, these are necessary. The local government additionally confronts a resource and competence gap. Positions are regularly filled by people who need more qualifications to solve this issue (The Fifteen Year Review Report on Government, 2008). Therefore, this article highlights that LED initiatives require municipal officials who have demonstrated a good record of understanding what LED is about and how much it should be executed. Therefore, assigning LED responsibilities to incapacitated personnel makes it challenging to implement LED programs. It, however, compromises the mission of realizing a developmental local government since LED is one of the critical aspects in the process of a developmental local government.

Solution to Address Above Challenges Facing Public Participation and Local Economic Development Planning in South African Municipalities.

Inclusive Participation Processes. To address challenges of inclusivity and representation, local governments should design participation processes that actively involve all segments of the population, especially marginalized and historically disadvantaged groups. It could involve targeted outreach, language accessibility, and community-specific engagement strategies to ensure diverse perspectives are captured (Mamokhere, 2022).

Balancing Decision-making and Implementation. Striking a balance between participatory decision-making and efficient project implementation requires a structured approach. Clear guidelines and timelines for decision-making can help prevent delays, while involving stakeholders early in project planning can ensure their concerns are considered without compromising efficiency.

Enhancing Civic Education. Increasing civic education and awareness is essential to foster meaningful public input. Individuals can engage more effectively by providing citizens with the necessary knowledge about local economic development and planning processes, leading to better-informed decisions (Van der Waladt et al., 2017).

Improving Information Access. Overcoming limited access to information and communication channels requires investing in transparent and accessible communication methods. Online platforms, community meetings, and information campaigns can bridge the information gap and encourage broader participation (Van Donk et al., 2019).

Capacity-building and Skill Development. Addressing challenges in LED implementation, including staff inadequacy and skills gaps, necessitates comprehensive capacity-building efforts. Municipalities should prioritize training programs for officials involved in LED initiatives, encompassing project management, development planning, and program execution (Report on the State of Local Government in South Africa, 2009; Mamokhere, 2023).

METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology. The study specifically reviewed secondary data to understand the effects of public participation on local economic development in South African municipalities. The authors reviewed both national and international sources from accredited and non-accredited journals, dissertations, books, thesis, internet sources and other published readable materials. To gather this data, different databases have been used such as Google, Google Scholar, and Scopus. The thematic discourse analysis approach was used to analyse the data. To ensure validity and reliability, the authors were not biased in the selection of secondary data, different keywords were used to search for relevant data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This article navigates the landscape of Local Economic Development (LED) in South African municipalities, emphasizing its historical roots and multifaceted role. LED, evolving since the 1960s, aims to stimulate local economies, alleviate poverty, and foster wealth redistribution. Meyer (2014) notes the challenges in local municipalities due to a lack of comprehensive economic strategies. Mokoena (2019) underscores LED's pivotal role in poverty reduction, unemployment alleviation, and community entrepreneurship. Public participation is crucial for effective LED, yet challenges persist, including historical disparities and the need for efficient implementation (Brady, 2020). Municipalities face hurdles like limited capital and untrained staff (Tebele, 2016). Challenges highlight the importance of inclusivity, communication improvement, and enhanced municipal capacity to unlock LED's transformative power. In summary, LED's critical role in South African municipalities demands attention to historical challenges and the synergy with public participation. Overcoming hurdles, including communication gaps and capacity issues, is crucial for LED's impactful contribution to South Africa's economic future.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, public participation plays a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of local economic development in South African municipalities. It enhances the quality of LED policies, empowers communities, influences resource allocation, and fosters social cohesion. As South Africa continues its journey toward inclusive economic growth, meaningful engagement of citizens in the LED process remains a critical factor in creating sustainable and equitable development outcomes. Efforts to address challenges and promote effective public participation can pave the way for a brighter economic future for all South Africans.

The intricate and multifaceted process of local economic development has been explicated with objectives that encompass creating employment opportunities, eliminating poverty, and equitable distribution of wealth. The use of LED technology is not a singular occurrence or undertaking. The endeavor to address sluggish economic expansion and elevated joblessness through economic stimulation and job creation is a continuous undertaking. The LED overview of South African municipal development has been brought to the forefront, along with the associated pitfalls and shortcomings. The study also analyzed the legislative and policy framework for LED in South Africa. Furthermore, the study revealed that utilizing Integrated Development Planning (IDP) as a strategic instrument and methodology for Local Economic Development (LED) encounters various obstacles that leave numerous local authorities in a state of uncertainty while attempting to establish reliable and enduring LED initiatives that accurately reflect the genuine necessities and preferences of their respective communities. The challenges pose a hindrance and a potential hazard to the efficacy of LED technology.

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