

Community participation in rural development

The case of Mbashe Local Municipality

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ABSTRACT

The article provides a brief conceptual overview of housing delivery in South Africa, in general, and in Mbashe Local Municipality, specifically. Community members and municipal officials' level of participation in the housing delivery process is also examined. This article aims to establish whether community participation takes place in the housing delivery process in the Mbashe Local Municipality and, if not, what the reasons are for non-participation. Several reasons prevent the community from participating in the housing delivery process. These include inaccessible language; ineffective communication between the municipality and residents; high levels of illiteracy; and a general lack of knowledge concerning roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in the rural municipality. One of the study's recommendations is that municipalities should form partnerships with local universities, where students who are linked to the various departments of Public Management Work Integrated Learning or Service Learning Programmes can help facilitate data collection and information dissemination around housing development, in general. In this way, the university, students, the municipality and rural citizens will benefit in various ways, as the municipality's current forms of community participation strategies prove inadequate.

INTRODUCTION

Section 26 of the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* contends that, “everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing”. Section 28 asserts that, “the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right”. Accordingly, one of the Department of Human Settlements’ main objectives is to fulfil this constitutional obligation. However, it has become apparent that the South African population’s housing needs and demands are only partially met and in most instances “promised” houses are not delivered at all.

Three methods were used for data collection for this study and included a literature review to develop a theoretical framework for the study; an interview process to assess the community’s level of participation in the housing delivery process; and a focus group discussion to gauge municipal officials’ views around the housing delivery process.

Mbhashe, which is the focus area of this article, is located in the Amathole District of the Eastern Cape Province. The Amathole District Municipality was established after the first transformed Local Government elections in December 2000. The district has eight local municipalities, which contain at least one urban service centre each. Mbhashe, which consists of Idutywa, Gatyana, Xhora and numerous rural settlements, is one of them (Mbhashe Local Municipality 2008).

Two hundred local residents comprising of 100 men and 100 women were interviewed. These residents represented various locations in the research area. In order to successfully conduct the interviews, the researcher visited clinics where participants were randomly selected to participate in the study. The interviews took place between 07:00 and 14:00 each day while people waited to be attended to at the clinics. In this way responses could be sourced from residents of varying ages. The traditional leader of each area provided permission for the research to be conducted, and also accompanied the researcher to the clinic to alleviate any suspicions around why the research was being conducted. This ensured higher levels of participation on the part of respondents.

A focus group discussion with eight municipal officials was also conducted. The researcher acted as facilitator. The purpose of the focus group discussion was to establish whether housing delivery in Mbhashe Local Municipality was an area of priority. During the discussion, the researcher wanted to ascertain whether communication channels and community participation strategies were established around housing delivery, in particular.

A lack of adequate housing, as alluded to earlier, remains a key challenge in South Africa and can be traced back to Apartheid. Segregated residential areas were established along racial lines and a large portion of the population was

deprived of decision-making in housing delivery processes. Currently, under the mandate of the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act* (Act 32 of 2000) citizens are encouraged to engage in integrated development planning and in the housing delivery processes, in particular. These integrated development plans are initiated, implemented and monitored at Local Government level and are expected to articulate the desired long- and short-term ideals of a given municipality (National Housing Code 2009; Mubangizi 2011: 643). Accordingly, when addressing the question of housing, it is necessary to address the issue of community participation in the housing delivery process in rural areas, such as Mbhashe. Community participation takes place when a community organises itself and takes responsibility to manage its own problems. Taking responsibility includes identifying problems, developing actions, establishing them and following through. However, there are varying degrees of participation. Participation may range from negligible or “co-opted”, where community members serve as token representatives who have no part in the decision-making process, to “collective action”, where local people initiate action, set the agenda and work towards a commonly defined goal (Cheetham 2002).

While schedule 4 of the *Constitution* assigns functional competencies in relation to the delivery of housing to Provincial and National Government, Local Government also has a role to play, as it is considered the Government sphere that is closest to the people and a crucial point for service delivery (Xali 2005:2). Integrated development planning at municipal level provides impetus to this and, accordingly, municipalities are required to establish appropriate community participatory processes and procedures (Xali 2005:3). The core purpose of this article is to establish whether community participation takes place in the housing delivery process in the Mbhashe Local Municipality. And, if not, what the reasons are for non-participation.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF HOUSING DELIVERY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Housing is meant to address basic human needs for shelter and security, by providing protection against excessive climatic conditions and a range of unwanted and harmful intrusions (Roderick 2004). In order to fulfil this basic need, the South African Government has developed a range of policies and legislation since 1994. These, according to Xali (2005:18), include the following: The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) developed by the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994; the *White Paper on Housing* (1994); the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996*; the *Housing Act of 1997* (Act 107 of 1997); the *White Paper on Local Government* (1998); the

Prevention of Illegal Eviction from Unlawful Occupation of Land Act of 1998 (Act 19 of 1998); and the *Rental Housing Act of 1999* (Act 50 of 1999).

Each sphere of Government has a specific role to play in the national housing development process, as stipulated in the aforementioned policy documents. It is against this background that community participation in the local housing delivery process, in particular in the Mbhashe Local Municipality, is discussed. Therefore, the following section provides insight into the role of each of sphere of Government, as articulated in South Africa's National Housing Codes. It particularly relates to codes that were formulated in 2000 and 2001 around housing delivery in South Africa (Ngxubaza 2010: 44–46).

National Government

One of National Government's key roles in the housing delivery process is to provide support to municipalities, as well as building capacity in order to empower them with knowledge and skills to properly implement, manage and monitor housing development plans and processes. It is further required to promote consultation on matters regarding housing development between National Government, representatives of civil society sectors and sub-sectors that supply or finance housing goods and services, Provincial Government and municipalities, as well as any other stakeholders that are involved in housing development. It should ensure that effective communication and information with regard to housing developments is available. Furthermore, National Government is required to facilitate the process of developing service delivery goals for all three spheres of Government in consultation with both provincial and local municipalities. This is done to ensure that goals and objectives are in line with the needs and demands of communities within the provinces and municipalities (Ngxubaza 2010:44).

Provincial Government

Provincial Governments' primary role in housing delivery is to facilitate and promote, and at the same time ensure that the housing needs of all citizens of a particular province are adequately met. This should be done within the national housing policy framework and in conjunction with national and provincial housing organisations. Accordingly, each province should determine a provincial housing development policy and should promote its adoption. It should coordinate housing development within the province and take reasonable and the necessary steps to support and strengthen municipal capacity to effectively exercise its powers and perform its duties in relation to housing development. The member of the executive council (MEC) for Housing

in each province is obliged to report to the provincial legislature annually on activities of the Provincial Housing Development Board and accredited municipalities (Ngxubaza 2010:44).

Local Government

As a sphere for Government, Local Government provides direct services to communities. In order to ensure effective service delivery, in particular the delivery of housing, all municipalities are required to develop Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) in consultation with their respective community structures and members. These plans are aimed at guiding service delivery, which ensure that they are responsive to the community's needs. The *National Housing Code* (2001) mandates all municipalities, as part of their IDPs, to "take reasonable and necessary steps within the framework of national and provincial housing legislation and policy to ensure that the right to have access to adequate housing is realised on a progressive basis" (*National Housing Code* 2001).

In relation to rural housing development, National Government's rural housing assistance programmes have been designed to complement the realisation of the objectives of the Integrated and Sustainable Rural Development Strategy (ISRDS) from a residential development perspective. Importantly, the ISRDS recognises the role that households should play in their own development. Notably, a fundamental principle of all rural housing programmes is that households should participate in all aspects of their development (*National Housing Code* 2009).

Mbhashe Local Municipality

One of the most serious issues that small municipalities, such as Mbhashe, face is a shortage of affordable housing. This comprises people who live in the countryside, have housing difficulties, and are far more scattered than their counterparts in urban areas. This situation leads to less attention, fewer resources and fewer support services (Du Mhango 1997). Not only are people in rural areas poor, they also suffer difficulties such as long distances to schools and a lack of access to other basic amenities. Government should understand that people who live in rural areas do not necessarily want to move to town. They require houses in their rural setting that will accommodate their livestock and that will allow them to cultivate their land. For this reason, developers, architects and builders should consult rural communities to determine the suitability of housing design, which will contribute to sustainable human settlements (Ngxubaza 2010:101).

Xali (2005:28) contends that the provision of housing is a development issue. Development, in turn, is a people-centered process that creates a sense of belonging. Turner, (in Xali 2005:8), postulates that: "Neither bureaucratic

mass housing nor the uncontrolled market can build communities and eliminate homelessness. But people can, when they have access to essential resources and when they are free to use their own capabilities, in local-appropriate ways". This statement would apply to the residents of the Mbhashe Local Municipality. It is therefore important in the housing delivery process to start with what people have and to build on what they know (Xali 2005:8). The Government cannot solely solve the housing backlog in Mbhashe. Community participation is imperative.

The following section explores community participation as a crucial factor in the housing delivery process in South Africa, as different stakeholders have different interests.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN HOUSING DELIVERY

Community participation is not new. It has been practiced in many different ways for many years within the broader social development context. According to Cornell, (in Xali 2005:7), community participation is a formally structured instrument, which is deliberately used to either bring about, accelerate or in some instances, slowdown the process of change. Xali (2005:7) contends that, "this description implies that the concept of community participation is associated with transformation, where people who were previously excluded from decision-making are provided with an opportunity to partake in decision-making processes".

Community participation methods

There are several ways to involve the public in the housing delivery and planning process. The following table by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs was adapted for the purpose of this article. It provides an assortment of methods to reach the largest audience and solicit meaningful input, while paying attention to the municipality's budget, schedule and target audience.

Community participation during the low cost housing process in the Mbhashe Local Municipality

During the Apartheid era, participation in housing issues was a right that was reserved for a selected portion of the South African population. Currently, municipalities are mandated by law to create appropriate conditions that enable community participation. Municipalities generally cover participation costs (Ngxubaza 2010:105).

Table 1: Community participation methods

Type	Technique	Description	Level of involvement	Level of expense & complexity
Informative	Lobby displays	Posting maps, photos or alternative plans in a prominent location in the community hall or public library. These displays provide information for visitors to view at their leisure and outside of formal public meetings.	L M H	M
Informative	Speakers	The planning team – staff, consultants and volunteers offer to make an introductory presentation of the housing planning process to civic organisations, business groups and schools.	H	M
Informative	Public Information Meetings	An event to announce the housing planning process to citizens and other stakeholders and to view a presentation that covers the project purpose and general plan approach.	M H	M
Informative	Printed Public Information	Flyers, newspaper inserts, brochures or newsletters that provide information on the progress of the housing plan, proposed maps, as well as announcements of future public meeting opportunities. This information can be mailed and made available in public locations, such as libraries and community halls.	M H	M
Informative	Website	A community website is used for periodic updates on the housing-planning process.	L	L
Informative	Press Release/ Media Strategies	Inform the public about housing projects via newspapers, radio, television, billboards and posters.	M H	L H
Key: L = Low; M= Moderate; H = High				

Type	Technique	Description	Level of involvement	Level of expense & complexity
Public Input	Public Hearings	A formal meeting of the elected body, where the public may comment or provide testimony on the matter presented for voting.	L M H	L H
Public Input	Website	Buttons on the community website to send e-mails to planners who are working on the housing plan.	L M H	M
Public Input	Direct Mail Survey	A questionnaire that solicits comments, opinions, and community goals via a printed mail survey, which is sent to a sample of residents in the community.	M H	H
Interactive	Vision, Goals and Objectives of Meetings	Facilitated meetings to determine answers to three key planning questions: What do you have? What do you want? And how will you achieve it?	M H	M
Interactive	E-mail Blasts	Create a database and send periodic progress e-mails and future meeting announcements to distribution lists.	H	M
Interactive	Workshops	The workshops are often small, informal meetings that may include exhibits and presentations that are designed to be interactive.	L M H	L-H
Partnerships	Stakeholder Meetings	The stakeholder group should be representative of the demographic diversity of the area.	L M H	L H
Partnerships	Stakeholder Interviews	One-on-one interviews with key community leaders by using a standardised series of questions, which are designed to gather more detailed information about stakeholders' areas of expertise.	L M H	L H
Key: L = Low; M= Moderate; H = High				

Source: Adapted from Georgia Department of Community Affairs 2005

As stated earlier, the Mbhashe Local Municipality is a rural municipality and the population size and area is vast, which hampers direct participation. While authors such as Theron (2005) suggests the use of radio, press, community newspapers, advertisements, flyers, ward committees, newsletters and church notices, these methods appear inadequate in the case of Mbhashe. A later section in this article reveals that there are evidently no forms of communication, whether a local radio station or a local newspaper in the municipal area. Hence, the forms of communication Theron (2005) proposes are questioned.

During the local housing development process in the Mbhashe Local Municipality, different role-players assume different responsibilities. The following section contextualises these roles (Ngxubaza 2010:102–104).

Councillors

The Mbhashe Local Municipality is made up of 51 councillors who, during the low-cost housing process, consider and adopt a process plan. Before its approval, stakeholders provide feedback on this plan.

Executive Mayor

During the housing development process, the executive mayor, together with the aforementioned councillors, decide on the process plan. The executive mayor monitors the process and at times s/he delegates responsibilities to the municipal manager. The executive mayor also approves nominated persons who are in charge of the low-cost housing process.

Ward Councillors

At the time of the study, Mbhashe had 26 ward councillors. Currently, 26 wards exist. Ward councillors proved to be a major link between the Municipality and the community. Their main role appeared to be linking the planning process to their constituency and/or wards. They are required to organise public participation and consultation, and should ensure effective and efficient communication between the Municipality and the community during the housing-planning or decision-making period.

The Municipal Manager

During the housing development process, the executive mayor at times appoints or nominates the municipal manager to coordinate and monitor the process. The municipal manager ensures that all relevant role players are appropriately

involved in the housing development process. Further duties include day-to-day management of the housing process – particularly its strategic planning, participatory processes and implementation phase. The municipal manager is also required to respond to any queries that the community may have with regard to the Mbhashe housing development process.

Head of the Housing Department

The head of the Housing Department provides relevant technical, sector and financial information in order to determine areas of priority.

Traditional Leaders

Traditional leaders are supposed to identify suitable land for housing development. The Local municipality, in turn, should facilitate, initiate and manage the housing development process.

FINDINGS OF THE INTERVIEWS

Local residents have a lack of awareness with regard to the Local Municipality's role in housing development. Residents reported that there is no communication between them and their ward councillor. They claimed that traditional leaders do not call meetings where information is shared around housing development and integrated development plans. If and when meetings are conducted, community halls in the town centre and traditional leaders' homes are used as venues for discussion. In most instances, the facilities are inaccessible to most residents of Mbhashe. The scheduled times for the meetings also proved inappropriate.

Several other factors prevent the community from participating in the housing process. These include inaccessible language (Xhosa is the dominant language spoken in the area and information is usually disseminated in English); illiteracy (90% of the community is illiterate); lack of formal schooling; and a lack of general knowledge around the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders within the municipality. Residents that were interviewed claimed that the top-down, centrally organised housing delivery strategies leads to poor planning and implementation. They claim that their lack of involvement has resulted in the delivery of sub-standard houses. The relationship between the community, traditional leaders and municipal councillors appeared strained. This further impeded participatory decision-making. No clarity exists around who should represent community interest in the housing development process, and who should keep the community informed around developments in the area, in general.

While poverty is evident in Mbhashe, local residents advised that they do not wish to live in houses that are labelled for “the poor”, as it further diminishes their social and economic value, as well as their status in society. They indicated a need to participate in the construction of their homes, and called for skills development programmes in building construction. They claimed that the use of local labour will enhance their financial conditions and reduce the local municipality’s housing costs. Women in particular contend that, as males migrate to urban centres to find employment, they have traditionally constructed their own houses in the rural setting by making home-made bricks. They have also been fetching and carrying water that is required during the housing construction process from rivers for a great number of years. They claim that the municipality, business persons and other stakeholders should recognise these skills when housing development endeavours are planned. Inadequate community participation in the housing delivery process has resulted in valuable skills and local knowledge going unnoticed.

FINDINGS OF THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Municipal officials revealed that the Mbhashe Local Municipality faces a big challenge, as it serves approximately 430 000 people – the majority of whom live in rural settlements. As a result of widespread poverty and unemployment, the population is primarily dependent on welfare and pensions for their survival. While the community claims that traditional leaders do not call meetings, traditional leaders, in turn, report poor meeting attendance. However, in the Mbhashe Local Municipality, traditional leaders have no clear understanding of what their duties entail with regard to the housing development process. This became evident in the focus group discussion.

The municipality claims that information around meetings is disseminated by radio and the local newspaper. Yet residents claim that these forms of communication are inaccessible. Discussions also revealed that municipal officials are indifferent to the plight of rural residents. Municipal officials reported that workshops and meetings are organised between them and councillors/ward councillors where information pertaining to housing is discussed and shared. Ward councillors, in turn, should convey this information to rural communities. This did not appear to be the case. Municipal officials concurred that there is a lack of understanding among community members around their roles, and agreed that effective communication channels should be found.

Both the interviews and focus group discussion revealed a lack of community participation in the housing delivery process in the Mbhashe Local Municipality. The residents of the Mbhashe Local Municipality strongly indicated that housing

is their most important need, above food, health-care and education for their children. Solutions to their plight should be heeded with great urgency.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for more innovative planning at a Local Government level that involves all role-players – especially the community. Furthermore, there is a need to link economic and social development. Employers, employees and municipalities should engage in partnerships to deliver houses, which will facilitate both social and economic development. Steps should be taken to strengthen local authorities' capacity to deliver housing. Skills development and relocation, as well as recruitment of properly trained staff to housing departments, is key. Development and the communication of policy should be improved and strengthened. There should be regular updates on policy and workshops should be conducted to discuss policy changes to ensure that the municipality keeps abreast of activities. Concerns that are raised at Local Government level should be taken into consideration and fed through to the Provincial Government. The Mbashe Local Municipality's IDP should integrate various departments in order to prioritise basic services – particularly the delivery of houses.

The study revealed that local communities are not well-organised and hence their impact on the housing delivery process is minimised. They could not claim their right to information, but instead had to rely on leadership to lead the process. Communities are not aware of the fact that they should be represented at sub-council meetings, nor are they aware of the existence of sub-council meetings as a participatory organ. Council members are not actively engaged in community issues, as complaints about their non-performance were raised frequently. Communities are poor and cannot afford to attend meetings or gatherings late at night at venues that are far from their homes. Hence, meeting attendance is often poor. The level of disunity among the community is apparent. Due to a lack of formal education and vulnerability, they easily disagree on issues of mutual interest. A majority of the interviewees suggested that local communities are often not willing to attend meetings or participate in activities in community structures if they do not benefit from it directly, or if they believe that it is not in their own interest.

The community participation methods forwarded by Georgia Department of Community Affairs (undated), specifically techniques such as workshops, stakeholder meetings and stakeholder interviews, proved the most appropriate methods of communication and participation for the Mbashe Local Municipality's housing delivery process. These methods are interactive and help

build partnerships. One-on-one interviews with key community leaders and individual community members distributed across rural villages, by way of a standardised interview schedule would be useful. These interviews should be conducted in residents' mother-tongue and will accommodate the demographic diversity of the area. During this data collection process, volunteers— especially students at various local universities who are participating in their Department of Public Management's Service Learning Programmes or Work Integrated Learning Programmes – could assist. Universities, in partnership with Local Government, will then gather information from residents around their specific and unique needs and wants. This process will benefit the university, all stakeholders and the local municipality, as current forms of community participation in local endeavours proved inadequate.

Closer interaction between the residents and municipal officials is a prerequisite for good governance. Good governance can only be established and advanced if the municipality takes the community's needs and aspirations seriously. This, in turn, will help build a relationship of trust between a municipality and its community. It will ultimately lead to the legitimisation of the municipality as an important service delivery organ of state. Furthermore, communication and consultation channels will be strengthened by including both urban and rural community structures, such as traditional leaders, the youth and civic organisations and so on. It is imperative that each resident of the Mbhashe Local Municipality should become aware of what the local housing process entails.

The National Department of Human Settlements, in conjunction with the Eastern Cape Province's Housing Department, could assist in formulating a local skills development programme around housing construction. When people have access to essential resources and when they are free to use their own capabilities in local-appropriate ways, as alluded to by Turner (in Xali 2005:8), they can build communities and eliminate homelessness.

The important role that women play in the construction of houses in rural settings should be recognised. Their skills around how they have constructed their dwellings, clayed their floors, thatched their roofs, cultivated their land and supported their families, should be embraced and built upon. Such valuable local knowledge can only serve as an asset in the construction of cost housing in the Eastern Cape.

Lastly, it is recommended that the Mbhashe Local Municipality should prioritise the needs of the poor with regard to housing development; consult meaningfully with individuals and communities that are affected by housing development; and ensure that housing development is based on an IDP and administered in a transparent, accountable and equitable manner that upholds the practice of good governance.

This holistic approach to housing development is in line with current Government policy on the matter. Both the RDP (1994) and the *Housing White Paper and the Development Facilitation Act* (Act 67 of 1995) state that development is not about the delivery of goods to a passive citizenry, but about active participation and growing empowerment.

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