



Youth Participation in Electoral Processes

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The study was carried out to provide an understanding of the participation of the Municipality's youth in the local electoral processes. The objective of the study measured and examined the extent of youth participation in the local electoral processes of the Municipality, investigated and identified factors that prevents the youth from participating in electoral processes within the Municipality. The study applied a qualitative research methodology, questionnaires and interviews were used to collect data. A number of factors posed challenges to the youth and hinder their participation in electoral processes. These challenges emanated from negative attitudes of the youth towards politics. Also, employment/income, age, gender and race were some salient factors backed by poor education background, poverty and unemployment. The study recommends that the youth in the Municipality should be educated by their parents, teachers, church elders and the Mafikeng community to enable them acquire skills and positive attitude towards participating in the local electoral processes.

INTRODUCTION

Political participation by the masses of any given society has come to globally accepted as a fundamental attribute of democracy, as government cannot be said to be representative of the people if they are not involved. Participation like other concepts in social sciences have been open to varying definitions by scholars. Nie and Verba (1972) defines it as "those legal activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take". Throughout the world, governments have placed emphasis on efforts to engage different sections of their populace in the electoral processes, at various levels (national and sub-national).

Youth participation in the political process, especially in the electoral processes has been encouraged by the United Nations which considers youth participation in electoral processes as the embodiment of hope and aspiration of nations. Youth participation in electoral processes provides them with experience and opportunities for their future participation in the municipal, provincial and national government. As a consequence, since the last decade of the 20th century, governments across the world have been laying emphasis on youth political participation. In the North-West Province, as in other parts of South Africa, the youth participate in the electoral processes of the municipality through their Local Youth Councils.

In South Africa, Local Municipality's (LM) are classified into three categories (Cameron, 1999). Category A is a Municipality that has exclusive executive and legislative authority in its area. Category B is a Municipality that shares municipal executive and legislative authority in its area with a category C Municipality within whose area it falls and Category C is a Municipality that has municipal executive and legislative authority in an area that includes more than one Municipality. Based on the categories of the Municipalities, Mafikeng Local Municipality falls under category B of the Act (Municipality System

Act, 2000).

Youth participation in Mafikeng municipality local electoral processes or any municipality is an essential aspect of the voting processes of that municipality. Participation provides basic platform to the understanding of youth role and involvement in the municipal electoral process, governance, decision-making and community projects. More importantly, youth participation in the electoral processes of the municipality, enable them to get involved in the processes of electing the leadership of the municipality and to hold the leaders accountable for any ills in the municipality or the community development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Youth and Their Classifications

Who are the youth and how are they classified? The definition of the youth varies from country to country and society to society. The term "youth" is referred to the state or period of change from dependence of childhood to adulthood independence. It could also be referred to as a flexible period or progression from childhood to adulthood. This progression or transition if applied to age limit varies from country to country and from region to region. In most countries and regions of the world, the number of youth who fall into secondary youth has over the years widened the unemployment gap increasing social and economic cost to the local and national economies of these countries or regions. This is why the UN has carefully defined the youth considering the statistical and consistency implications amongst the member states as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Within these are *teenagers* between 13 and 19 years of ages; and *young adults* as between 20 to 24 years of age.

From the definitions youth classifications can be narrowed into two, that is, the primary and secondary youth. According to NYDA (2008), *Primary youth* are those young men and women within the age group of 18 years to 35 years. This group of youth are seen as youth in the age of majority. They can enter into a business contract independently without the requirement for parental, guardian or representative consent.

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Secondary youth are those young men and women within the age group of 14 years to 17 years. This group of youth are seen as youth in the age of minority. They can enter into a business contract only with the support and consent of parents, guardian or representatives.

Concept of Participation

Participation means taking active part in any development or community activity that affects one's life. A member of a community participates in a development action in various forms and at different levels. One can participate at the decision-making level or the implementation level, monitoring, evaluation to share of benefit levels. Participation at any of these levels brings about efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the development process. This may explain why participation is crucial in identifying who does what, when and how in the development or community projects.

The term participation is referred to by philosopher and critical theorists, Paolo Friere, as the transformation of social structure (Leal, 2010). In other words participation is a process of involving people in the development activities and decisions that affect their lives (Botchway, 2001). A definition that emphasizes the contribution to policy formulation and the outcome of policy implementation states that, "Political participation consists of taking part in the process of formulation, passage and implementation of public policies. It is concerned with action in protest at the outcome of a decision." (Parry, Moyer & Day, 1992 cited in Axford, Browning & Rosamond, 2007). Milbrath & Goel (1977) provides conventional definition of political participation when they state that "political participation refers to those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics." The definition of Milbrath & Goel (1977) covers both conventional and non-conventional forms of participation. Conventional political participation includes the routine behavior that uses institutional channels of representative government, especially, campaigning for candidates and voting in elections. Unconventional political participation on the other hand includes all forms of uncommon behaviour that either challenge or defy the established government channels or accepted culture (Janda, Berry & Goldman, 1992 cited in Nwogwugwu, 2012).

The essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and dispensing of power to organize society, harness and distribute resources and to influence decision making in line with organized or individual interests (Arowolo & Abe, 2008 cited in Arowolo & Aluko, 2010). Levine and Weiner (1997) argue that in the new South Africa, participation must not merely become a legitimization process but should be voluntary, passive and willingly. It should be an essential component of a broad political programme in which local knowledge becomes a driving force for social transformation. According to the Trillium Foundation (2013), traditional participation provides opportunities for the people to take initiatives and responsibility. In the case of participation in electoral processes, it would enable them to exercise their rights as citizens and access to democratic processes in the society (Checkoway, 2010).

The traditional participation has value, but the determining factors are mainly the degree to which people are engaged in the program and the degree to which the government programmes, policies and infrastructures support people involvement in a meaningful way. According to Botchway (2001), Nnaemego (2009) study, certain government programmes offer opportunity for people to develop leadership skills needed to become self-confident. One way of

promoting these programmes is through effective communication with the citizenry.

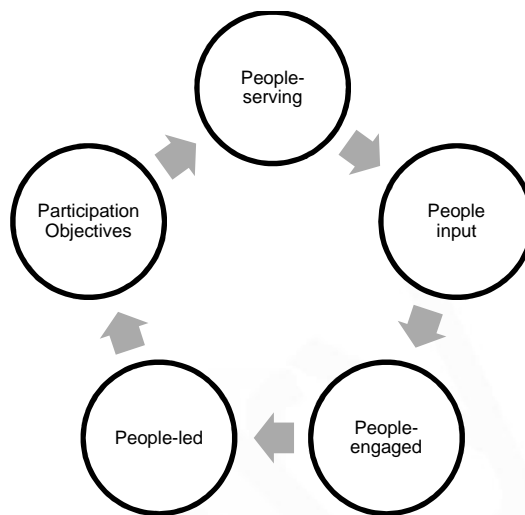


Figure 1 Traditional Participation

Figure 1, showcases the chain relationship of each traditional stage of participation. Once any stage in the chain is violated the whole participation exercise will no longer represent the interest of the people which form the centre of any development plans if the community is considered the beneficiaries of the project. From the diagram:

- **Stage one** represents the people initiative, ideas and knowledge while serving in the community projects for the benefit of the community.
- At **stage two**, these ideas and initiatives of the people becomes a significant input in the project. The people are evaluated and feedbacks on the progress of the project are conceptualised.
- On **stage three**, based on the assessment of the people, they are fully-involved and their participation in the community project at this stage is unequivocal.
- Having won the heart of the evaluators, at **stage four** the community project becomes the people-led. The program concepts therefore become part and parcel of the people.
- **Participation Objectives** to make community projects peoples oriented is therefore answered when the sequence of the chain relationship is harnessed, developed and addressed in-line with questions on the participation objectives, outcomes, and assessment criteria.

According to Botchway (2001) objectives and strategies of traditional participation must lead to the development of all members of society through a bottom-up approach. If participation is seen as a top-down research methodology then it will explain the community attitude, how they participate or why they do not participate in community projects. Farthing (2010) writes that literature exploring community participation can be relatively viewed as either disengaging and disenfranchised on one extreme or active and engaged in new forms of politics. Parry, Moyser and Day (1992) in their study found that people participation extend no further than voting in the case of electoral processes. They also found that education, wealth, age and voluntary association membership are the most important determinants of level of participation in community development programmes.

Conventional literature tends to overlook circumstances and issues that affect people and the way they view community development

programmes. Example, considering participation in various electoral processes like voting, party membership, joining local youth council, campaigning and taking part in demonstrations, the failure of the mainstream literature to attempt to differentiate young people from adults, means they have tended to overlook the generational effects. By generational effects, this means the distinctive attitudes that are developed by the people and shared by this group over-time. Arguably, generational effects could be traced to the fact that successive generation face new and different challenges of which previous generations have no experience about (Jowell and Park, 1993).

Pirie and Worcester (2000) argues that potential decline in the level of political and civic participation may be due to the decreasing relevance of political activities to the people. Pirie and Worcester argues that people who do not vote or participate in politics do so because they do not see the relevance neither does it make any difference to them. Disputing this claim, DeLuca's (1995) belief that political indifference clears better understanding, as it shows the essential relationship between free choice and representative satisfaction derived by the personal indifferences. DeLuca (1995) further argues the concept of non-participation as a condition under which one suffers-apathy.

Non-participation

Non-participation is the absence of participation. It is defined as a state of mind brought about by forces, structures, institutions or elite manipulations over which one has little control and perhaps little knowledge (DeLuca, 1995). Eden and Roker (1999) argue that people are indeed turning away from formal mainstream politics but this does not mean that they are necessarily politically apathetic. Indifference in participation is traceable to the failure of politicians, parties and political structures to address the issues that concern the people. In other words, people place high degree of faith in the democratic processes and few support the view that voting is a waste of time. That is why Seyd, Whiteley and Pattie (2001) found that people conceptualise politics in a limited and narrow way, they perceive it as boring and irrelevant to their lives. This explains why few people vote given the total absence of real political choice.

Classifications of political participation

Almond, Powell, Strom & Dalton (2004) provide a classification of political participation based on the political culture of given societies. To them, there are three major political cultures which describe citizens' participation in political process: participant, subject and parochial.

Participatory culture

Participatory culture motivates people to keep the participation doors open. Participatory culture teaches people skills and promotes political emancipation. This is because participatory culture generally exposes people to political information and ideas (Judge, 2007). It promotes the key democratic values of involvement and openness. It teaches people vital elements of involving, acquisition of knowledge and collaborative problem-solving. Participatory culture provides both motives and opportunities for political engagement (Kanni, Berry, Gant and Zager, 2007).

Furthermore, a resolution from Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHGM, 2002) argues that participatory culture is critical for maintaining democratic values such as freedom and justice. According to CHGM (2002) participatory culture depends on two ideas about participation, that is, as a paid employment and managing the transition from adolescent student to adult worker, while the other is the

democratic practices embedded in devices like youth roundtables or similar consultative mechanisms. Roundtable discussions create opportunity for people to communicate directly with government on issues of concern to them. For instance, in Australia, the Australian government established a taskforce team to examine people's transition from school to work and further their education as well as actively involved in the participation in the activity of community life (Bessant, 2010).

Bessant (2010) further argues that paid employment is a steady transition from education to the workforce. For instance, in Australian Government increased bid for educational retention rate and reforms such as work-for-the dole because paid work is seen as serving two traditional roles- to provide and serve as a source of income and productivity as well as a moral-social integrative influence in the lives of people to actively get involved in the participatory culture (Bessant, 2010). In essence, people with higher levels of socio-economic resources are most likely to participate in electoral processes while the almost inactive have the lowest levels of socio-economic resources (Seyd, Whiteley and Pattie, 2001).

Types of participation – Active and Passive participations

Broad based meaning of participation is not only measured by its scope such as the number of people who attend a number of activities but also by its quality such as how participants have real effect on the process to influence a particular decision or produce a favourable outcome. That is why Checkoway (1998) argues that measurement of participation is not necessarily whether the effort is youth-led, adult-led or intergenerational but rather whether people have some effect. Delgado and Staples (2008) further argue that by this they are involved in goal setting, resource allocation and program implementation. Organizing brings people together and enables them to generate power to accomplish their purpose (Delgado and Staples, 2008). It is a process that builds their own sense of power, their perceived or actual power with others, and their ability to affect power relationships in the community.

Johari (2010) utilizes three different concepts in his classification of levels of political participation; very active level, occasionally active and inactive. Participants at the very active level would refer to leaders who hold high positions in legislative and administrative spheres. They are concerned with the exercise of formal political power and are seen as the repositories of power. Principally, persons in this category belong to political parties and other organizations through which members of society may participate in one form of political activity or another, such as interest groups.

At the occasionally active level would be individuals who take part in political activities when certain issues that concern them either socially or economically are affected. People who only vote at scheduled general elections every four years would be categorized under this group, as voting is regarded as the commonest form of political participation. Active participation in the present context would be seen as getting a group of people or when the people take initiative in the governance, decision-making and other community programmes. This is usually the case when a greater number of people participate in the community project without being forced. It is also when the majority of the people freely and willingly take part in community action to make any change that benefits the community.

Passive participation is the non-active participation. Johari (2010) writes that the inactive level of political participation is where people are either not involved in political activity at all or show signs of limited involvement. This is the kind of participation that defines people's non-

involvement through visible or physical appearance and reaction to events within the municipality or the community. Passive participation is most times based on participation by rules and regulations. It ensures that people participate according to the laws or regulations rather than willful and free-will involvement and participation in the community projects. It considers the accessibility, interest and ability of people in the municipality, villages and communities, the rural and the municipality at large to respond to municipal development plans, programmes, governance, economic and socio-political initiatives.

Reasons for participation

There are various reasons why young people should participate in the municipal electoral processes. This motive could be for personal reasons or for community obligations. According to Botchway (2001) both personal and community participation should follow a bottom-up approach as this would reduce development problems. Amongst these reasons include voting for a credible candidate that would represent their interest at Municipal level and in decision-makings that concern young people.

Participation as a bottom-up approach ensures that the rural people are integrated in projects and development plans in the municipality. Botchway (2001) argues that participation should be people oriented. Rural people should be included in the processes of planning, decision-making, implementation, evaluation and monitoring of development programmes and projects. They can do this by participating in the electoral processes, electing municipality leaders and holding such leaders responsible for community development projects. Rural people should see community projects as “our project” and not “their project”. If this is done, managing, monitoring and sustaining such project would be effective. Therefore, it becomes paramount that the community and the rural people should be allowed to see elections as their decision to make, to determine who leads or direct the affairs of the municipality. By participating in the electoral processes, governance of the municipality and other activities, such as community development and social programmes, rural people take initiatives, participate in the implementation of decisions as well as take responsibility of the outcome of their choice of representative at the municipality.

Who should participate and why

Every member of the municipality and the community is entitled to participate in community development programmes in any capacity he/she is able to especially those above 18 years of age. Given every citizen or member equal opportunity create freedom of mind, fairness and equity in participation of community projects. In most cases people are motivated to take part in the affairs that concerns them. Participation assumes that people are competent citizens, rather than passive recipients of services. According to Finn, Nybell and Shook (2009), this assumption is consistent with the view of people as resources rather than the classification of a group of people as victims of poverty and problems to the society. It is therefore paramount to understand who and why the people are motivated to participate in community development programmes and municipal activities. In Social Science studies people's participation are alienated from community, withdrawn from professional activities thereby focusing on a-group of people as weak and deficient and when adults view young people as troubled and troubling and youth accept these adult conceptions, this weakens rather than strengthens the roles of young people (Finn, et. al, 2009).

According to Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins and Delli-Carpini (2006), most active participants in community and municipal

programmes are not representative of the general community due to Income, education, class and socioeconomic status while non-participation by middle and upper-income people could be attributed to the individual demand for technology, telecommunications, and decline in social capital. Resultant effect of this is the withdrawal from participation and disengagement from democratic activities.

Through increasing participation, low-income people are integrated in governance, administrative, community projects and educational reforms, including initiatives to justify inequities in school suspension policies and prevent cuts in people services, conduct campaigns for new school curricula responsive to racial diversity and work to reduce class sizes and increase after-school programmes, (Checkoway and Richards-Schuster, 2006; Ginwright and Cammarota, 2009). Differential participation by low-income people does not mean that they are disengaged from democracy but they participate in public affairs in the activities which are more appropriate to their situation.

Challenges to participation

The Mafikeng Local Municipality is surrounded by 103 villages scattered around the municipality. The challenge is how to determine the parameter through which people from these villages would get fair and equitable involvement by participating in the decision-making, governance and other community development programmes considering economic cost and socio-political implications. The challenge, as in most cases, is that one village could be seen as marginalised while another village may be perceived as favoured in terms of executing community projects and electoral representation. Therefore, difficulty in getting people involved in the participatory processes lies in the ability to change their mentality from a group that cannot create change, to a group that have ideas that are resourceful for implementation (Checkoway, 2010). Educating people in the scattered villages of the municipality, pose a challenge since the educated few prefer to migrate to urban areas. Besides this, villages and communities lack access to resources such as community policing, clean water electricity and good roads.

Youth in Electoral Processes

In South Africa, youth participation in the local electoral processes is an important aspect of democracy which is constantly being promoted by the government. It is therefore of particular importance that opportunities are created for the youth to participate in activities at local Municipalities. The Draft National Policy Framework (DNPF) for public participation published in November 2005, defines the concept of participation as an open, accountable process through which individuals and groups within selected communities can exchange views and influence decision-making. It is also viewed as a democratic process of engaging people to decide, plan and play active part in the development and operation of services that affect the youth at the local Municipalities.

Kimemia (2007) argued that it is more likely that the youth will stay in their home locations if they have sufficient opportunities for self-realisation. In order to guarantee youth participation in the electoral processes in decision-making, such processes amongst all levels, must be youth centered. African National Congress (ANC) commitment to youth participation in the electoral processes and policy-making started before 1994. The ANC (1994) has since then made other remarkable contribution to the nation by getting the youth involved in electoral processes and governance of LM.

METHODOLOGY

The study applied a qualitative research methodology. In this methodology, 200 youth members of the municipality were sampled using open-ended questionnaires through a simple random sampling. The choice of the sampling method is due to the nature of the study. The open-ended questionnaires enabled the respondents to respond beyond the boundaries of the questions posed to them. Interviews were carried out through interactive and group discussions. Each group constituted 10 members. During the group discussions, various questions including why the youth are not interested in electoral processes of the municipality were posed to the respondents (the youths). Each group had different opinions but one thing is outstanding, that is, the groups share similarities responding to “youth attitude”. The study also found that factors such as “Race”, to great extent affected the rate of participation in the electoral processes of the municipality.

These factors are supposed to be facilitated through the LYC. The implication is that the youth council is supposed to be the medium through which the youth are mainstreamed to participate in the local electoral processes. The goal of the council is articulated to enable the youth to have a say in the resolutions made by the local government. Nonetheless, the youth participation in local electoral processes enhances their understanding about electioneering and making good choices and to freely express their civil right during voting exercises. In the Local Municipality, the paradox of the youth participation in the electoral processes is resolved in a tautological manner by simply assuming that individuals get utility out of participating in the political electoral processes (Stiglitz, 2000). This explains the view that considering time, money, resources and energy that are devoted in campaigns before and after local elections, it is important to educate the youth on the issues of electoral processes. This can be done through the local youth councils, the IEC, schools, the media, families and churches about their civil and political responsibilities. That can easily be done through formulated youth policies.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Firstly, the study found that there are legislation(s), policies and programmes like the National Youth Policy documents in South Africa that aim at youth development. However, these policy documents are flawed in several ways since they are not grassroots based. Even though these legislations and documents provide an understanding into government plans and desires for the youth; the legislation extends beyond the youth since civil responsibilities are not meant for the youth alone but the entire citizens of 18 years and above. As such, the provision of these several legislative documents and policy frameworks by the South African government should be modelled to reach the most vulnerable at the rural communities and to the youth in schools. Arguably, the aim and objectives for the publication of these policy documents include explaining to South African citizens and the world on steps taken by the South African government to integrate young people into government programmes. At MLM additional programmes such as Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), Community Works Programme (CWP) and car-wash scheme are provided as a medium to employ the youth and to get them actively involved in governance. These additional programmes are aimed at equipping the youth with skill and employment. The problem thereof is that these programmes are not properly implemented and not evenly distributed within the municipality.

Secondly, the Local Youth Council did not serve much purpose during the elections since it was not the medium through which the

youth participated in the local electoral processes. The LYC, consequently was not consistent to the welfare of the youth during the election. The body was hijacked by few members and those who are not members of the political party were left out. The negligence constituted a challenge to getting the entire youth with voter's card and who are qualified to vote to abstain from the electoral processes since their welfare through the LYC had been left in the hands of few. Therefore, the poor integration of the youth to adequately involve in the local governance and electoral processes through the LYC affected the rate of participation in the electoral processes (in which case, one could then ask what is the relevance of the LYC since it cannot promote youth participation in the elections of the local municipality). Factors such as gender, years in political affiliation and experience, voting age and financial capabilities before and during elections constituted major challenges amongst the youth. Those mostly disenfranchised were the secondary youth, the youths in the interior villages and those without proper education.

Knowledge based curriculum contributed to the gap in the views expressed by the youth. The concept of participation (to some) sounds abstract since they are not core members of a political party. The study further found that this gap is a challenge to the rural community. Since they are not core members of political party, their participation is minimal and failures of the government on service delivery are visited with anger, rage and destructive activities. Therefore, the study recommends that the youth should be integrated into governance and civil activities by developing their minds through education at tender ages.

CONCLUSION

The level of Youth participation in the electoral processes in Mafikeng Local Municipality (MLM) in the North-West Province of South Africa is very low. This can be linked to the fact that the Local Youth Council has not been able to play its statutory role of being the platform through which the youth in the municipality play active role in the political process because of the non-acceptability by the youths. The uneven distribution and ineffective implementation of the programmes that are meant to empower the youths and provide them with the leverage they need to participate, has affected the acceptability level.

Youth participation in electoral processes provides them with experience and opportunities for their future participation in the municipal, provincial and national government. It enables them to get involved in the processes of electing the leadership of the municipality and to hold the leaders accountable for any ills in the municipality as well as the community development. Participation at any of these levels brings about efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of the development process.

There is need for greater enlightenment to achieve a youth buy-in into the programmes that have been put in place to encourage their participation in the electoral processes, especially the Local Youth Council. Youths should also be encouraged to take advantage of the various empowerment programmes that have been put in place by the South African government.

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