COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE MANGAUNG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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Abstract

This study evaluated community participation in the municipal performance management systems (PMS) in South Africa, with a focus on the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. Existing literature shows that, despite legal requirements, a significant knowledge gap exists concerning the efficiency and inclusiveness of community engagement in municipal PMS. Through a case study of the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, this research addresses this existing gap by evaluating community participation in developing, implementing, and reviewing the municipal PMS. The study used qualitative methods, drawing on 14 in-depth interviews with community members and municipal officials. It also included an analysis of publicly available municipal policy documents related to public participation and performance management systems.

The findings show that many community participants, including members of ward committees, were not fully aware of what public participation or performance management meant. A significant number of them had a general understanding of these concepts. A lack of detailed understanding can be attributed to the limited active involvement of communities in these municipal processes. The findings indicate that public participation in municipal PM in Mangaung is either non-existent or very limited. This is because participants believed that meetings are held for compliance reasons instead of being utilised to genuinely engage with citizens. In addition, ward councillors, who should be a bridge between the community and the municipality, seem to be failing to provide clear communication of performance goals and structured updates that address community members' complaints. In some instances, they seem to be serving certain political interests at the expense of others. The study findings show that community engagement in Mangaung is ineffective mainly due to limited communication between the municipality and the residents. The top-down approach that the municipality uses could also be another barrier to effective municipal involvement of the community in its PMS.

Keywords: Community participation, public participation, Mangaung, performance management systems, municipality performance management.

Declaration

I, Mongezi John Mabozo, declare that this research is my work and that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Signed

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Date

Dedication

To my beloved wife, Nthabiseng Margaret Mabozo, I express my deepest gratitude for her unwavering love, patience, and support throughout this journey. Her encouragement and understanding were my pillars of strength.

I dedicate this dissertation to my children, Bongiwe Mabozo and Ongeziwe Mabozo, whose resilience and love sustained me during the many hours spent away from them. I apologise for the moments I was unable to be present as a father, and I hope this achievement makes them proud.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt thanks to my mother, Kelaegile Ruth Mabozo, whose lifelong support, inspiration, and belief in me have been the foundation of my perseverance. Her sacrifices and encouragement have shaped my academic and personal journey in immeasurable ways.

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Table 1. Interview participants

Acronyms and Abbreviations

4IR - Fourth Industrial Revolution

AGR - Auditor-General's Report

COGTA - Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs

IDP - Integrated Development Plan

KPI - Key Performance Indicators

LGMSAA - Local Government Municipal Systems Amendment Act

MFMA - Municipal Finance Management Act

MMMOPMPFSOP - Mangaung Metro Municipality Organisational Performance Management Policy Framework and Standard Operating Procedures

MPPMR - Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulations

MSA - Municipal Systems Act

NPM - New Public Management

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OGP - Open Government Partnership

PM - Performance Management

PMS - Performance Management Systems

SALGA - South African Local Government Association

SDBIP - Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan

WCRB - Ward Committee Resource Book

WPLG - White Paper on Local Government

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This study evaluates community participation in the municipal performance management systems (PMS) in South Africa, with a focus on the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality in the Free State. The mandate for local government is outlined in the Constitution of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996), which emphasises democratic and accountable governance at the local level and promotes community participation in local government issues (Ngamlana, 2011). Building on this foundation, Chapter 4 of the Municipal Systems Act (MSA, 2000) stipulates that municipalities must foster a culture of community involvement. This involves establishing suitable mechanisms, processes, and procedures to facilitate local community participation in municipal affairs. Specifically, Section 17 requires municipalities to develop a framework for community participation (MSA, 2000).

Chapter 6 of the MSA mandates that municipalities establish key performance indicators (KPIs) focused on outcomes and their effect on the municipality's development priorities and goals as outlined in its Integrated Development Plan (IDP). Municipalities must consistently provide updates on their performance progress to both the public and relevant state entities to ensure transparency and accountability (MSA, 2000). Further emphasising community involvement, Section 42 of the MSA highlights the importance of actively engaging citizens in municipal performance management systems. This includes setting primary performance goals and ensuring that community needs and aspirations are adequately represented in municipal decision-making processes. Section 44 of the MSA, moreover, requires municipalities to disclose KPIs and targets for their PMS, both internally and externally, as determined by the council.

Municipalities utilise community engagement as a strategy to augment accountability and receptiveness in governance (Heikkila & Isett, 2007), engaging communities in fundamental processes such as formulating IDPs, budget consultations, and decision-making concerning the provision of services (de Visser, 2009). As Barichiev et al. (2005: 371) argue, “Participatory governance is not the same as representative democracy, which involves the regular election of councillors. Instead, it refers to how municipalities

are governed between elections. Specifically, it pertains to a set of structural and procedural requirements to achieve what the MSA of 2000 defines as community participation in the operation of local government." At a municipal level, the local community constitutes the public, and community participation and public participation are used interchangeably in this study. This active involvement ensures that municipal determinations align with the genuine needs of the communities they impact, thereby reinforcing the validity of public decisions and policies (Rijal, 2023).

Community engagement in municipal performance management holds particular importance, as stated in Section 42 of the Municipal Services Act of 2000. Such engagement directly impacts the formulation of performance objectives and benchmarks, which are essential for evaluating municipal performance. The introduction of a PMS in local government is intended to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in South Africa's municipalities (Asmah-Andoh, 2009). The South African Local Government Association (SALGA, 2019) states that performance management (PM) is crucial for developing, supervising, monitoring, and evaluating municipal and employee performance, assessing progress toward IDP goals, and appraising service delivery efficiency. Democratic legitimacy and accountability are also recognised as important aspects of public participation (SALGA, 2019).

Some South African municipalities struggle with ineffective community participation and the delivery of basic services (Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022). Public participation faces quality challenges, including poor implementation, lack of political will, and inadequately designed participation structures, which have hindered the effectiveness of these initiatives (Piper & Von Lieres, 2008). Piper and Von Lieres (2008) express concerns that this situation may persist, rendering the government's "invited spaces" ineffective in addressing the needs of poor and marginalised communities, thus failing to improve their quality of life.

Ngubane et al. (2024) emphasise the need for scholarly inquiry into community involvement in PM processes at the municipal level. When citizens fully engage in the

PMS, they can contribute to the better provision of targeted solutions to their needs. However, despite legal requirements, a significant knowledge gap exists concerning the efficiency and inclusiveness of community engagement in municipal PMS. This gap hinders the understanding of how communities influence performance indicators and goals, as well as their familiarity with these systems in their municipalities. Understanding the extent of community involvement and its influence on PM in municipalities could offer valuable perspectives on enhancing participation, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness in local governance, ultimately resulting in more effective and inclusive municipal PM.

Through a case study of the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality in the Free State, this research addresses the existing gap by evaluating community participation in developing, implementing, and reviewing the municipal PMS. It examines the approaches and mechanisms through which community participation in municipal PM is facilitated by the municipality and the degree of community awareness and involvement in the establishment, execution, and appraisal of municipal performance indicators and objectives. By scrutinising the efforts of the Mangaung Municipality to engage the community in the municipal PMS, especially considering prior interventions and ongoing initiatives to promote public participation, the research offers insights into the obstacles to and prospects for improving public involvement in local governance.

1.2 Problem statement

The MSA of 2000 is considered a fundamental aspect of municipal governance, emphasising the significance of active community engagement, the establishment of participation mechanisms, and the alignment of performance goals with developmental priorities (MSA, 2000). As emphasised by Asha and Makalela (2020), PM assumes the utmost importance in addressing service delivery issues since all municipal personnel must comply with performance-based agreements linked to the IDP of the municipality and its KPIs. Community participation in municipal governance is central because the effective execution of a PMS can enhance service provision (Mohangi & Nyika, 2023; Prins, 2023). This engagement not only ensures that policies mirror the multifaceted

needs and perspectives of the populace but also fortifies trust in governance institutions (Lynn *et al.,* 2001).

Nonetheless, there is a notable gap in understanding citizen participation in municipal PMS. This gap becomes more apparent when considering the plethora of literature available on local government public participation in forums such as IDPs and ward committees (Van der Waldt, 2004; SALGA, 2019; Phago & Molosi-France, 2018; Piper & Deacon, 2008, 2009). There is a noticeable absence of analysis specifically focused on citizen participation in municipal PM (Ngubane, 2024). In the research that has been conducted (Ngubane, 2024), findings indicate that the PMS in South African local governments are failing to effectively enhance the lives of citizens and that public involvement in the PM of municipalities is inadequate.

Therefore, while some comprehension exists regarding citizen engagement in endeavours such as IDP and budgetary deliberations (Mamokhere & Meyer, 2023; Asha & Makalela, 2020), the scope and nature of community engagement with PM processes, including the development of KPIs and objectives, remains uncertain. This knowledge gap, related to how municipalities and citizens interact in terms of the municipality's PMS, presents an obstacle to transparency, accountability, and efficient governance in local administrative entities (Mohangi & Nyika, 2023). A better understanding of how citizens are engaged, and their level of participation would add to our understanding of the progress and challenges of community involvement in South African local governance.

1.3 Research objectives

This study was guided by the following research objectives:

- To investigate the mechanisms and structures to enable community participation in the PMS.
- To analyse the challenges or barriers to community participation in the PMS.
- To determine community members' understanding of public participation in PM and the municipal PMS.

- To explore the extent and nature of community participation in the various stages of the PMS, including establishment, execution, and review of performance indicators and objectives.
- To evaluate how community inputs influence the shaping of performance targets and indicators.
- To understand how communities would want to be involved in municipal PMS in the Mangaung Municipality.

1.4 Research question

The study was guided by the following research question: *How do citizens in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality understand and engage in public participation in the municipal PMS, especially the setting of targets and indicators and the review of municipal performance?*

To respond to the principal question, the investigation was further guided by the following research sub-questions:

1. What mechanisms and structures are in place to enable community participation in the PMS?
2. What are the challenges or barriers to community participation in the PMS?
3. How do community members understand the role and process of public participation in municipal PM and the PMS?
4. To what extent are community members actively participating in the different stages of the PMS (establishment, execution, and review of performance indicators and objectives)?
5. How do community inputs influence the decision-making processes within the Mangaung Municipality, particularly in shaping performance targets and indicators?
6. Based on stakeholders' experiences and perspectives, what strategies or approaches can enhance community participation in the performance management processes of the Mangaung Municipality?

1.5 Structure of the study

This research report is divided into five chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1: This introductory chapter has introduced the topic of study, the problem statement, research questions, and objectives.

Chapter 2: This chapter reviews existing literature on public participation and performance management, with a focus on the municipal sphere, to locate the research and highlight the knowledge gap to be filled by the study. It also sets out the theoretical framework of the research

Chapter 3: This chapter sets out the research methodology used to gather data in the study. It explains the research paradigm, approach, design, population, sampling, data collection methods, data analysis and ethical considerations, among others.

Chapter 4: This chapter presents the findings of the study that were derived from data gathered via interviews with municipal officials and community members, as well as through document analysis.

Chapter 5: This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the data, juxtaposing the study findings with existing literature. The chapter also highlights how the findings answer the study's research question(s).

Chapter 6: This chapter presents concluding remarks and a summary of the main findings of the study. It brings together the study’s overall argument as well as setting out limitations and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature on community involvement in municipal PMS. The review starts by unpacking performance management in local government and considers the context of the New Public Management (NPM) approach. The subsequent section examines the development of local government in South Africa, as the sphere of government closest to the people, with a focus on the legal framework underpinning the PMS. The chapter also examines the role of 'developmental local government' and public participation in municipal governance, focusing on the value and role of public participation, its placement within local government, and a brief overview of the PMS in Mangaung municipality. The chapter then outlines the study's theoretical framework for participatory governance.

2.2 Performance management

Curtis (1999) describes performance management (PM) as a management procedure that is used in most nations worldwide. In South Africa, Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality (2021: 7) notes the following concerning PM.

> PM is a tool used to drive organisational performance by aligning individual performance objectives and targets with organisational objectives and targets. It is also a management tool to plan, monitor, measure, and review performance indicators to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery by the municipality. It is also a communication process that assists managers in providing a motivating climate for employees to achieve high-performance standards.

As a concept, PM originated in Europe with the "Management-by-Objective approach" (Cameron & Sewell, 2003) and was implemented in municipalities across South Africa in 1998, following the enactment of the White Paper on Local Government (Mafolo, 2012). The concept and practice of PM in governance have been influenced by the principles of new public management (NPM). NPM was developed in the late 20th century in response to the apparent inefficiencies and rigidity of traditional public administration (Mofolo,

2012), promoting a shift from bureaucratic to market-oriented management practices in the public sector (Mofolo, 2012). As per Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017), NPM encompasses various strategies, including the decentralisation of management within public services, the increased use of performance measurement and management, an emphasis on outcomes rather than inputs, and the adoption of management techniques and practices from the private sector.

PM and the use of PMS have roots in private sector management practices, particularly those related to strategic planning, performance measurement, and continuous improvement. The adoption of these practices in the public sector is motivated mainly by the need to improve the efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness of public services (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017), the idea being that PM can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public service delivery by prioritising outcomes rather than processes (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008) Kloot and Martin (2000) state that PM frameworks enhance accountability by establishing clear performance standards and regularly reporting on outcomes, thereby increasing the transparency of government actions. PM also enables strategic planning and decision-making by providing relevant data and insights, which help in setting priorities and allocating resources effectively (Poister, 2010).

While NPM and its related practices have led to significant reforms, they have also faced considerable criticism. For instance, Munzhedzi (2021) argues that several challenges are associated with the application of NPM principles in South African local government, including corruption, a lack of skills and capacities, and a lack of political will. Critics also contend that the emphasis on efficiency in NPM can compromise other fundamental public sector values such as equity, fairness, and social justice (Hood & Dixon, 2015). The focus on cost-cutting and productivity improvements may result in the neglect of aspects of public service that are difficult to quantify (Hood & Dixon, 2015). Additionally, the integration of private sector practices into public management does not always align with the public sector's unique goals and limitations. Public organisations often have complex and multifaceted objectives that are not easily measured or managed using traditional PM tools (Dunleavy *et al.,* 2006). Furthermore, while NPM aims to improve

accountability, the introduction of numerous performance metrics can create situations where public managers are held accountable for conflicting goals. This can lead to manipulative practices or an emphasis on what can be measured over what is truly important to municipal stakeholders, particularly communities (Pollitt, 2013).

Literature also problematizes the adoption of externally driven policies like NPM over consideration of local conditions. In this regard, Rubakula (2014) discusses the proliferation of the NPM model in Africa and concludes that while some African countries have shown improvement following the adoption of NPM reforms, others have faced disappointing outcomes. Unlike its success in other parts of the world, NPM has encountered unique challenges in Africa that require specific attention for significant progress to be realised (Rubakula, 2014). To address these challenges, Rubakula (2014) advocates for a shift toward public value management, emphasising the importance of considering local contexts before implementing externally driven reforms.

Public value management refers to a framework in public sector administration that focuses on actively identifying, creating, and delivering tangible benefits to the public by prioritising the needs and perspectives of citizens when designing and delivering services, essentially ensuring that government actions are generating real value for the community rather than just outputs (Raleting & Nzimakwe, 2022). This approach is useful because it promotes a more citizen-centric focus, improves accountability, and helps decision-making by considering broader societal impacts beyond just internal efficiency (Raleting & Nzimakwe, 2022). This approach better aligns public sector reforms with the needs and realities of African countries (Rubakula, 2014).

Former Minister of CoGTA, Richard Baloyi, stated that public service officials in South Africa tend to behave as if they are doing the public a favour by performing their duties (Raleting, 2022). Public value management in South Africa is thus affected by poor ethical, professional, and human values (Raleting & Nzimakwe, 2022). Thus, for community engagement to be effective in Mangaung municipality, there may be a need to look at local conditions of involving the community in PMS as opposed to advancing externally driven approaches.

2.2.1 Performance management in local government

In South Africa, municipal operation systems should conform to legislative requirements and specify a framework to achieve service delivery (Mofolo, 2012). Therefore, a PMS is mandatory for municipalities (MSA, 2000). Municipal PM entails evaluating the performance of municipal KPIs, the developmental target priorities, the IDP's objectives, and using the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 to measure and review performance at least once a year (Mofolo, 2012) Risher (2003) states that municipal managers should create conditions that allow for high municipal performance. Mofolo (2012) believes that managers can create an atmosphere that fosters good municipal performance by going beyond the basic aspects that require reviewing, monitoring, and measuring to establish municipal performance.

According to Meyer and Kirsten (2005: 62), PM is useful to municipalities when it speaks to the objectives listed below:

- To nurture an environment that encourages an ethos of good performance
- To determine transparent performance standards
- To guarantee the execution of the municipality's developmental plans
- To furnish municipal workers with performance feedback
- To encourage municipal workers' development through coaching, training, and counselling
- To recognise employment opportunities
- To increase career development through discussions on municipal policies for career progression and promotion
- To establish mutual goals aimed at improving communication and relationships
- To formulate a mechanism that links wages to performance
- To improve municipal service delivery.

The literature on PM and PMS in local government highlights several key roles and impacts, including improved service delivery (Ammons, 2012; Hatry, 2014), accountability and transparency (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008), strategic planning and decision-making (Poister, 2010; Ferreira & Otley, 2009), employee performance and motivation (De Bruijn,

2007; Moynihan & Pandey, 2010) and community engagement (Ho, 2007). PM and PMS are considered tools aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of delivering public services. They help in setting clear goals, measuring performance, and identifying areas for improvement, leading to more responsive and accountable local governments (Ammons, 2012; Hatry, 2014). Local governments can also enhance transparency by setting performance standards and regularly measuring outcomes, thereby improving public trust (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008). Effective PM and PMS can provide critical data and insights that inform policy decisions, resource allocation, and strategic priorities (Poister, 2010; Ferreira & Otley, 2009).

2.3 Legislative Framework Governing Municipal PMS in South Africa

Before 1994, South Africa's local government was administered by the apartheid regime, which was characterised by an autocratic political culture centred on white dominance (Ndasana & Umejesi, 2022) and state-promoted repression of black people (Leander, 2015). Post-1994, the supreme law of the nation, which is the Constitution, has granted municipalities the status of a third sphere of government. Chapter 7 of the Constitution details municipal matters, including the establishment of different types of municipalities, their authority, the roles to be performed by these municipalities, and the efficient execution of these roles. Section 152 of the Constitution outlines the municipality's aims and sets out guidelines as to how each municipality must carry out its activities (South Africa, 1996).

Chapter 6 of MSA 32 of 2000 is another piece of legislation that deals with municipal PMS. Sections 38-40 of the MSA cover how to establish a PMS that suits the municipality’s resources, how to develop a PMS, and how the municipality should monitor and review its PMS. Section 41 focuses on the PMS’s essential components (MSA, 2000). These include establishing suitable KPIs as a measure of performance, assessable performance targets regarding developmental priorities and aims, and performance monitoring, evaluation, and review (Swanevelder, 2004). The essential components also include actions to improve performance on development priorities and aims where there is underperformance, as well as the formation of a consistent

mechanism that reports to municipal workers, the council, the public, political structures, political office bearers, and other state organs (Swanevelder, 2004).

Sections 42-48 of the MSA deal with the involvement of the community to safeguard the development, implementation, and review of the municipal PMS, and how the Minister can determine suitable KPIs that apply to municipalities in general. This latter aspect is covered in the Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulations (2001). The PM Guide for Municipalities (2001) provides strategies for the development and implementation of an organisational PMS. The Local Government Municipal Systems Amendment Act (LGMSAA), 44 of 2003, provides for further allocation of roles and authorities to municipalities and proposes procedures for the submission of annual municipal performance reports. Section 46 of the LGMSAA states that in each financial year, a municipality should compile a performance report that reflects the following (LGMSAA 2003):

- The municipality's performance and its financial years' service providers
- An evaluation of the performance regarding the targets of the previous financial year
- Service delivery priorities and municipal performance targets for the upcoming financial year; and
- The measures used to improve performance.

The Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA), 56 of 2003, is another Act that governs municipal PMS. The MFMA is arguably one of the most vital Acts on performance evaluation as it establishes a strict process to cultivate durable management of the municipality's financial affairs and those of other municipal institutions (SALGA, 2019). The MFMA aims to modernise budget and financial management practices within municipalities, ensuring the efficient and effective use of resources (SALGA, 2019). The MFMA also articulates comprehensive treasury norms and standards for performance evaluation and reporting and stipulates actions that should be taken against non-compliant individuals (SALGA, 2019). The MFMA supports municipal PM requirements

as outlined in the MSA by introducing a performance component into municipal budgeting and financial reporting (SALGA, 2019).

2.4 Developmental local government in South Africa

Municipalities in South Africa play a critical developmental role, guided by the Constitution and various legislative frameworks. Their primary mandate is to promote sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development at the local level (White Paper, 1998). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) Section 152 outlines the objects of local government, which include promoting social and economic development and ensuring the provision of services in a sustainable manner. The White Paper on Local Government (1998) is a seminal policy document in South Africa that laid the foundation for the concept of "developmental local government." It envisions local governments as central actors in promoting sustainable, equitable, and participatory development at the local level. The key ideas articulated in the White Paper regarding development include IDP, service delivery, local economic development, community participation and empowerment, and capacity building and institutional development (Dlamini & Reddy, 2018).

The municipal developmental role encompasses several key functions and objectives, such as service delivery, local economic development, spatial planning and land use management, community participation and governance, and social development (Van Donk *et al.,* 2008; Rogerson, 2010). Municipalities are responsible for providing essential services, including water, sanitation, electricity, waste management, and public transportation. Effective service delivery is fundamental to improving the quality of life for residents and fostering economic development (Van Donk *et al.,* 2008). In the same vein, municipalities are tasked with promoting economic growth and development within their jurisdictions. This involves creating an enabling environment for businesses, supporting small and medium enterprises, and implementing local economic development strategies that attract investment and create jobs (Rogerson, 2010). Municipalities also oversee spatial planning and land use management to ensure sustainable urban development. This includes developing IDPs that align with national and provincial development goals, as well as addressing local needs and priorities (Pieterse, 2004).

Engaging communities in decision-making processes is a crucial aspect of the developmental role of municipalities. Through mechanisms such as ward committees, community involvement, and public consultations, municipalities ensure that development initiatives reflect the needs and aspirations of residents (Bekker & Leilde, 2003). Municipalities also focus on social development by providing amenities and services that improve social well-being, such as parks, libraries, community centres, and healthcare facilities. They also implement programs aimed at addressing social issues like poverty, inequality, and unemployment (Swilling, 1997; Mumba & van der Waldt, 2023).

While South African municipalities have made significant strides in fulfilling their developmental roles, several challenges, such as capacity and resource constraints, governance issues, and service delivery protests, exist (Atkinson, 2007; Pieterse & Parnell, 2014). Many municipalities, particularly in rural areas, face significant capacity and resource limitations, and this hampers their ability to effectively deliver services and implement development projects (Atkinson, 2007; Mpongwana & Cishe, 2024). In South Africa, corruption, political interference, and poor governance practices have undermined the effectiveness of municipal administrations. These issues often lead to inefficiencies and a lack of accountability (Pieterse & Parnell, 2014). Frequent protests over inadequate service delivery highlight ongoing frustrations among residents. These protests underscore the need for improved responsiveness and accountability from municipal authorities (Booysen, 2007; Alexander, 2010; Morudu, 2017; Alexander et al., 2018; Chiwarawara, 2023, 2024). These frustrations and protests may also highlight the lack of community involvement in municipal performance management.

Local government is widely recognised as the sphere of government that is closest to the people and plays a crucial role in the everyday lives of citizens (Reddy, 2016). Local governments are geographically and administratively closer to the citizens, which facilitates immediate and direct access to government services and officials (Van Donk *et al.,* 2008). This closeness enables the design and implementation of policies and services tailored to the needs of local communities, thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of government interventions (Bekker & Leilde, 2003). Local governments are,

therefore, in a better position than national or provincial governments to understand and address the needs and preferences of their residents and engage with communities through direct interaction and participatory governance mechanisms, such as ward committees, public meetings, and local forums (Reddy, 1999). By involving citizens in decision-making processes, local governments empower individuals and communities, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards local development initiatives (Pieterse, 2004). The proximity of local government to communities also enhances accountability as residents can more easily monitor and influence the actions of their local representatives and officials (De Visser, 2009). Local governments are more likely to practice transparent governance due to the scrutiny by local communities and the media, leading to greater public trust and confidence (Pieterse & Parnell, 2014).

The literature reviewed here shows that local government serves as the frontline of governance, intimately connected with the everyday lives of citizens. As such, it is ideally placed as the sphere in which communities can be involved in decisions and performance management. However, it has also been highlighted that issues of corruption and service delivery protests in South African municipalities highlight the frustrations of communities and, arguably, their limited involvement in municipal processes. Thus, this study aims to use the case of Mangaung Municipality to assess how the community is involved in the municipal PMS.

2.5 Public participation in municipal governance

This section examines how municipalities leverage their proximity to communities and embrace participatory democracy principles in municipal governance. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, and the MSA 32 of 2000 are the main pieces of legislation that provide for public participation in municipal governance in South Africa. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, section 152, states that communities have the right to be involved in local governance, section 195(1) (e) states that the public must be encouraged to participate in policymaking. Section 195(1) (g) states that the public must be provided with timely, accessible, and accurate information.

The MSA 32 of 2000 facilitates public participation in South African municipal governance by requiring municipalities to establish mechanisms for community engagement. These include receiving petitions, holding public hearings, consulting community organisations, and providing regular feedback to the local community. In other words, it essentially mandates a transparent process where citizens can actively contribute to the decision-making of municipal issues. This is primarily outlined in Chapter 4 of the Act.

2.5.1 Public participation in municipal governance internationally

Internationally, the role and value of public participation in governance have been widely recognised, with numerous scholars and practitioners advocating for its importance in fostering democracy, enhancing legitimacy, and improving governance outcomes (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Fung, 2006; Gaventa, 2005; Fung & Wright, 2003; Heller, 2001). Fung (2006) has emphasised the importance of participatory governance in enhancing transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in government, arguing that involving citizens in decision-making processes can lead to informed and legitimate policy outcomes. Moreover, international organisations like the United Nations have underscored the value of public participation in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, which explicitly call for inclusive governance and citizen engagement as essential components of effective and sustainable development (Fox *et al*., 2016).

In the context of local government, scholars have explored various mechanisms for public participation, including participatory budgeting (Sintomer *et al.,* 2008) and processes of deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 2000). These approaches aim to empower citizens to have a direct influence on decision-making processes and resource allocation at the local level. Heller (2001) examined the politics of decentralising democracy in Brazil, India, and South Africa and noted that successful democratic decentralisation depends on strong participatory institutions that allow ordinary citizens to engage in governance. Heller (2001) draws on Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting model as a key example, where community members directly influence municipal spending priorities. He also notes that, in Kerala, local governments are empowered through the People's Planning Campaign, which ensures grassroots participation in development projects (Heller, 2001).

In Brazil, despite a long history of authoritarian rule spanning from monarchy to military dictatorship (1964 - 1985), since 1985, there have been efforts to involve citizens in community planning, which represents a remarkable achievement (Speier, 2009). On the one hand, Brazil still grapples with the legacy of corruption and cronyism. Citizens often operate within systems of patronage and obligation to political and economic elites, which may impact their ability to effectively participate in municipal governance (Speier, 2009). This underscores the ongoing challenges in fostering genuine citizen participation within governance processes, despite Brazil's strides toward democracy (Speier, 2009).

Nonetheless, prior to becoming a member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2011, Brazil had already begun engaging citizens and stakeholders in decision-making at both local and national levels. (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2022). The OGP is an international initiative that helps governments become more transparent, accountable, and participatory. Furthermore, in the two decades following Brazil's democratic transition, it became known as a democratic innovator after the democratic transition by utilising new instruments such as policy councils and participatory budgeting (Pogrebinschi, 2021; Heller, 2001). For instance, Brazil has participatory practices such as the 1944 National Health Council, the 1989 participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, the 2000 Law on Administrative Improbity, and the 2004 Transparency Portal (OECD, 2022). In Porto Alegre, Heller (2001) notes that strong social movements and labour organisations helped institutionalise participatory governance, ensuring that local decision-making was inclusive. However, more recently, the avenues for citizen participation in public decisions have been steadily reduced, and the state-society relationship has become polarised, hampering traditionally well-established participatory practices (OECD, 2022).

In the Global North, Bishop and Davis (2002) noted that a significant challenge is that in Australia, community members have limited opportunities to participate in decision-making and policy development, and their voices are often not taken into account, contributing to developments that affect them. The importance of public involvement in

improving policy implementation and effectiveness is highlighted in Lynn et al. (2001) study on citizen engagement in public administration in the USA, illustrating how incorporating citizens into decision-making processes can lead to more informed and long-lasting policies, ultimately contributing to improved service delivery. Additionally, Nabatchi and Leighninger (2015) emphasise the role of public participation in strengthening social capital by reinforcing community networks and relationships. This empowerment of citizens in governance enables democracies to effectively address challenges while remaining committed to the principles of inclusivity and accountability.

2.5.2 Public participation in municipal governance in South Africa

Piper and Von Lieres (2008) observe a surge in the usage of public participation methods in the global south. Countries, including South Africa, have embraced governance reforms aiming to engage citizens in public decision-making and provide better representation for historically marginalised groups (Piper & Von Lieres, 2008). In the South African context, literature indicates that community involvement should result in improved service delivery and citizen satisfaction. Ngubane et al. (2024) emphasise that, in municipalities, success is measured by their capacity to deliver services and the level of citizen satisfaction, which often falls short. Consequently, there is a call for active public participation, allowing citizens to voice their opinions and contribute to the improvement of service delivery (Ngubane et al. 2024).

South African literature documents community participation in municipal governance from both the municipal and community perspectives. Community participation is not merely the presence of community members in municipal affairs, but rather the active engagement of community members in the affairs of a municipality by municipal officials, to ensure that development and service delivery are in the best interest of the community (Phago, 2008). Marais et al. (2008) provide evidence that communities are not fully engaged and involved in the decision-making processes of municipalities, particularly in decisions and policies that directly affect their lives.

Community members are upset by the lack of community participation (Petunia & Selepe, 2020). For example, literature shows that protests have been prominent over the last 15-20 years, especially in instances where community members feel that their needs are not met and services are not sufficiently provided (see for example, Alexander, 2010; Alexander et al., 2018; Williams, 2016; Ndasana, Vallabh, & Mxunyelwa, 2022). Williams (2016) asserts that between 2015 and 2016, local municipalities in South Africa faced numerous violent protests related to service delivery, underscoring the agitation caused by poor citizen participation. In the same vein, Alexander (2010) has noted that, since 2004, South Africa has experienced a movement of local protests amounting to a 'rebellion of the poor'. He asserts that, on the surface, the protests have been about service delivery and against uncaring, self-serving, and corrupt municipal leaders (Alexander, 2010). Recently, Khan and Booysen (2024) have noted that, over the last 30 years of South African democracy, real results have depended on people holding their leaders accountable through protest, which has resulted in significant changes. This suggests that protests, especially those related to service delivery, have been vital in ensuring that communities hold their municipalities accountable.

Community involvement is seen to mitigate some of the challenges faced by municipalities (Moodley, 2003). Moodley's (2003) study identified the challenges faced by local governments, including resource constraints, skills shortages, and bureaucratic obstacles. It highlights the difficulty of aligning PMS with the diverse needs of local communities. To resolve this, Moodley (2003) proposed the active participation of communities in performance management to promote transparency, accountability, and the relevance of municipal services. Public consultations, community workshops, and participatory budgeting are recommended to facilitate effective community involvement (Moodley, 2003). This is where the theoretical framework of participatory governance is particularly helpful for exploring public participation in South African municipalities. Brooks (2017) highlights a historical tradition of grassroots organisation and participation in South Africa, which dates to before 1994. This culture of local participation influences people's demands for engagement, not only in terms of government provision but also regarding broader community involvement.

Petunia and Selepe's (2020) study examined the extent of community involvement in policy and decision-making within Mbombela Local Municipality, focusing on whether residents of Matsulu actively engaged in municipal affairs. Findings showed that 87% of the community had little to no participation in the municipality's decision-making processes and policymaking, despite 13% having some level of community involvement in these matters. Most community members (87%) stated that the municipal community meetings were limited and that their opinions were rarely solicited on any matter. The results showed that the municipality consulted the community after making decisions (Petunia & Selepe, 2020)

Literature indicates that some municipalities have struggled to address issues related to effective communication between the local government and the citizenry. Consequently, in these municipalities, there is low public participation, citizens have lower trust levels in government, and there is an increase in service delivery protests (Taylor, Draai, & Jakoet-Salie, 2020). These problems suggest that where there is little trust in government, communication channels, citizen involvement, and the co-production of services are also impeded (Jakoet-Salie, 2018, p. 56).

2.5.3 Municipal public participation in South Africa and its critiques

There are various ways through which community involvement in PMS can be forged. The *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998* introduced Ward Committees as a key mechanism for public participation. In South Africa, the ward committee system was first introduced in 2001 when the former President, Thabo Mbeki, sought to improve community involvement (Ward Committee Resource Book (WCRB) 2005: 32). The legislation and policies governing the role of Ward Committees require that their processes 'reinforce two of the fundamental mechanisms of sustainable democracy, which is the participation of the people and accountability of local government' (WCRB, 2005: 39). Therefore, Ward Committees are one of the major mechanisms for municipalities and communities to improve citizen involvement in local government (Jakoet-Salie, 2018: 54; SALGA, 2019). The Catholic Parliamentary Liaison

Office (2016) notes that in local government, every ward committee consists of up to ten persons:

> Each ward committee must accurately reflect the ward's registered community-based organisations in all relevant sectors. These include ratepayers associations, civic organisations, faith-based organisations, safety and security groups, environmental groups, education organisations, youth organisations, arts and culture groups, sports bodies, the business community, and designated vulnerable groups such as pensioners, women and children, and the disabled (Catholic Parliamentary Liaison Office, 2016: 2).

The municipality is legally obligated to involve the community, through the ward committee, in setting performance targets and KPIs, and to ensure that the community is involved in monitoring and evaluating these targets and KPIs (SALGA, 2019). Local governments often face competing interests when determining a municipality's key performance areas from various local government stakeholders (SALGA, 2019). Therefore, a municipal PMS must include these various interest groups. Councillors must report their performance evaluations to the Ward Committees and should take into consideration the Ward Committee's inputs (SALGA, 2019). This procedure fosters accountability and ensures consensus between the council and the community. When councillors involve the community in PM, they can ensure community trust in their PMS (SALGA, 2019).

Literature, however, documents the challenges that ward committees face, such as politics around representation, structural limits to the ward committee's power, and party politics (Seitlholo, 2016; Oldfield, 2008). The challenge of representation is often pinned on councillors who are blamed for hand-picking ward committee representatives (Smith & de Visser, 2009; Sekgala, 2016). Councillors also frequently manipulate the committee processes, given that the chairperson is the ward councillor. Ward committees also have a challenge of limited powers stemming from the Municipal Structures Act, which confines ward committees to playing an advisory role to councillors and gathering community contributions (Seitlholo, 2016; Smith & de Visser, 2009). Taylor *et al.* (2020) also note that the relevant councillors often lack information and understanding of the ward

committee's work. Findings from the Local Democracy, Peace and Human Society show that most ward councillors are not leading or directing, and some are not attending ward committee meetings, resulting in limited consultation with communities on matters affecting them (Karamoko & Jain, 2011; Seitlholo, 2016).

Another challenge is linked to members' skills, expertise, and education (Smith & de Visser, 2009; Seitlholo, 2016; Sekgala, 2016). Functionality is also a challenge associated with the effectiveness of ward committees in South Africa. Tsheola and Nkuna (2014) identify a fundamental issue of role ambiguity, where the specific functions and responsibilities of ward committees are often unclear. This lack of clarity impedes their capacity to operate as intended within the local governance framework. The MSA asserts that ward committees are envisioned to be the primary mechanisms for fostering participatory democracy, acting as essential conduits for public involvement in municipal matters (Tsheola & Nkuna, 2014).

Further complicating the effectiveness of ward committees is their limited success in facilitating community engagement and participation. Shava and Thakhathi (2016) contend that while ward committees are designed to bridge the gap between communities and municipal authorities, they frequently struggle to establish meaningful connections with residents. This disconnect restricts their ability to serve as effective representatives of community interests, ultimately undermining their role in participatory governance.

Literature on community involvement in municipal management examines both state-initiated spaces and those that emerge organically, introduced by citizens themselves. Piper and Von Lieres (2008) note that institutionalised or invited public participation initiatives are initiated by the state rather than emerging organically from communities. Evaluating whether these formal participation mechanisms, such as ward committees, have led to increased democracy in local governance or improved service delivery, they suggest that formal public participation has not yet achieved these goals (Piper & Von Lieres, 2008). Challenges such as poor implementation, lack of political will, and inadequately designed participation structures have hindered the effectiveness of these

initiatives (Piper & Von Lieres, 2008; Sekgala, 2016). Therefore, if this situation persists, it will render the government's ‘invited spaces’ ineffective in addressing the needs of the poor and marginalised communities (Piper & Von Lieres, 2008; Sekgala, 2016). This study will, therefore, consider whether Piper and von Lieres’ argument applies to Mangaung, specifically investigating whether state-initiated spaces for participation in PM are enhancing democracy and improving municipal responsiveness.

Matloga, Mahole, and Nekhavhambe (2024) explored the obstacles to public involvement in improving basic service delivery within the Vhembe District Municipality in Limpopo. They found that community members hesitate to participate in service delivery meetings due to the repeated broken promises made by the government regarding service delivery (Matloga et al. 2024). Furthermore, they note a deficiency in community consultation, the hiring of unqualified individuals in key roles, and the failure to execute the municipality’s Integrated Development Plan (IDP) (Matloga et al. 2024). These authors suggest that local governments should actively aid municipalities in tackling and resolving service delivery challenges, including resource limitations, corruption, instability, and insufficient community involvement (Matloga et al. 2024). It is essential to support and empower community-based organisations, traditional leaders, and municipal councillors through training workshops to develop skills in public participation and improve basic service delivery (Matloga et al. 2024).

Efforts to improve participation and service delivery often run into deeper structural issues within municipalities, especially weak performance management systems. Mdleleni (2023) observes that efforts to implement performance management in South Africa’s municipalities are often hindered by entrenched resistance and weak accountability structures. Staff and stakeholders frequently oppose these systems because of concerns about increased scrutiny or interference with established practices. As a result, progress toward adopting new methods is slowed, and a culture oriented toward performance struggles to take root. Using the O.R. Tambo District Municipality as an example, Mdleleni (2023) also highlights that poor training and development are major obstacles. The lack of a formal training policy leaves employees unprepared to meet new expectations and responsibilities, which in turn undermines effective performance management.

2.5.4 Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality

Mangaung Municipality in the Free State province comprises the Bloemfontein, Thaba Nchu, Botshabelo, Dewetsdorp, and Soutpan locations. The municipality exemplifies the significance of community involvement in the municipal PMS. In 2019 and 2020, the municipality faced severe financial and service delivery issues, leading to provincial and national interventions (COGTA, 2022). Mangaung municipality has nonetheless made efforts to comply with legislative mandates and promote community participation. The municipality established a Performance Audit Committee to oversee the performance of local government, senior managers' wages, and development plans (Parkies, 2015).

Letawana's (2017) evaluation of participatory governance in Mangaung municipality, however, concluded that, despite these legal frameworks, the realisation of participatory governance at the local level, as emphasised by the Constitution, remains a challenge. He notes that service delivery protests in Mangaung since 2004 underscore the failure of participatory governance, particularly in municipal planning, to bridge the gap between the government and its constituents due to insufficient consultation in the planning and decision-making processes (Letawana, 2017). Letawana (2017) recommends providing a framework for evaluating the success of the Mangaung Municipality's participatory agenda and ensuring that the IDP achieves sustainable development outcomes.

The literature reviewed here has highlighted the roles of PM and PMS, as well as the laws that govern and provide for them at the municipal level in South Africa. The literature has also articulated the various mechanisms and avenues through which communities should participate in PMS. However, the existing literature provides little evidence of communities using the various mechanisms that the legislation offers for them to participate in municipal PMS. Thus, this study draws from Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality to explore community involvement in the municipal PMS.

2.6 Theoretical framework: Participatory governance

This study employed a theoretical framework of participatory governance to enhance the understanding of community involvement in municipal PMS. Participatory governance

underscores the importance of involving citizens in decision-making processes, especially at the local level, to ensure transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in governance (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Participatory governance is hinged on the belief that citizen participation not only bolsters the legitimacy of government actions but also fosters more effective and sustainable policy outcomes by tapping into collective intelligence and the diverse perspectives of communities (Lukensmeyer *et al*., 2011). Involving citizens in decision-making processes fosters democracy, enhances accountability, and promotes sustainable development (Fung, 2006). It emphasises the active engagement of diverse stakeholders in policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation, aiming to address complex societal challenges and improve the legitimacy of governance structures (Sintomer *et al.,* 2008).

At the heart of participatory governance lies the principle of inclusive decision-making, where citizens are not merely passive recipients of policies but active contributors to the governance process (Bell & Reed, 2022). By involving citizens in decision-making, participatory governance seeks to increase the responsiveness of public institutions to the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve (Bell & Reed, 2022). Hickey and Mohan (2004) describe participation as a ‘transformative’ process in that citizens develop themselves. They are of the view that participatory approaches in development should aim for transformation by shifting power dynamics rather than merely improving the efficiency of development projects. They stress that true transformation involves enabling marginalised groups to have a real say in decisions that affect their lives (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Here, democracy and development intersect. Participatory governance is, therefore, a sound theoretical framework for this study to assess whether the community has a real say in the Mangaung municipality’s performance management.

Bell and Reed (2022) developed a model, which they termed the 'Tree of Participation,' embodying principles of emancipation, inclusivity, and empowerment. The 'Tree of Participation' serves as a practical tool for organisers of participatory processes, offering guidance on how to ensure that their practices are empowering and inclusive. Another similar typology or approach is Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of citizen participation, which sets

out different rungs, or levels, of participation. The OECD (2017a) also identifies three distinct levels of involvement for citizens and stakeholders depending on the level of involvement and associated impact. These are: information, consultation, and engagement. ***Information*** is an initial level of participation characterised by a one-way relationship in which the government produces and delivers information to the public (OECD, 2022). It covers both the on-demand provision of information and "proactive" measures by the government to disseminate information. This level of participation can refer to open data platforms or public communication campaigns (OECD, 2022).

Consultation is a more advanced level of participation that entails a two-way relationship in which the public provides feedback to the government and the government provides feedback to the public (OECD, 2022). This form of participation relies on clearly defining the issue at hand before seeking input and requires providing relevant information along with feedback on the outcomes (OECD, 2022). Typically, there is no obligation to incorporate the public's input into final decisions, policy changes, or rulemaking. In most consultation processes, decision-makers listen to participants' views and may consider them during discussions (OECD, 2015). This level of involvement is standard in forums like technical advisory committees on health policy or public consultations on draft legislation.

Engagement This happens when people are given both the chance and the tools, like information, data, and digital platforms, to take part in every stage of policymaking and the design and delivery of public services (OECD, 2022). "Engagement is a partnership between citizens and government, where the public plays an active role in shaping both the process and the content of policies" (OECD, 2022). Like consultation, it involves two-way communication, treating citizens as equals in setting priorities, suggesting policies, and influencing decisions. "While public authorities typically retain the final say in policymaking" (OECD, 2022), this approach values citizen input. This type of participation can include representative or deliberative processes, as well as participatory budgeting at the local level. This ladder helps highlight how these three levels – information, consultation, and engagement are reflected in public participation in Mangaung, and in

the implementation of community involvement in municipal performance management in particular.

The OECD (2017b). Public institutions can involve individuals and stakeholders in participatory procedures, according to the OECD (2022). Stakeholders include any interested or affected parties, such as organisations or institutions from government, civil society, academia, the private sector, or the media. Citizens, on the other hand, refer to individuals, regardless of personal characteristics such as age, gender, sexual orientation, or beliefs, and more broadly, to people living in a specific area, depending on the context (OECD, 2022).

Citizen engagement in the South African context faces significant challenges, including political interference, lack of trust, inequality in information access, and resource limitations in municipalities (OECD, 2022). Nonetheless, levels of participation set out by the OECD can be useful despite these challenges. In this study, the ‘information’ level would help determine whether the municipality shares information on its performance, budgets, and strategies with the community. The ‘consultation’ level helps assess whether the municipality asks for community feedback on proposals or decisions, such as municipal plans or service delivery strategies. Lastly, the engagement level helps determine whether there is more direct interaction between the municipality and the community, where citizens have a say in decision-making.

Not unlike the notion of ‘engagement’, Arnstein (1969) argues that the concept of participatory governance and citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power (1969). Thus, for genuine citizen participation to be realised, Arnstein (1969) introduced the concept of the "ladder of citizen participation", which delineates different levels of citizen involvement, from tokenism and manipulation to genuine citizen power. This framework emphasises the importance of moving beyond surface-level participation to achieve meaningful engagement that empowers citizens and redistributes decision-making authority (1969: 216):

> It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future. It is the strategy by which the have-nots join in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits, such as contracts and patronage, are parcelled out. In short, it is how they can induce significant social reform that enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society.

Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation has eight levels of participation, where each rung corresponds to the extent of citizens' power in determining the product. The bottom rungs are 'manipulative' and 'therapy', and they signify non-participation, while the three (informing) and four (consultation) highlight tokenism that allows citizens to have a voice (Arnstein, 1969). Rung five (placation) is a higher level of tokenism where citizens can have a voice, yet the powerholders retain the right to make final decisions. In addition, "Rung (6) Partnership enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional powerholders. At the topmost rung, (7) Delegated Power and (8) Citizen Control, have-not citizens obtain most decision-making seats or full managerial power" (Arnstein, 1969, p. 217).

Arnstein's (1969) "ladder of citizen participation" will serve as a decision-making framework in this study to help assess the extent to which inputs by the various stakeholders are considered in the Mangaung Municipality. This will be vital in showing whether the current methods of citizen involvement in decision-making constitute tokenism, manipulation, or genuine citizen power, as well as how they might be strengthened.

Participatory governance as a theoretical framework offers a focused lens for examining the quality of citizen involvement in municipal decision-making. It helps assess whether current practices represent genuine citizen power or merely forms of tokenism or manipulation. This framework also guides the analysis of how participatory mechanisms can be improved to enable more meaningful and practical engagement.

Performance Management

Alongside participatory governance, performance management theory is also relevant to this study. PM is a structured process designed to enhance organisational performance by aligning individual and team goals with the organisation's strategic objectives (Locke & Latham, 2002). In essence, it involves establishing clear performance expectations, offering ongoing feedback, and assessing outcomes through performance appraisals. The foundation of performance management lies in goal-setting theory, which posits that specific, challenging goals improve performance by directing attention and effort (Locke & Latham, 2002). It also draws from systems theory, which perceives organisations as interconnected systems where coordinated efforts are essential in achieving collective goals (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). The significance of performance management lies in its capacity to promote accountability, boost employee engagement, and drive continuous improvement of individuals and organisations (in this case, a municipality). By defining expectations clearly and providing regular feedback, organisations can ensure that employees focus on priorities that contribute to overall success, thereby enhancing efficiency and effectiveness (Aguinis, 2013).

In this study, by applying the theory of participatory governance, the research aims to explore how citizens participate in the municipal PMS, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and inclusiveness. This study aims to understand to what extent participatory governance principles are integrated into municipal PM, the nature and scope of public participation, and the challenges and opportunities for enhancing citizen engagement in these systems. Given the case study of the municipal PMS, however, performance management theory supplements this understanding to determine if and how public participation influences the PM process in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. PM theory will help to understand community involvement in municipal PM in South Africa through accountability, transparency, and participatory governance. It will help to highlight whether citizens are engaged in setting performance indicators, monitoring service delivery, and holding municipal officials accountable.

2.7 Conclusion

This literature review has unpacked some of the debates related to municipal performance management and the legislative framework that guides local governments in their endeavours to involve communities in PMS and the developmental role of local government. The literature review also examined public participation in municipal governance, focusing on the role and value of public participation, existing debates on public engagement in local government in South Africa, and the current methods of community involvement in municipality management.

The literature highlights a gap in our knowledge of how municipalities and citizens interact within PMS, as well as the factors that influence citizen engagement. This gap is evident in the lack of analysis specifically focused on citizen participation in the municipal planning process. The literature reviewed thus far indicates that the PMS in the South African local government sphere is largely failing to effectively enhance the lives of citizens and that public involvement in the PM of municipalities is inadequate. This study aims to contribute to our understanding of this challenge by examining community involvement in the PMS in Mangaung municipality as a case study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter unpacks the methodology used to gather and analyse data. This study adopted a qualitative methodology where data were collected through in-depth interviews with community members and municipal officials and an analysis of documents. The sections below unpack the research paradigm, approach and design used in this study. The chapter also unpacks the population and the purposive and snowball sampling methods that were used to locate participants. The chapter also examines the thematic analysis method used to analyse the data, as well as the researchers' positionality and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research paradigm

Kivunja, (2017) defines a research paradigm as the researchers' worldview because it encompasses the rational viewpoints and beliefs that shape how a scholar sees, understands, and behaves within that world. A research paradigm offers the researcher the lens to study the procedural aspects of their research and choose the research and data collection methods to use (Kivunja, 2017). This study employed an interpretivist paradigm as the organising principle through which the researcher assembled and construed data concerning community involvement in the municipal PMS (Nieuwenhuis, 2016).

Through interpretivism, truth is not objectively obtained but socially constructed. Therefore, the reality of community participation in the PMS in Mangaung Municipality was based on the researchers' social exchanges with the study participants. The interpretivist paradigm assumes that, for a researcher to better understand their subjects' views of their daily lived experiences, they should study them in their social environment (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). This study focused on understanding how community involvement in the PMS is achieved in Mangaung. Interviewing various stakeholders in their municipal environment allowed the researcher to understand their perspectives.

3.3 Research approach

This study employed a qualitative method to gain a deeper understanding of community involvement in the PMS. Qualitative research is defined by Lichtman (2013) as the process through which a researcher collects, consolidates, and gives meaning to data gathered through observation and interaction with human beings. In this study, data were collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews with community members, municipal officials, and officials from the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) department. This approach enabled the drawing of a comprehensive description of the dynamics of community involvement in municipal PMS in Mangaung. It also allowed the researcher to engage with events in their usual settings and to infer meanings and interpretations in harmony with how participants understand these events, as suggested by Ritchie and Lewis (2003).

This study employed a case study approach, which Neuman (2014) defines as an in-depth investigation involving a comprehensive collection of information about a single case. The research was exploratory, which, according to Neuman (2014), is typically used when a topic is relatively new and not much is known about it. While Performance Management Systems (PMS) are not new in the South African context, the exploration of community involvement in PMS within the Mangaung Municipality represents a relatively under-researched area.

The units of analysis are described as the “what” of one’s study, referring to the person from whom the researcher collects data (Bless et al., 2013, p. 133). For this study, individuals, particularly residents, community leaders, and municipal officials in Mangaung municipality, were the units of analysis. The points of focus for these individuals were their views and experiences of community involvement in municipal PMS.

3.4 Research design

This study adopted a phenomenological research design, which Nieuwenhuis (2016) defines as an investigation into people’s daily lived experiences and how they live. This research design values what participants’ encounters mean to them (Nieuwenhuis, 2016).

Therefore, the phenomenological research design was employed to investigate the actual experiences of citizens in Mangaung Municipality regarding their involvement in Municipal PMS. It enabled the researcher to gather data from participants in their natural environment. It allowed for the conduct of face-to-face interviews with various community members, as well as municipal officials.

Creswell (2014:214) contends that, although it is challenging to establish generalisation, phenomenology tolerates a profound comprehension of the phenomenon under study, which is the involvement of communities in municipal PMS. Phenomenological research aims to explore the structure of human life and the lived world as experienced in ordinary situations and relationships (Van Manen, 2007, cited in Nieuwenhuis, 2016, p. 77).

3.4.1 Case study: Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality

The case study covers the full geographic and administrative area of the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality. This includes the city of Bloemfontein along with the surrounding towns and rural settlements of Botshabelo, Thaba 'Nchu, Dewetsdorp, Wepener, Van Stadensrus, and Soutpan. Together, these areas span about 9,886 square kilometres (Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2025). The metro has a population of roughly 811,431, most of whom are Black African. Sesotho is the most widely spoken first language, followed by Afrikaans, English, and others. The municipality consists of 51 wards, each with its own demographic and spatial characteristics (Statistics South Africa, 2022).

Mangaung was selected because its mix of urban neighbourhoods, rural communities and areas with traditional leadership creates varied conditions for citizen participation. This diversity allows the study to examine the difference between meaningful engagement and participation that is more symbolic within a single municipal setting. As the capital of the Free State, Mangaung's governance practices also carry regional significance. In line with legislation, the municipality has performance management and public participation systems in place. However, a combination of community pressure, administrative commitments and uneven outcomes creates conditions where participation

is both contested and consequential. Moreover, there is currently no permanently appointed official responsible for performance management, and the role is carried out by an acting incumbent (Interview, Participant 12). This institutional arrangement shapes how public participation processes are coordinated and evaluated

3.5 Population and sampling

A study population is defined as a cluster from which some important data will be gathered, and the population will be determined by clear inclusion and exclusion criteria (Benerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). The target population for this study was community members, community leaders, and municipal officials in Mangaung. A sampling method is a way of selecting research participants since it is impractical to gather data from the entire targeted study population (Babbie & Mouton, 2010) - in this case, the population of the Mangaung Municipality. In this study, the "community" referred to a diverse group of individuals residing within the municipality, including community members, leaders, Academic and local stakeholders involved in the municipal PMS.

Data was collected through 14 interviews: four with municipal and COGTA officials, one with an academic, and nine with community members. Planned interviews initially included the MMC responsible for performance management to gain an oversight perspective, but this was not possible. The research sub-questions, however, examine how citizens experience participation, the barriers they encounter, and how they understand the process. For this reason, concentrating the interviews on community members, who comprised the majority of participants, thus offered a clearer view of the conditions and challenges that shape participation for those directly involved.

The selection criteria emphasised diversity, inclusivity, and active engagement in local governance. I interviewed a diverse range of community members, including Ward Committee members, ordinary community members, community leaders, and community development workers. Participants were identified to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives, from those directly involved in community decision-making (Ward Committee members and community leaders) to those who may be more representative

of the general community (ordinary community members). Community development workers were also included, as they often have a unique understanding of community needs and initiatives. By engaging with these different groups, I aimed to gather a comprehensive understanding of community awareness and engagement with PM processes.

The purposive sampling method was used to select the study participants. Purposive sampling is very useful in studies where participants are selected based on a clear motivation (Maree & Pietersen, 2016). In this study, a purposive sampling method was employed due to the need to interact with community members, community leaders, and municipal officials to gather their views and experiences of community involvement in the PMS. The study sample was enlarged through a snowball sampling method, which involved asking interview participants to refer other potential participants who could contribute to the study. Additionally, I leveraged existing contacts within the community, with the assistance of the ward councillor, who helped to identify and recruit participants for the study.

3.6 Data collection methods

In this study, data were collected in two ways: through interviews and document analysis.

3.6.1 Interviews

An interview is a mutual conversation between an interviewer and interviewee in which the researcher probes the participant to collect data about their opinions, experiences, views, and attitudes (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Using face-to-face interviews, I gathered detailed accounts of participants' views and experiences with PMS in Mangaung Municipality. In-depth interviews allow for a comprehensive discussion between the researcher and the participant in an accommodating atmosphere, enabling follow-up questions and detailed explanations (Jamshed, 2014).

Interviews were conducted with community members and municipal officials. When approaching municipal officials, those working with public participation and those involved

in the PM process of the municipality were targeted. The interview questions that guided these conversations can be found in Appendix A. An interview was initially planned with a Member of the Mayoral Committee responsible for performance and public participation, as well as officials from COGTA. However, the councillor was ultimately unavailable to participate. The questions to municipal officials were tailored and served as a guide to address the questions to COGTA's support role in municipal operations.

A total of 14 interviews were conducted: four (4) with municipal and COGTA officials and ten (10) with community members. The interviews helped the researcher to understand the participant's insights, emotional state, and values on the topic. Interviews provided the participants with freedom of expression to express their views and feelings comfortably. With participant consent, the interviews were audio-recorded for easy transcription, backup, and analysis. The participants' profiles are captured in the table below.

Participant	**Role**
Participant 1	Community member
Participant 2	Community member
Participant 3	Community member
Participant 4	Community member
Participant 5	Community development worker
Participant 6	Community member and academic
Participant 7	Community member
Participant 8	Community leader involved in local government
Participant 9	Ward committee member
Participant 10	Community leader
Participant 11	Municipal official
Participant 12	Municipal official
Participant 13	COGTA official
Participant 14	COGTA official

Table 1. Interview participants

3.6.2 Document analysis

Document analysis complemented the interviews, providing a holistic view of public participation and the PMS in Mangaung Municipality. Document analysis involves systematically examining and interpreting various forms of documented data to uncover meanings, gain insights, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009).

In the context of public participation and PM, document analysis was conducted on all publicly accessible municipal policies related to public participation and PMS. The documents analysed included South Africa's White Paper on Local Government (1998), Municipal Finance Management Act Circular 88, Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulations (2001), Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality Auditor-General's Report (2023-2024), and the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality Organisational Performance Management Policy Framework and Standard Operating Procedures (2024/2025). This method provided valuable insights into the policies and practices in the Mangaung Municipality, examining the strategies and mechanisms the municipality employs to facilitate community participation. It also involved assessing the level of community awareness and involvement in the establishment, implementation, and evaluation of municipal performance indicators and objectives.

3.7 Data analysis

After obtaining participants' consent, all interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The data were then examined through a deductive thematic analysis guided by predefined concepts linked to community involvement in municipal PMS. This approach included segmenting and labelling the text, coding it against the initial analytical framework, grouping similar codes into sub themes and developing narratives that explained how these sub-themes they did to the broader research questions (Rivas, 2012). Using this method made it possible to explore the interview data in a structured way and clarify how citizens viewed their roles in municipal PMS processes in the analysis

chapter. To protect participants' identities, I refer to them only by assigned numbers and general descriptors such as "community members" or "municipal officials."

3.8 Trustworthiness

Bless et al. (2013: 236) note that a qualitative researcher is a “self-critical, thoughtful, curious and trustworthy human being” through whom the world is studied. Therefore, the quality of data depends on guaranteeing the trustworthiness of the study in its procedure and results. Nieuwenhuis (2016) asserts that trustworthiness can be achieved when a researcher ensures the study’s credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability. Therefore, this study followed the research strategy discussed above and showed how each step was completed to ensure the study's dependability (Ali *et al.,* 2011). Data saturation was used to ensure the study's trustworthiness.

Conducting in-depth interviews and maintaining participants' confidentiality facilitated the collection of reliable data. According to Nieuwenhuis (2016), credibility measures the researcher's confidence in the authenticity of their study findings. Participant validation was used to guarantee the credibility and authenticity of this study. This entails a situation in which the researcher sends interview transcripts to key study participants so that they can confirm whether their views are accurately captured (Carter et al., 2014), and they can make additions or corrections to the interview transcripts (Torrance, 2012).

The trustworthiness of this study was ensured through the process of transferability. Carter *et al*. (2014) note that transferability entails a process in which the researcher can prove that the study results can be applied in other settings. This was achieved by giving detailed explanations of the situations, the research design, and the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2011).

Confirmability refers to the neutrality of the study findings. This means that the research results stem from the participants’ narratives and are void of the researcher's influence, motivations, and biases (Nowell *et al.,* 2017). To achieve this, the researcher ensured that his biases did not influence the presentation of the data gathered from the study

participants. In addition, the sampling conducted in this study helped ensure the confirmability of the study results by capturing and juxtaposing various perspectives from participants, including local government officials and community members. According to Nieuwenhuis (2016), researchers can ensure confirmability by keeping a record of activity. A record of activity is a qualitative research approach that demonstrates how the study results are grounded in participants' narratives and illustrates the researcher's process of gathering and analysing the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2016).

The researcher explained how data were collected and analysed in this study to demonstrate how the study's findings were reached. According to Nowell et al. (2017), this approach illustrates that the data analysis proceeded logically based on the information gathered from study participants. Additionally, the researcher maintained a field diary where he documented all activities conducted in the field.

3.9 Limitations

This study encountered limitations due to time and financial constraints. Due to the limited time available for the study, the researcher focused on a representative sample from one municipality, rather than attempting to include other municipalities in the province. To guarantee timely completion, the researcher used efficient time management techniques and established a clear research timeline. To work within budget limitations, the study employed cost-effective data collection methods, including face-to-face interviews that lasted approximately 1-2 hours. Fewer municipal officials were interviewed than initially planned. While I had intended to interview the Member of Mayoral Committee (MMC) responsible for performance management to gain a high-level oversight perspective, this was not possible. As a result, the study placed more weight on community perspectives. This focus is still valuable because the research questions centre on how citizens experience participation, the barriers they encounter, and how they understand the process. Concentrating on community members, therefore, provided a clearer view of the conditions and challenges that shape participation for those directly involved, offering insights that are central to the study's aims.

Costs were also reduced by leveraging existing municipal networks and resources. This included using local government venues such as offices and community centres for interviews, engaging municipal staff and community development workers to assist with participant recruitment, and relying on established relationships with councillors to facilitate introductions and build trust. These strategies enhanced data collection efficiency while maintaining methodological rigour and effectively managing time and budget constraints.

3.10 Feasibility

The research was feasible within the given constraints due to several key factors. A detailed timeline was created, outlining each phase of the research process, including setting milestones and deadlines to ensure the project stays on track and is completed within the allocated timeframe.

To complement any gaps in primary data collection, publicly available data was utilised in cases where accessing data was challenging. The research scope was clearly defined to focus on Mangaung Municipality and key aspects of public participation in the PMS, specifically to ensure that the study remains manageable and relevant.

3.11 Positionality

As a researcher working for the Department of COGTA, it is important to acknowledge that inherent biases and positionalities may influence the interpretation of data. Awareness of personal beliefs and normative approaches is crucial in this context. To address this, the researcher maintained a reflexive stance, continually reflecting on how personal positions might affect data interpretation. This reflective practice included keeping a research diary to document thoughts and potential biases. To minimise bias, the study utilised triangulation methods and numerous data sources to ensure that the findings were robust and not unduly influenced by personal opinions. Engaging in peer debriefing sessions with colleagues with different perspectives further helped mitigate bias.

Given the researcher's role within COGTA, it was crucial to approach this research topic without bias. Therefore, the researcher maintained objectivity and focused on understanding how community members experienced and perceived the municipality's participation initiatives. Recognising the potential power dynamics involved in gathering data from municipal entities, the researcher ensured that participation was voluntary and that the privacy and anonymity of respondents were preserved. To mitigate any perception of coercion or vulnerability due to the researcher's position, the researcher explicitly informed participants that the study was being conducted for academic purposes as part of a Master's research report rather than in the capacity of a COGTA official.

3.12 Ethical considerations

According to Babbie and Mouton (2010). Research ethics require researchers to adhere to specified research procedures. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) of the University of Witwatersrand. The researcher also obtained permission from the Mangaung municipality to conduct the research. De Vos *et al.* (2017) state that a formal agreement between the researcher and all the participants in the research must be signed. This agreement ensured that the study participants understood the procedures and any potential risks associated with participating in the research, and that their participation was entirely voluntary. In this regard, all the participants were required to provide informed consent by signing a consent form outlining the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of their participation, affirming their right to withdraw from the study at any point, assuring the use of pseudonyms to protect their identities, and guaranteeing the preservation of anonymity. While the fact that I leveraged references from Ward committees in recruiting might have made participants feel compelled to participate, I explained to prospective participants their right to choose not to participate. I also ensured that I did not disclose information about such participants that would allow one to easily identify their narratives.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this study. In this regard, the chapter presents the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative method, and the phenomenological research design used in the study. The chapter has also explained the population, sample and purposive and snowball sampling methods that were utilised in the study. The chapter noted that data were collected through 14 in-depth interviews with community members and municipal officials, as well as an analysis of municipal documents and policy documents. The chapter has also unpacked the thematic data analysis method that was used to analyse data, the researchers positionality, and the study's methodological limitations, feasibility, trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4: Presentation of data

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's findings, derived from document analysis and in-depth interviews. The documents that were analysed include South Africa's White Paper on Local Government (1998), the Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) Circular 88, the Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulations (MPPMR) (2001), the Auditor-General's Performance Report (AGR) (2023-2024), and the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality Organisational Performance Management Policy Framework and Standard Operating Procedures (MMMOPMPFSOP) (2024/2025). These documents were analysed to see how they support community participation in PM within the Mangaung Municipality.

The 1998 White Paper on Local Government (hereafter referred to as the White Paper (1998)) establishes participatory governance principles, while the MFMA Circular 88 (2017) guides municipalities on performance indicators but lacks direct community engagement mechanisms. The MPPMR (2001) mandates public involvement in performance planning, however. The AGR (2023-2024), which evaluates Mangaung's financial and performance accountability, reveals gaps in community participation. The MMMOPMPFSOP (2024/2025) provides a structured approach to PMS, outlining PM processes, responsibilities, and community engagement expectations.

The study's research questions guided the data analysis. The first research question sought to understand the effectiveness of the current methods and approaches employed by Mangaung Municipality for engaging citizens in PM processes. The second question sought to understand how community members understand their role and the process of public participation in municipal performance management. The third question sought to understand the extent to which community members actively participate in the different stages of the PMS. The fourth research question examined how community inputs influence the decision-making processes within Mangaung Municipality, particularly in shaping performance targets and indicators. Drawing from stakeholders' experiences and perspectives, the fifth research question examined the strategies to enhance community

participation in the PMS of Mangaung Municipality. The last research question examined how communities wish to be involved in municipal PMS in Mangaung.

The findings of this study are presented thematically below. The first section explores community members' understanding of public participation, PM, and PMS. The subsequent section looks at how the community participates in municipal PMS, while the third section focuses on the effectiveness of the municipality's citizen engagement mechanisms. The final section outlines strategies that can enhance community participation in the municipality's PMS, drawing on the input of participants. The chapter concludes with a summary that encapsulates the key themes from the data.

4.2 Community members' understanding of public participation, PM, and PMS

4.2.1 Public participation

The data relating to this theme is presented under two subheadings that highlight the various understandings of public participation amongst community members. The sub themes identified are participation in service issues and participation as a legal and democratic right.

4.2.1.1 Participation as a legal and democratic right

Some participants' narratives highlight that public participation is not just a practice but a fundamental right and legal obligation. In this regard, Participant 6 (a community member and an academic) noted that public participation ensures the government considers community input in decision-making. This participant added that public participation is enshrined in the MSA of 2000, which mandates public engagement. The quotation below best captures Participant 6's understanding of public participation as a legal right and obligation:

> I understand public participation, especially in the context of local government. The Municipal Systems Act of 2000 contains specific legislation on this topic, particularly in Chapter 4, which emphasises community participation. This chapter highlights the importance of direct public involvement in municipal affairs and underscores the need for

> municipalities to consider community input in decision-making. This ensures that municipalities make informed decisions while also educating the public about their responsibilities regarding municipal matters (Participant 6, community member).

The understanding of public participation as a legal right and obligation is supported by Participant 10's narrative, in which public participation is viewed as a democratic right, comparable to the right to vote. They remarked:

> As for public participation, it is a process that existed even before the advent of democracy. Back then, it was mainly used as a tool for protesting the government and municipal administration. In a democratic state, public participation is a fundamental political right, just like voting. That is why people must take part in decision-making processes so that no one is left out of how municipal affairs are run (Participant 10, community activist).

The above view of participation as a legal right is linked and directly draws on a more extended history and traditions of civic action in which people sought direct involvement, not merely representation. The data show that public participation was historically linked to struggles as a protest tool against the apartheid government, and in the post-1994 era, it became a democratic right. In the post 1994 dispensation, Participant 5 (a Community Development Worker) viewed participation as a means to address social issues such as unemployment by fostering active community involvement in problem-solving:

> In my view, public participation means the government engaging with communities to address challenges, such as high unemployment rates. The government should consult communities on their needs, whether jobs or business opportunities, by organising meetings where the public can provide input on planned programs (Participant 5, Community Development worker).

Participant 7 (a community member), in contrast, highlighted the importance of participation in ensuring that communities have a voice in decisions about service

delivery, specifically citing infrastructure projects, such as the construction of schools or churches, as key examples. This line of thinking is captured below.

> Yes, my understanding is that public participation means the community should be involved when the municipality makes decisions about service delivery. For example, if they plan to build a school or a church in our ward, we should be invited to give our input (Participant 7, community member).

4.2.1.2 Participation in service issues

Most community participants understood public participation as a process in which the municipality engages the community on service issues. This involved transparent engagement between leaders and residents, as well as residents' involvement in municipal issues. The understanding of public participation as transparent engagement between leaders and residents is aptly captured by Participant 1, who remarked: "[Participation is] when community leaders engage with residents transparently, update them on developments, ask for their input, and build a relationship between the municipality and the community" (Participant 1, community member).

Some community participants understood public participation as their involvement in municipal issues that directly impact them, such as waste collection, electricity, and water access. This can be deduced from excerpts from Participants 2 and 7 below:

> Public participation is the engagement and involvement of community members in matters that directly affect them. This includes issues like waste collection, electricity supply, water access, and awareness events, among other things (Participant 2, community member).

> My understanding is that public participation means the community should be involved when the municipality makes decisions about service delivery. For example, if they plan to build a school or a church in our ward, we should be invited to give our input (Participant 7, community member).

Community participants also emphasised their right to be consulted before decisions affecting residents are finalised:

> Public participation means that when decisions are made, especially those that directly affect me, I should be consulted. Any municipal policies that impact me should involve my input. There must be community engagements where our ideas are considered before finalising any municipal documents (Participant 6, community member and academic).

4.2.2 Community members' understanding of PM.

Participants' understanding of PM could be divided into three groups: the first group did not understand what PM was; the second group was unsure but attempted to conceptualise it; and the third group knew what it was.

The first group of community members in this study did not understand the concept of PM. For instance, Participant 1 (a community member) was unfamiliar with PM and had never attended meetings discussing it. Within the second group, who were unsure but attempted to conceptualise PM, some participants associated it with monitoring and evaluating responsibilities. For example, Participant 2 remarked:

> I have an idea of what it is. To my understanding, performance management involves monitoring and evaluating the duties expected of different departments, whether in the public or private sector (Participant 2, community member).

Some participants in this group linked PM to employee performance assessment but were unsure if this applied to municipalities. For example, Participant 7 noted:

> I think it has to do with assessing performance, like how well I am doing in my job and what I am supposed to be doing. However, I am not sure if that applies to municipalities (Participant 7, community member).

The third group of participants, who had a clearer understanding of PM, like Participant 3 (a community member), below, described it as a structured system involving elements like setting objectives and targets for projects or interventions; monitoring progress using quarterly and annual targets to ensure goals are met; and reviewing and adjusting plans when necessary to improve effectiveness.

> Performance management is a system where objectives are set for specific projects or interventions. It ensures that projects are completed on time and within budget. For example, an intervention should have annual targets, which are then broken down into quarterly targets. As the plan is implemented, progress is assessed. If things are not going as planned, adjustments are made to stay on track and achieve the intended goals (Participant 3, community member).

Some participants noted that the PM should align with municipal planning frameworks, such as the IDP and the Service Delivery and Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP). This view was aptly captured by Participants 8 and 10:

> I believe performance management involves how the municipality plans, monitors, and reviews its performance as well as that of its employees. It also includes setting targets aligned with the IDP and ensuring they are met to improve service delivery (Participant 8, community leader involved in local government).

> I would say performance management is closely tied to local government. It encompasses all key stakeholders, including political leadership, administrative leadership, and the broader community. Municipalities follow a five-year plan called the IDP, which sets performance targets. Each year, specific goals are outlined in the SDBIP, which should be reviewed regularly (Participant 10, community leader).

The quotes above from Participants 8 and 10 also show that they understand PM as an integral part of municipal planning, where the IDP sets long-term municipal goals. At the same time, the SDBIP ensures continuous monitoring and adjustments. They also noted that PM ensures that municipalities meet service delivery expectations through proper planning and evaluation. Some participants in the study linked PM to formal policies and legislation, such as the MSA (Chapter 6) and the AGR, and argued that municipal performance must involve community input because exclusion leads to inefficiencies.

The narrative below from Participant 6, a community member and academic, highlights how the community links PM to formal policies and legislation:

> I understand performance management, and as I mentioned earlier, it shares similarities with community participation. The Municipal Systems Act addresses performance management in Chapter 6, which states that a municipality's performance should reflect the needs of the community it serves. Evaluating municipal performance helps determine its effectiveness. The Auditor-General's report, released annually, provides insights into the municipality's service delivery and quality. Municipalities must involve the community in developing performance management plans. Municipalities cannot operate in isolation, and excluding the community from these processes leads to inefficiencies (Participant 6, community member and academic).

In articulating their understanding of what PM is, some participants described community participation as essential for effective PM. This is the case with Participant 6, who highlighted that performance indicators should be developed with community input to reflect residents' needs and that engaging the community in performance planning can reduce service delivery protests and conflicts. The extract below from Participant 6 best captures his views on PM.

> It is crucial for municipalities to involve the community in developing performance management plans. Municipalities cannot operate in isolation, and excluding the community from these processes leads to inefficiencies. Several key aspects require community involvement to ensure that performance management aligns with residents' needs and expectations. This includes setting up performance indicators and other essential processes to ensure effective municipal management. When the community is engaged, there is less likelihood of service delivery protests and conflicts between residents and the municipality (Participant 6, community member and academic).

In addition, COGTA and municipal participants emphasised that PM includes not only municipal employees but also political and administrative leadership, as well as the community itself.

4.2.3 Community members' familiarity with PMS

Many community members who participated in this study had limited familiarity with the municipal PMS itself, and several participants admitted to having little knowledge about how it works. Data showed that there is a general perception that communities are not educated about PMS and their role in public participation. Participant 2, a community member, believed that communities are not aware of their role in service delivery because they think it is the municipality's sole responsibility. A quote from Participant 2 below illustrates this point.

> I think communities need to be educated about performance management processes because they are not aware of performance management and their role in public participation. Many people expect the municipality to handle everything without realising they also have a role to play. Therefore, capacity building would create a significant shift. People would understand what should be done, and there would be better accountability because community members would know what to expect and hold the municipality responsible (Participant 2, community member).

This quote highlights the need for the municipality to educate and capacitate communities to understand the PMS.

A key issue raised by participants in this study is the lack of interaction between the municipality and the community regarding PMS. Participants noted that the municipality fails to engage communities in developing KPIs, involving only municipal officials. Participants shared that community members are sometimes invited to meetings to voice their concerns, but there is no follow-up with the community after the meeting. Updates on municipal performance are not actively communicated to residents, leaving them to seek information on their own:

> I know there is a system in place where the municipality develops a yearly plan. Each year, community members are invited to meetings where we can voice our needs and suggest projects or services that should be prioritised. There is no follow-up from the municipality. The only way to get updates is by checking their website, but no one reaches out to inform us about the progress or outcomes of our input (Participant 9, Ward Committee member).

In this study, some community members recognised that municipal PMS involves structured processes where the municipality develops a yearly plan, and community members can suggest priorities. Participant 10, a community leader, noted that PMS includes both internal (employee performance agreements) and external (community participation in decision-making) aspects. Additionally, they noted that statutory and non-statutory stakeholders play a role in municipal PMS, although their impact is not well understood by all community members. The quotation below best captures this view.

> There are two primary aspects to performance management: internal and external. Internally, employees have performance agreements that outline their targets. Externally, the system should involve communities in the decision-making processes. There are also structures in place to facilitate this participation, such as statutory and non-statutory stakeholders who play a key role in municipal affairs (Participant 10, community leader).

The above quote indicates that the participant is aware of how PMS should be conducted and would like to see the municipality incorporate both external and internal mechanisms. This perspective likely comes from their familiarity with community issues, which helps explain why they emphasise a balanced approach, something often associated with leadership or oversight roles.

4.3 Mechanisms and structures for community participation in the municipal PMS

This theme highlights the mechanisms and structures for community participation in the various stages of the PMS. The MPPR requires public involvement in setting municipal KPIs but fails to define what this participation should entail. The Mangaung Performance

Management Systems Framework requires community feedback through consultation platforms, although specific stages for input (such as mid-year assessments or evaluations) are not detailed. As such, while the framework mentions community consultation, clear guidelines for continuous community engagement during each PMS stage are lacking. In addition, there are no dedicated PMS structures for community participation in Mangaung. Thus, communities engage via the IDP process and ward committees.

4.3.1 Ward committees

Ward committees are official structures mandated to facilitate community input into municipal affairs. However, in Mangaung, these structures are often ineffective or sidelined. As participant 6 noted “Ward committees are meant to collect community concerns and communicate them to councillors and the council. However, their input is often ignored, rendering them nonfunctional” (Participant 6, community member and academic).

Although ward committees are intended to serve as a vital link between communities and the municipality, Participant 6 argued that, in practice, they are ineffective. This reveals a critical gap between the formal mandate of ward committees and their practical relevance, which suggests a systemic failure in participatory local governance. Participant 6 attributed this dysfunction partly to weak political and administrative leadership: “If they [municipal officials] were committed to the ward committee system, these structures could significantly improve municipal performance and public participation” (Participant 6, community member and academic).

Furthermore, Participant 8 acknowledged that ward committees are meant to serve as key mechanisms for grassroots participation in municipal affairs, including performance monitoring and planning. However, he noted that these structures are often undermined by political interference: “Ward committees are supposed to be non-partisan, but they are often controlled by certain political parties” (Participant 8, community member involved in local government).

The above excerpt reflects a politicisation of ward committees, which often creates exclusionary dynamics, where only select groups have influence, and ordinary community members are sidelined (Yende, Mahlangu & Mkhwanazi, 2024). The result is a loss of legitimacy and trust in ward committees as neutral platforms for civic engagement.

4.3.2 Ward councillors

The community members in this study saw councillors as a mechanism for community participation. However, they also expressed clear frustration with ward councillors who are not proactive in engaging their constituencies. Participant 3 emphasised that councillors rarely initiate public meetings and fail to communicate performance goals or service delivery challenges: “Ward councillors are not conducting community meetings. This failure limits community involvement in performance management processes” (Participant 3, community member).

This lack of engagement is especially problematic given that ward councillors are the key political drivers of local participation in governance. Their absence or inaction undermines opportunities for communities to shape performance indicators or hold the municipality accountable. In the same vein, Participant 5 was critical of the passivity and absence of ward councillors, especially their failure to provide feedback or mobilise communities around service delivery issues. He noted that, “Some councillors have not held a single feedback meeting since being elected” (Participant 5, Community Development Worker).

This lack of responsiveness is a direct failure of democratic representation, particularly in the context of performance management. Councillors are supposed to be liaisons between the community and the municipality, but many appear disconnected and unaccountable. Participant 5 offered an illustrative case from Letsemeng, remarking, “The mayor does not even live in the municipality—he commutes daily from Bloemfontein. How can someone like that genuinely understand the community's needs?” (Participant 5, community development worker).

This underscores a geographical and emotional distance between local leadership and the communities they are meant to serve.

4.4 The extent to which community members participate in PMS stages

4.4.1 Setting of KPIs

The MFMA Circular 88 provides standard performance indicators but lacks a mechanism for public contributions to these metrics. The Mangaung Performance Management Systems Framework encourages the inclusion of community views in performance monitoring but is vague about how community input directly shapes performance targets. Thus, although community input is encouraged, decision-making processes around performance targets still appear to be top-down, and feedback loops between community input and actual performance targets are weak.

The narratives of participants in this study indicate that there is limited and superficial public engagement in Mangaung regarding PMS. Many participants expressed that public participation in municipal PM is either non-existent or very limited. Participants also noted that community members are not involved in establishing KPIs. This is evident in the quotation from Participant 1 below:

> Honestly, there is very little engagement, and the municipality does not provide sufficient information or involve the community. From what I have seen, there is no real community engagement in setting performance indicators or targets in our ward. In the past, there were community meetings and consultations with councillors. However, this has changed, and we no longer see such consultations happening (Participant 1, community member).

While meetings, which arguably should be platforms for community members to participate in setting up KPIs, are held, participants feel that these meetings are treated as compliance exercises rather than genuine engagement platforms, resulting in minimal impact on community participation in municipal PMS. In the same vein, Participant 2, a community member, stated that municipal meetings tend to be general discussions rather than being focused on PMS: “I know they conduct community meetings and use loud hailing to inform people about them, but these are general meetings, not specifically about performance management”: (Participant 2, community member).

The gathered data shows that the lack of genuine engagement in community involvement in municipal PMS also manifests in the lack of feedback, as community members often do not receive updates from the municipality when they provide input. This leaves people unaware of what happens after consultations. Similarly, ward councillors often fail to provide clear performance goals or structured updates that address community members' concerns and complaints. This lack of robust engagement has led some participants to believe that the municipality engages the public as a formality rather than for meaningful collaboration. This is clear in Participant 8's quotation below.

> I do not think communities are fully aware of performance indicators. The process often feels like a compliance exercise rather than a genuine effort to engage residents. Municipal officials and councillors present plans to the community, but they rarely follow up on their commitments. This lack of feedback creates a disconnect between the municipality and residents (Participant 8, community leader).

Participant 4, a community member, noted that residents do have opportunities for input, but that past failures overshadow discussions, as residents focus on broken promises rather than current municipal plans:

> The community does get opportunities to provide input in the municipality's processes. However, past failures often overshadow discussions. People tend to focus on previous promises that were never fulfilled, which derails meetings. Even when the community contributes, the municipality fails to provide feedback or return with a final document. As a result, people do not know what happens to their input, and the same cycle repeats (Participant 4, community member).

The quote above indicates a lack of accountability on the part of the municipality. Participant 4 added that the municipality should engage communities at the ward level because issues vary significantly from ward to ward. He also noted that stakeholder conflicts often arise in meetings, which can divert people from the actual purpose of the meeting. This delays the meetings, and, in some instances, due to conflicts, issues, and

agendas, they remain unresolved, leading to a loss of interest among community members in attending municipal discussions.

In this study, some participants noted that engaging the community is challenging because most residents prefer to communicate via WhatsApp rather than attending meetings. Nonetheless, participants felt that the municipality could improve participation by arranging visits to local community centres and providing transportation to the head office, where officials could address residents directly. Participant 6, a community member and academic, explained that "since the new administration took office in 2021, there has been no strategic plan for engaging the community in setting up KPIs." He added that "community meetings are not held frequently, and many residents of Mangaung have expressed frustration with councillors failing to call meetings" (Participant 6). Participants noted that councillors often cite budget constraints and municipal challenges as reasons for this lack of engagement

Participant 1, a community leader, lamented that in South Africa, the spirit of public participation is weak compared to models in the U.S., where it is considered the backbone of democracy. He felt this was so because community members in Mangaung have raised issues in public participation meetings, but many of these concerns remain unaddressed:

> Take my area, for example. Some streets were supposed to be paved, and money was allocated for it, yet nothing has been done. That discourages people from participating because they feel their input is ignored (Participant 10, community leader).

4.4.2 Lack of civic education and awareness

This study shows that some participants do not participate in municipal PMS due to a lack of civic education and awareness of their role and avenues in municipal PMS. This is because many community members lack an understanding of their rights and responsibilities regarding municipal governance, which limits their ability to participate effectively. In this regard, Participant 1 remarked "The main issue is a lack of civic education. People need to be educated on their rights and responsibilities regarding municipal governance" (Participant 1, community member).

In addition, Participants 3 (a community member) and 9 (Ward committee member) noted that there is a lack of training for ward committees, which are meant to oversee municipal activities but often lack the necessary knowledge and resources. To this end, Participant 8 (a community leader involved in local government) noted that the community needs capacity-building initiatives to help them engage with municipal PMS. Participant 6 also emphasised the need for community awareness as follows.

> Community awareness of municipal policies and programs needs to be strengthened. The municipality should include stakeholders in strategic planning to ensure that communities are not left behind. Effective participation requires deliberate efforts to involve all relevant groups (Participant 6, community member and academic).

Participant 7, a community member, felt that community members do not contribute and are often unaware of their role in PMS. Below is what he had to say.

> I do not think we contribute much, especially in my area. Many people are not even aware of their role or the municipality's role in this process. Only a few, like me, who work for COGTA, have some understanding, but we do not fully grasp all the details. Our councillor has never called a meeting for that (Participant 7, community member).

The lack of awareness of how community participation in PMS is involved has resulted in some participants in this study explaining that they do not participate in municipal PMS because they assume that councillors do it on their behalf and provide them with feedback. This assumption appears to lead to a lack of interest in direct involvement among community members. Participant 9's narrative below captures this:

> We are not involved at all. We assume the councillor plays that role on our behalf, but we do not follow up or check the progress of these goals. The councillor might have more information, but as a community, we do not engage with it. As a ward committee member, I occasionally meet with the councillor, who shares some of the challenges he faces. However, he does not present clear performance goals or specific targets. The discussions

> usually revolve around community complaints rather than structured municipal plans (Participant 9, Ward Committee member).

The quotation above indicates that, although community members assume that councillors participate in PMS stages on their behalf, the councillors themselves do not constantly update communities or present clear information, which often results in the lack of clear KPIs, and meetings being clouded by complaints.

While there appears to be a lack of awareness among community members, municipal officials who participated in this study also felt that in Mangaung municipality, there is no specific forum that deals exclusively with PMS where the public can participate. In this regard, Participant 11 acknowledged that they are not doing justice to public participation in municipal processes. For instance, they do not sit down with community members to solicit their input for the IDP and KPIs, but rather, they gather the wish list from citizens and use it to develop KPIs and IDP:

> … it will be in most cases allowing them [the community] to provide their wish list ... It is easier to say to them, explain in detail in terms of what you require, and that gives us a guide in terms of how we want to set the targets or indicators for those specific wish lists that they will be providing to us. But I do not think we are sitting in length [with community members] unless when we meet with different stakeholders or, you know, forums, and then we might be able to say, colleagues, let us break down this wish list that we have received from the community (Participant 11, municipal official).

The above quotation illustrates that the municipal approach to community involvement in setting KPIs is more top-down and indirect, where they gather a wish list of needs and demands. This might be the reason why community members lack awareness of their role in municipal PMS, as the municipality does not directly involve them in PMS processes. This lack of awareness and limited involvement, as perceived by Participant 8, a community member, was believed to be the reason why protests often serve as the immediate response to service delivery issues. Participant 8 believed that, if a community monitoring tool existed, it could help track municipal performance and hold officials accountable before frustrations escalate.

4.5 Challenges to Mangaung’s citizen participation in PMS

This theme covers the effectiveness of community engagement in Mangaung municipality's PMS. The gathered data indicate that the WPLG promotes participatory governance through ward committees and IDPs. However, the Auditor-General’s 2023–2024 report highlights ongoing failures in public participation, poor reporting standards, and poor accountability in service delivery. Despite recurring issues, there are few consequences for non-compliance or mismanagement, leading to a culture of impunity. As a result, residents are left without a voice or meaningful role in decisions that impact their communities. The MPMSF includes specific provisions for community consultation in the planning and reporting stages, providing a precise mechanism for citizen engagement. Despite the framework's emphasis on community input, however, implementation is inconsistent, and community participation in real-time performance feedback remains limited.

The data gathered for the study indicate that, despite the significance of public participation as outlined in municipal documents and commitments, several challenges hinder the community's meaningful involvement.

4.5.1 Political interferences

The first barrier that study participants noted was political interference, where governance is intertwined with party politics. This has often resulted in limited commitment from both the municipal administration and the political leadership towards enhancing the ward committee system, which could significantly improve municipal performance and public participation. The excerpt below captures this idea.

> Well, ward committees are supposed to be non-partisan, but they are often controlled by certain political parties, such that meetings are held, but not everyone in the community is included (Participant 10, community leader).

Political interference was also reported to affect attendance at meetings by reducing the number of attendees, particularly those from a single political party.

> Out of a ward with 6,000 residents, you might find fewer than 100 people at these meetings, and often, they are affiliated with a particular political party. That is a major gap in public participation (Participant 3, community member).

Participants noted that political and leadership challenges affect public participation in PMS in Mangaung municipality. This is because elected leaders become inaccessible once they assume power, making it difficult for community members to engage with them. Furthermore, political conflicts disrupt municipal operations, as factions within the municipality often disagree on leadership and decision-making, resulting in dysfunction. Thus, Participant 5, a community development worker, noted that.

> The challenges are broad; political party conflicts often disrupt municipal operations, as different factions disagree on leadership and decision-making. This leads to dysfunctionality (Participant 5, community development worker).

Participants in this study also noted that political divisions within communities hinder unity, which makes it challenging to mobilise residents around shared municipal issues. Participants also noted that political interference affects community members' commitment to paying for services. Participant 10, a community leader, noted:

> The issue of service payment was politicised in the past, and now, no one is actively encouraging people to pay. Those working for the government cannot avoid paying taxes, so municipalities should develop similar enforcement systems. That said, some municipalities have created systems where residents who struggle to pay can report their situation and arrange payment plans (Participant 10, community leader).

4.5.2 Resource constraints and incentives

The third challenge is resource constraints and the use of incentives. Participants noted that municipalities make promises they cannot fulfil, which ultimately frustrates the

community. With regards to the impact of a lack of funding on community engagement, Participant 1, a community member, commented:

> No, we do not have; our municipalities do not have enough resources. Some of them lack the necessary resources to finance public participation activities. The issue is that public participation is not considered a priority. It is still perceived as a political activity in a municipality because it does not provide services. It is not quantified whether you can say that public participation is now evident. So, it is not always the case that funding is very low (Participant 1, community member).

Participants also noted that the use of incentives for engagement often results in some less motivated residents attending meetings only when incentives (e.g., food, T-shirts) are offered.

4.5.3 Limited access to information and communication gaps

This study's participants identified limited access to information and communication gaps as some of the challenges that confront effective public participation in municipal PMS. This is because not everyone has internet access to find municipal reports or monitor performance, creating an information barrier. In addition, the information barrier is exacerbated by the municipality's failure to provide clear updates on its performance, leaving residents uninformed about progress and decision-making. This is aptly captured by Participant 2, below:

> Access to information is a major issue. Not everyone has access to the internet to find municipal reports or understand performance monitoring and evaluation. There's also a communication gap between the municipality and the public (Participant 2, community member).

The language used in municipal documents was also noted to be complex and inaccessible, which makes it difficult for residents of Mangaung to understand policies and engage meaningfully. On this note, Participant 8, a community leader involved in local government, stated:

> One [challenge is] the language barrier. The documents are not user-friendly, making it difficult for us to engage. Most of us are not familiar with the tools they use. We are not technologically advanced. There's also a lack of capacity in terms of training, especially in Mangaung. We need capacity-building initiatives to help us understand what the municipality is doing and how we, as communities, are supposed to be involved (Participant 8, community leader).

Participants explained that the municipality has structures for performance communication, such as the SDBIP and IDP forums, but their effectiveness is questionable.

4.5.4 Poor municipal planning and exclusion

Poor municipal planning and exclusion from key decision-making processes are among the challenges to effective community participation in the Mangaung PMS. Participant 3 observed that municipalities comply with public participation requirements only on paper but do not genuinely engage communities in decision-making. Additionally, findings indicate that community members are not involved in budgeting processes, yet municipal performance cannot be properly evaluated without considering the budget. A quotation below from Participant 6 highlights this idea:

> One of the biggest challenges is the lack of community involvement in the budgeting process. You cannot evaluate municipal performance properly without considering the budget. However, our community is not involved in budget planning, which significantly affects the effectiveness of performance management. How can municipal performance improve if the community is left out of the decision-making process? (Participant 6, community member and academic).

This poor municipal planning and exclusion has resulted in many residents losing faith in the municipality, feeling that it does nothing for them. In addition, Participant 7 observed that, in areas with poor delivery service (no roads, streetlights, or clinics) and high unemployment, people see no benefit in participating in municipal meetings:

> People have lost interest and faith in government systems. They feel the municipality isn't doing anything for them. In our area, we lack roads, streetlights, and a nearby clinic. Most people are unemployed and struggling, so they don't see the point of engaging (Participant 7, community member).

Moreover, participants noted that work commitments sometimes prevent residents from attending meetings, resulting in low attendance at public consultations. Participant 9, a community development worker, noted that to work around the challenges of in-person attendance, WhatsApp groups are used for discussions, but they lack structured engagement, resulting in chaotic debates rather than meaningful participation:

> Many community members are unable to attend due to work commitments. When meetings are called, attendance is often low. Some discussions happen in WhatsApp groups, but they become chaotic because people share different opinions without structured engagement. Political divisions also play a role, making it difficult to unify community members around shared goals (Participant 9, community development worker).

4.6. Community influence on decision-making

4.6.1 Lack of feedback on performance

In this study, participant 11 (municipal official) explained that the municipality communicates with the public through the municipal communication department, which uses media platforms such as the municipal website, local newspapers, the councilors' office, and radio stations. However, community members lamented that there are limited and inconsistent communication on performance generally. Some participants shared that the municipality relies on community meetings to communicate performance goals, but attendance is low. Participants 2 and 7, both community members, narrated that online reports are another communication method that exists but are not widely accessed because performance updates are mainly published on the municipal website, which limits reach to those who actively seek them out. The quotation below from Participant 2 captures this:

> I've noticed that they publish reports and findings online, making them accessible to the public. They do so strictly on their website. They usually post reports detailing their performance for a given financial year (Participant 2, community member).

Participants highlighted those public notices, communications from ward councillors, pamphlets, community radio, and newspapers are some of the ways the municipality communicates. Participants noted, however, that there is no dedicated document outlining the progress on municipal projects, forcing residents to visit municipal offices to get updates. The IDP review serves as an annual performance update, but participants note that it lacks regular progress reports on project implementation.

Participants also shared that communication is one-directional in the sense that the municipality informs the public, while there is no structured feedback loop. Apart from communication being one-directional, participants noted that they are often excluded from the PMS and get involved as an afterthought. This significantly limits community influence. The quote below from Participant 8 highlights these issues.

> Communities were initially not involved in setting targets and goals. When discussing performance auditing and related matters, communities might feel excluded. I think it boils down to the fact that we were not involved initially. Now, they come to talk to us after decisions have already been made. It feels like an afterthought rather than a meaningful engagement. Communities should be part and parcel of the municipality throughout the process, not just during the planning stage. If you involve people only after everything has been decided, their role becomes limited. That's why you often find that these meetings turn into complaint sessions because the report has already been finalised. Had we been involved in setting strategic objectives and priorities from the beginning, our input could have positively influenced the final report (Participant 8, community leader involved in local government).

Participants in this study explained that the community is usually excluded from the PMS. This can be deduced from Participant 8's quotation above, where communities are not

involved in setting performance goals and targets, making later discussions feel like an afterthought rather than genuine participation. Additionally, the exclusion of community input from performance auditing and discussions undermines trust and participation. Moreover, when community meetings do occur, they often turn into complaint sessions, as decisions have already been made without prior input.

Some participants noted that ward councillors and committees should serve as a bridge between the municipality and residents, but in practice, political influence limits inclusivity. Participant 12 (municipal official), who is an official employed by the municipality, noted that the public communicates their inputs through public participation platforms, preferably in writing, and the councillor will bring notes of what they jotted down from a meeting. For him, these inputs would then be brought to a separate meeting between the ward councillor, ward committees, and municipal officials. Therefore, it is in these meetings that councillors should say they have input from the communities and how they should prioritise them.

4.6.2 Transparency and accountability

In the same vein, participants shared that while audit outcomes may look positive, they do not reflect the lived experiences of residents struggling with poor service delivery. The quotation below from Participant 8, a community leader involved in local government, best captures some of the issues raised:

> The municipality is accountable to the community, at least in principle. Developmental local government requires municipalities to work closely with communities and ensure their interests are addressed. Chapter 7, Section 152 of the Constitution outlines the objectives of local government, which include accountability. Based on this legal framework, the municipality is accountable for setting goals and serving its community. Some objectives of local government are being pursued, but there are gaps. For instance, municipalities involve communities in certain events by marketing them to stakeholders. However, meaningful engagement where communities influence decisions and policies is lacking. Object 5 of Section

> 152 emphasises community involvement in municipal affairs, but this is not consistently implemented in practice (Participant 8, community leader involved in local government).

While participants like Participant 6 above noted that there is no transparency and accountability due to poor engagement, Participant 12, a municipal official, highlighted that the municipality has mechanisms for the community to review municipal performance. This review ought to bring about accountability and transparency:

> I think that if you consider the Municipal Finance Management Act, Section 52, which pertains to your quarterly SDBIP reporting, which the mayor must submit at the end of each quarter. Within 30 days, [the mayor] must have a progress report in terms of the performance, in terms of the financial, and the actual non-financial performance, you know. That must be provided to the council, and the councillors are expected to receive the same report; they should be able to go to the communities and report back with it (Participant 12, municipal official).

This suggests that councillors are the ones who should return to the community with progress reports, rather than municipal officials (MSA, 2000). This might be the reason community members who participated in this study felt like the municipality is not accountable and transparent, because they do not see its officials providing feedback. Participant 12 also added that by law, it is the councillors who should give feedback, but they seem not to be holding feedback sessions with their communities:

> To illustrate, we have a set of indicators prescribed by the National Treasury, COGTA, and DPME. One of their questions is how many sittings or the percentage of councillors who have held their meetings or ward committees that have reported in terms of their Ward Committee reports. However, I can tell you that it does not look good when you examine the statistics we receive (Participant 12, municipal official).

This suggests that the lack of accountability and transparency, which community members reported, may be due to councillors not appearing to fulfil their duty of reporting back to the community. This resonates with the inputs of some community members, who felt that councillors attend meetings on their behalf but do not provide them with feedback. In addition, Participant 13, a municipal official, agreed that they rely on councillors to give feedback.

4.7 Strategies to enhance community participation in PMS

The Auditor-General's 2023/2024 report highlights persistent governance and accountability failures in Mangaung Metro Municipality. These include unreliable performance reports that lack credible evidence, poor internal oversight, and non-compliance with national requirements for public consultation in planning and reporting processes (AG, 2024).

Public participation in performance management remains especially weak. Although the Municipal Performance Management Standard Framework (MPMSF) calls for structured citizen involvement, Mangaung appears to restrict engagement to the annual IDP meetings. The Auditor-General found no evidence of broader, institutionalised mechanisms for involving communities in performance monitoring or reporting (AG, 2024). This was supported by interview data, where participants described the municipality's consultation efforts as lacking follow-through and meaningful feedback. These findings highlight a significant disconnect between policy and practice, indicating that Mangaung's performance management system is weak not only in its implementation but also in its integration of citizen input into governance.

4.7.1 Communications

Study participants noted that to improve community participation, the municipality should enhance communication and transparency by analysing past mistakes and making realistic and clear commitments to improve transparency. Some participants noted that this could also be achieved by utilising multiple communication channels, such as print media, radio, social media, WhatsApp, and door-to-door outreach, to reach different

demographics. Similarly, participants felt that ensuring timely and consistent communication, as well as scheduling meetings at appropriate times and avoiding short notice, can improve public participation. Participant 5, a Community Development Worker, captured some of these issues below.

> They should engage communities through various channels such as print media, radio stations, and social media. They should also train local representatives, including ward councillors and committees, to facilitate participation. Timing is crucial. Meetings should be scheduled at appropriate times when people are available. Often, communities do not attend because they are busy trying to survive in the face of poor service delivery and unemployment. Also, meetings should not be announced at short notice. Communication should be consistent and repeated to remind people of upcoming meetings. Additionally, they should use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to reach more residents (Participant 5, Community Development Worker).

Participants also highlighted that the use of a hybrid approach to engagement, where traditional and digital methods are both adopted, could enhance community involvement in Mangaung's PMS. Participants 6 and 8 advocated for the adoption of these modern engagement strategies because they align with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), such as automated and integrated PMS. The use of different approaches would cater to all age groups, as while young people prefer digital tools, older residents rely on traditional methods such as loud hailing and radio. A quotation below from Participant 8 highlights this:

> Mangaung is still struggling. They rely on traditional methods and lack appropriate performance systems. Their systems are not integrated or automated. There is a lack of capacity and skills, a misalignment of performance management structures, and inadequate resources to implement an automated and integrated system. We can't fully rely on digitised tools because we need a differentiated approach (Participant 8, community leader involved in local government).

Participant 8 justified the need for a differentiated approach to addressing the generational needs of residents. He noted that young people are more accustomed to digital tools. In contrast, older people still rely on traditional methods of information dissemination, such that the use of multiple tools enhances and complements participation. He also added that digitised tools are necessary, especially to encourage youth involvement in local government matters. However, all mechanisms should be used in a way that ensures inclusivity because even the ward committee model is effective, provided it is functional.

4.7.2 Civic engagement and education

Participants suggested that community participation can be enhanced by strengthening civic engagement and education. In this regard, civic education is necessary so that communities understand municipal policies, PM, and their role in governance. In the same vein, participants noted that ward committees needed to be capacitated with the necessary knowledge and tools to educate communities and facilitate meaningful participation. This was also believed to be enhanced by developing structured engagement programs, such as a six-month plan to inform residents of their rights and responsibilities:

> First, ward committee members need to be capacitated with the necessary knowledge and tools to educate the community. Right now, we lack the power to enforce change. Meetings are held quarterly, but there is little action afterwards. If we had structured plans, such as a six-month program to inform residents of their rights and responsibilities, we might see more engagement. However, the community itself often lacks the motivation to participate, which makes the situation even more difficult (Participant 9, ward committee member).

The need to revamp public participation structures, such as ward committees and Community Development Workers, so that they can play an active role in facilitating participation, was another way participants felt would enhance community involvement in Mangaung. Participant 7, a community member, noted that elected councillors should

reside in their wards to ensure they are present and understand the community's needs, as he felt that their current councillor, who lived 30 kilometers away, did not comprehend their daily struggles. While civic engagement and education were pertinent to enhancing public participation, a closely related issue was the scheduling of municipal meetings with the community. One community member noted: “The municipality has officers assigned for these meetings, but again, the problem is timing. Meetings are held when people are at work, so participation remains low” (Participant 7, community member).

This shows that civic engagement and education programs should be held when people are not at work to improve participation.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of this study, which uncovered a limited understanding of public participation, PM, and PMS among citizens. Community members perceive it as a general evaluation process, while others associate it with structured municipal systems, such as the IDP, SDBIP, and the MSA. It also emerged that some participants had little understanding of their role in PM as citizens, even though effective PM requires community involvement to ensure that municipal service delivery aligns with residents' needs.

Gaps in public awareness emerged as the ones that limit meaningful participation in performance evaluation processes. At the same time, decision-making in Mangaung follows a top-down approach, as it remains municipal-led, with minimal community involvement in performance evaluations. The data shows that community participation in municipal PM is hindered by limited civic education, poor municipal communication, exclusion of residents from planning processes, political conflicts, declining public trust, and practical barriers to participation, such as work commitments and digital access issues. It also shows that participants feel that, for the Mangaung municipality to address these challenges, it requires better transparency, improved communication, capacity-building programs for the community and ward councils, and meaningful community involvement.

Chapter 5: Discussion and analysis of findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the narratives presented by participants in Chapter Four. In doing so, it unpacks how the data gathered answers the study's research questions and meets the study's objectives. The purpose of this chapter is to present the study's key findings. In addition, the chapter juxtaposes the findings with existing literature and theories to examine how the data gathered in this study builds upon the existing bodies of literature discussed in Chapter two.

5.2 Community conceptions of public participation in municipal PM

This theme focuses on the first objective, which sought to understand community members' understanding of public participation, PM, and PMS. Most participants understood public participation at a municipal level as a process where the municipality engages the community in decision-making. Their understanding was hinged on two pillars, the first being transparent engagement between leaders and residents in service issues (like waste collection, electricity, and water access). Secondly, community members in Mangaung understood participation as not merely a practice but a fundamental right, a legal obligation, and a democratic right akin to voting. To cement this notion, participants highlighted that public participation is enshrined in the MSA of 2000, which mandates public engagement.

This resonates strongly with participatory governance theory, which emphasises the inclusion of citizens in decision-making processes beyond electoral representation, promoting active collaboration between government and communities. Within this theoretical framework, meaningful participation is essential to responsive, accountable, and legitimate governance. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and the MSA 32 of 200 both support this participatory ideal by mandating mechanisms for engagement, such as public hearings, community consultations, and the sharing of accessible information.

Section 152 of the Constitution states that communities have the right to be involved in local governance. Section 195(1) (e) states that the public must be encouraged to participate in policymaking, and section 195(1) (g) states that the public must be provided with timely, accessible, and accurate information (RSA, 1996). Similarly, the MSA 32 of 2000 promotes public participation in South African municipal governance by mandating municipalities to establish mechanisms for community engagement (RSA, 2000). These include receiving petitions, holding public hearings, consulting community organisations, and providing regular feedback to the local community. In other words, it mandates a transparent process that allows citizens to actively contribute to decision-making on municipal issues (RSA, 2000).

The abovementioned views on public participation draw on a more extensive history and tradition of civic action in which people sought direct involvement, not merely representation. This also shows that public participation has been linked to historical struggles, previously serving as a protest tool against government decisions, and is now recognised as a democratic right. The understanding of public participation exhibited in this study shows how this is closely linked to the notion of people's power, which is associated with the civics of the 1980s (Brooks, 2017). People's power was associated with the idea of people taking control of their own lives (Cherry, 2000, cited in Brooks, 2017). Thus, the participants in this study's view of public participation, which included a desire to be involved, consulted, and transparently engaged, reveals their desire to control issues that affect their lives.

The findings of this study reveal that participants had varying understandings of PM, resulting in three distinct groups with differing perspectives. The first group consisted of those who did not understand what PM was; the second group comprised those who were not sure but attempted to conceptualise it; and the third group consisted of those who knew what it was. The first group of participants who did not know what PM was blamed their lack of understanding on the fact that they had not attended any meeting where PM was discussed. The second group of participants stated that they were unsure of what PM is, but they associated it with monitoring and evaluation, as well as employee performance assessment. The third group of participants understood PM as a structured

system involving four elements: setting objectives and targets for projects; monitoring progress using quarterly and annual targets to ensure goals are met; reviewing and adjusting plans when necessary to improve effectiveness; and ensuring that PM aligns with municipal planning frameworks like the IDP and SDBIP. These various understandings of PM resonate with Mofolo (2012), who notes that Municipal PM entails evaluating the performance of municipal KPIs, the developmental target priorities, and the IDP's objectives, and using the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 to measure and review performance at least once a year. In this study, most community members did not understand public participation, PM and PMS. This highlights the lack of community education and the need for various stakeholders to teach the community about what these processes involve.

The findings of this study show that, while PM should ensure that municipalities meet service delivery expectations through proper planning and evaluation, facts on the ground show that in Mangaung, service delivery expectations are not met due to a lack of proper evaluation and planning. In this study, some community members linked PM to formal policies and legislation, such as the MSA (Chapter 6) and the AGR. From a policy perspective, municipal performance must involve community input, as exclusion leads to inefficiencies.

The findings of this study show that even though the municipality seems not to be properly involving the community in its PM, the study participants knew that community participation is essential for effective PM because KPIs should be developed with community input to reflect residents' needs and evaluate whether performance has been achieved. Participants believed that engaging the community in performance planning can reduce service delivery protests and conflicts. These views align well with the literature on PM, which highlights several key roles and impacts of PM, including improved service delivery (Ammons, 2012; Hatry, 2014), accountability and transparency (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008), and community engagement (Ho, 2007).

However, the data from this study revealed that community members had limited understanding and familiarity with the municipal PMS itself, and some participants did not know how it worked. The findings showed that most community members are not

educated about PMS and their role in public participation and service delivery, as they believe it is the municipality's sole responsibility. The study participants who understood PMS stated that municipal PMS involves structured processes where the municipality develops a yearly plan, and community members can suggest priorities. In this study, it was noted that PMS includes both internal (employee performance agreements) and external (community participation in decision-making) aspects. Overall, most participants in this study had limited knowledge of both public participation PM and PMS. This could be blamed on limited civic education and community engagement in these processes in Mangaung.

Participants also felt that PM and PMS should be co-owned by the municipality and community, echoing the participatory governance principle of shared authority. While some linked PMS to internal processes, such as employee assessments, others recognised its external dimensions, including community-driven priority setting. However, the overall limited public understanding of PMS reflects a missed opportunity for municipalities to empower citizens and move participation up Arnstein's ladder toward "citizen control". Participants' views also align with the OECD's typology of participation, particularly the levels of "consultation" and "engagement in decision-making", where citizens not only express views but also influence decisions. However, gaps in actual practice suggest that Mangaung may fall short of these ideals. From Arnstein's Ladder of Participation, many participants' experiences suggest they operate at the middle or lower rungs - "consultation" or "informing" rather than higher levels such as "partnership" or "delegated power". This gap between theoretical aspiration and practice illustrates that public participation in Mangaung is symbolic rather than substantive.

5.3 Evaluating the influence of community inputs in decision-making processes within the Mangaung Municipality

This theme focuses on two of the study's objectives to unpack community participation in PMS. The first objective was to explore the extent and nature of community participation in the various stages of the PMS, including establishment, execution, and review of performance indicators and objectives. The second objective was to evaluate the mechanisms and processes utilised by the municipality to facilitate public engagement in

the formulation of targets and indicators for its PMS. Overall, this section attempts to answer one of the research questions that sought to understand how community inputs influence the decision-making processes within the Mangaung Municipality.

In this regard, the findings of this study, based on both in-depth interviews and document analysis, indicate that public participation in municipal PM in Mangaung is either non-existent or very limited. This is because participants believed that meetings are held for compliance exercises instead of utilising them to engage with citizens genuinely. This limited engagement is evident in the study findings, which indicate that since the new administration in Mangaung took office in 2021, there has been no meeting to engage the community in setting up KPIs. Moreover, community meetings are not held frequently, and many residents of Mangaung have expressed frustration with councillors failing to call meetings. It also emerged that councillors often cite budget constraints and municipal challenges as reasons for this lack of robust engagement. This therefore shows that community inputs do not have an influence on the decision-making processes within the Mangaung Municipality since there are no platforms where those inputs are solicited.

This failure to conduct meetings was seen as one of the reasons leading to minimal public participation in municipal PMS. The idea that meetings are held for compliance purposes has a knock-on effect on the influence of community inputs in municipal PMS, as participants feel that when community members provide inputs, the municipality does not return with updates. This leaves people unaware of what happens after consultations. In the same vein, ward councillors also fail to provide clear communication of performance goals and structured updates that address community members' complaints. Therefore, this lack of robust engagement is the reason why most participants believe that the municipality only engages the public as a formality rather than in meaningful collaboration.

This lacuna in how the municipality engages the public can be best understood through an analysis of policy frameworks and legislation that provide for community engagement in PMS. For instance, an analysis of the MPMSF reveals that it promotes the inclusion of community views in performance monitoring; however, it remains unclear how community

input directly influences performance targets. In addition, the documents analysed show that while community input is encouraged, decision-making processes around performance targets still appear to be top-down, and feedback loops between community input and actual performance targets are weak.

Furthermore, this study's findings not only reveal limited public involvement in PMS in Mangaung but also highlight the need to educate and empower communities to understand PMS better. Community members' lack of knowledge about their role in PMS can be attributed to the limited interaction between the municipality and the community, as highlighted above. In this study, the municipality does not engage communities in developing KPIs, as it only involves municipal officials. While participants highlighted the need for the municipality to engage citizens in Mangaung, they also noted the challenges that hinder the municipality's ability to engage with them. For instance, some participants noted that engaging the community is challenging because, for example, of resident's preference for communicating via WhatsApp, rather than attending meetings. To address this challenge of poor public involvement, some participants highlighted that the municipality could arrange visits to local community centres or provide transportation to the head office, where officials could address residents directly.

The findings of this study suggest that the lack of or minimal community involvement in Mangaung municipality's PMS is a reason why protests are often the immediate response to service delivery issues. This is so because participants felt that if a community monitoring tool existed, it could help track municipal performance and hold officials accountable before frustrations escalate. This use of protests as a tool for service delivery frustrations resonates with the literature on protests in South Africa (Alexander, 2010; Morudu, 2017; Alexander et al., 2018; Chiwarawara, 2023, 2024). While some participants with an understanding of PMS lamented the limited public involvement and councillors failure to communicate with them, others without an understanding of PMS explained that they do not participate in municipal PMS because councillors handle it on their behalf and provide them with feedback.

Overall, while the government has created an enabling environment by having policies for public participation in PMS, it is not actively ensuring that communities play a critical role. This could be attributed to a lack of provisions in policy on how this participation should be practically implemented, as well as civic education on the community's role in all stages of PMS. This disconnection between policy and practice reflects a broader failure of participatory governance, where institutional mechanisms that should foster shared decision-making are underutilised or symbolic. According to participatory governance theory, effective governance depends on co-creation, shared authority, and mutual accountability between the state and citizens (Sintomer *et al.,* 2008). However, in Mangaung, the prevailing practice reflects unilateral, top-down governance, with little substantive collaboration or mutual exchange. This pattern aligns with the lower rungs of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation, particularly the levels of "informing" or "tokenism", where participation exists only in form, not substance. Participants noted that the municipality rarely provides feedback after consultation, resulting in broken feedback loops and citizen disillusionment. Similarly, by OECD standards, Mangaung reflects a "consultation" model at best, but not "engagement" or "empowerment", where citizens' inputs shape decisions or co-design outcomes.

5.4 Assessing Mangaung's citizen participation in PMS

This theme focuses on investigating the effectiveness of existing approaches and strategies employed by the Mangaung Municipality to engage citizens in the PM procedures of the municipality. The study findings show that, from a policy perspective, the WPLG promotes participatory governance through ward committees and IDPs. In contrast, participants' narratives reveal that ward committees and councillors in Mangaung are dysfunctional and do not regularly engage with the communities. Although the policy states that communities should be involved in performance management, there are no dedicated structures in place for them to do so. They participate through the IDP process. In addition, the AGR (2023-2024) also highlights limited public consultation and poor accountability in service delivery.

This study's findings indicate that the Mangaung municipality communicates its performance goals and progress to the community in several ways, despite some of these methods appearing ineffective. For instance, community meetings emerged as one of the most popular communication channels that the municipality relies on to communicate performance goals. However, participants' narratives indicate that meeting attendance is low, which may be attributed to the idea that some citizens prefer to communicate via WhatsApp and the perception that councillors participate on their behalf. Online public reports by the municipality are another communication method that emerged in this study. However, they are not widely accessed by the community because they are mainly published on the municipal website, limiting reach to those who actively seek them out. This limit of reach might also be attributed to the need for a smartphone and data to access such reports.

Additionally, the municipality communicates with the community through public notices, ward councillors, pamphlets, community radio, and local newspapers. Some participants, especially those who noted the absence of structured communication channels and dedicated documents outlining progress on municipal projects, mentioned that residents do visit municipal offices to obtain updates. While participants had varying views on modes of communication, most agreed that communication is one-directional in the sense that the municipality informs the public, with no structured feedback loop. This one-directional approach can be viewed as a top-down approach to municipal governance. It may also be a result of limited-service delivery, as well as an explanation for the resort to protests. Literature often critiques this top-down approach, typically as a cause of protests and poor service delivery (see Ganson, 2016; Sinwell, 2023) and demonstrates that it is a widely adopted municipal management approach (Chomane & Biljohn, 2023; Sinwell, 2023).

The study findings also showed the ineffectiveness of the Mangaung municipality’s community involvement in PMS, as evidenced by its failure to involve communities in setting up KPIs and targets, as well as performance auditing. This, therefore, makes it difficult for communities to participate in later discussions, especially when they were not involved from the beginning. This failure to consistently engage and communicate with

the people, combined with a top-down approach, may be the reason why community meetings often turn into complaint sessions when they do occur, as decisions have already been made without prior input. The data indicate that these engagement challenges occur despite the presence of municipal structures for performance communication, such as the SDBIP and IDP forums.

In this study, ward committees, which are supposed to be non-partisan, are controlled by political groups, reducing their ability to represent everyone and ultimately leading to ineffective citizen engagement. This resonates with Piper and Von Lieres' (2008) analysis of institutionalised or invited public participation initiatives such as ward committees, where they found that these formal participation mechanisms have not yet achieved increased democracy in local governance or improved service delivery. This was the case due to challenges such as poor implementation, lack of political will, and inadequately designed participation structures (Piper & Von Lieres, 2008; Sekgala, 2016). These same challenges prevail in Mangaung municipality.

The Mangaung municipality's transparency and accountability in providing information on PMS is inadequate because the municipal leadership withholds information from the public, which leaves residents feeling excluded. This lack of transparency and withholding of information appears to stem from a lack of communication, consultation, and engagement between the municipality and the community. Furthermore, data indicate that there are weak accountability mechanisms in Mangaung municipality, which is evidenced by the fact that municipal officials do not adequately report back to communities on targets, performance, or financial matters. Moreover, quarterly ward councillor meetings, which are legally required, often fail to occur, thereby reducing community oversight. Additionally, residents are unaware of how budgets are allocated at the ward level, a consequence of weak accountability. This might be the reason for the compliance vs. meaningful accountability issue, where Mangaung municipality appears accountable on paper by following formal procedures without engaging residents in a meaningful way.

The study findings highlight that Mangaung municipality faces a plethora of challenges to effective community participation, namely, political interference, resource constraints, limited access to information and education and poor municipal planning and exclusion.

Unfortunately, these challenges occur irrespective of legal frameworks, such as Chapter 7, Section 152 of the Constitution, which emphasises accountability (RSA, 1996). Therefore, these accountability challenges result from the fact that the Mangaung municipality does not consistently implement the provisions of the constitution in ways that benefit communities. Furthermore, the findings of this study indicate that while the municipality acknowledges community concerns, it does not effectively address them, as there is no evidence of feedback loops in place to track concerns and report progress back to residents. In addition, during election periods, service delivery improves, and this suggests that the municipality prioritises political incentives over regular community needs.

Participants repeatedly highlighted the dysfunctionality of ward committees and councillors, who rarely convene community meetings, thus undermining genuine participation. From a participatory governance theory perspective, this reveals a breakdown in co-governance and joint decision-making. Participatory governance requires inclusive, deliberative processes that engage citizens not only as recipients of services but also as co-creators of policy and performance.

In Mangaung, however, the study found that information dissemination is one-directional, and participation mechanisms are symbolic rather than empowering. This reality aligns with the lower rungs of Arnstein's Ladder of Participation, particularly "informing" and "tokenism," where residents are merely given information without any influence over decisions. Despite structures such as ward committees, IDP forums, and the SDBIP, most engagement occurs after the decision, resulting in participation that is reduced to ritual compliance. Similarly, using the OECD's levels of participation, Mangaung appears to operate at the "inform" and limited "consult" levels, but far from "engage" or "empower", where citizen inputs are integrated into decision-making processes and shape policy outcomes.

5.5 Evaluating Strategies to Enhance Community Participation in PMS

This section considers the identified challenges/barriers to community participation in municipal PMS and strategies for enhancing such involvement, by considering how

communities would like to be engaged in municipal PMS within the Mangaung Municipality.

This study's findings suggest that community involvement could be enhanced through multiple communication channels, including print media, radio, social media, WhatsApp, and door-to-door outreach, to reach different demographics. The findings of this study indicate that a hybrid approach, combining both traditional and digital methods, could enhance community involvement in Mangaung's PMS. The digital methods would involve the adoption of modern engagement strategies that align with 4IR, such as automated and integrated PMS. The use of different approaches would cater to all age groups, as while young people prefer digital tools, older residents rely on traditional methods such as loud hailing and radio. Digitised tools are necessary, especially to encourage youth involvement in local government matters. However, all mechanisms should be used in a way that ensures inclusiveness, as even the ward committee model is effective, provided it is functional.

Tailoring communication methods to age, access, and literacy levels ensures that all community members are not only digitally connected but can also meaningfully engage in municipal PMS. In terms of OECD levels of participation, this strategy moves beyond "informing" and toward "consulting" and potentially "engaging", where citizen input can begin to influence decision-making.

Civic education emerged as another way to enhance community participation in Mangaung municipality's PMS. This is especially true if one considers that most participants did not understand what public participation, PM, and PMS are. This knowledge gap keeps citizens on the lower rungs of Arnstein's Ladder, particularly at the manipulation or informing stage, where participation is nominal or misunderstood. Some community participants did not understand their role in the PMS, which is why some believed that councillors should handle it on their behalf. If civic education were undertaken, however, it would equip citizens with knowledge of their role in PMS.

In the same vein, ward committee members are another avenue in this study that needs to be capacitated with the necessary knowledge and tools to educate communities and facilitate meaningful participation. This would be enhanced by developing structured engagement programs, such as a six-month plan to inform residents of their rights and responsibilities in relation to the PMS process. Implementing robust civic education programs would help shift participation upward on Arnstein’s ladder, toward consultation, partnership, and even citizen control, depending on how empowered communities become.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter sought to provide an analysis and discussion of the study findings. In doing so, the chapter presents four main themes that focus on presenting the study findings in relation to the study's objectives. The first theme focused on unpacking community members' understanding of public participation, PM, and PMS, noting that while some participants did not understand these concepts, others did, albeit with a limited understanding of their roles in these processes. The second theme focused on community involvement in PMS in Mangaung, noting that the municipality communicates with residents through various channels, including meetings, radio, and pamphlets. However, these mechanisms were believed to be inefficient due to the challenges they faced. The third theme focused on the effectiveness of citizen engagement in Mangaung municipality, which was perceived as ineffective due to the municipality's practice of engaging the community for compliance purposes without meaningful interaction. Moreover, the ineffectiveness of community involvement in PMS was attributed to a lack of transparency and accountability. Lastly, the chapter looked at how participants wished the municipality could involve them in PMS. Overall, the findings show that citizens do not have any influence on decision making, and this is underscored by resorting to protests as a way to make their voices count.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This study evaluated community participation in PMS in South Africa, with a focus on the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality in the Free State. To achieve this, the study proposed six objectives. The first objective was to investigate the mechanisms and structures in place to enable community participation in the PMS. The second objective analysed the challenges or barriers to community participation in the PMS. The third objective aimed to determine community members' understanding of public participation in PM and the municipal PMS. The fourth objective explored the extent and nature of community participation in the various stages of the PMS, including establishment, execution, and review of performance indicators and objectives. The fifth objective evaluated how community inputs influence the shaping of performance targets and indicators, and the last objective evaluated how communities would want to be involved in municipal PMS in the Mangaung Municipality. This concluding chapter synthesises these objectives to discuss their implications for the themes that emerged throughout this study.

The chapter proceeds as follows: Section 6.2 presents a summary of the main findings of the study, while Section 6.3 addresses the study's limitations, and Section 6.4 outlines the study's recommendations. The last section concludes the chapter and thesis.

6.2 Summary of key findings

This study examined community members' understanding of concepts such as public participation, PM, and PMS. From the data, it emerged that a considerable portion of the participants did not understand what these concepts meant, while a few participants did have a general understanding of these concepts. Lack of understanding can be attributed to the limited active involvement of communities in their municipal processes. In this regard, it is also key to note that the post-apartheid government has developed comprehensive policy and legal frameworks to facilitate public participation, PM, and PMS, as outlined in the MSA 2000 and the Constitution, among others. However, the lack

of understanding of these concepts, despite the rich frameworks that provide for them, highlights the gap between policy and practical implementation.

This study also sought to explore the mechanisms and structures for community participation in municipal PMS. In this regard, it was found that structures and mechanisms for public participation in municipal PMS in Mangaung are non-existent or very limited. Ward committees and ward councillors were seen as the only available mechanisms for community participation. The findings on ward committees reflect politicisation of ward committees, which sometimes create exclusionary dynamics, where only select groups have influence, and ordinary community members are sidelined. This was believed to result in a loss of legitimacy and trust in ward committees as neutral platforms for civic engagement.

Furthermore, findings show that councillors and municipal officials largely held meetings for compliance exercises instead of using them to genuinely engage with citizens. Ward councillors, who are meant to be a bridge between the community and the municipality, appear to be failing to provide clear communication of performance goals and structured updates that address community members' concerns. In some instances, participant inputs suggest that the community feel they sometimes serve certain political interests at the expense of others. This lack of and minimal community involvement in Mangaung municipality’s PMS was cited as a reason why protests are often the immediate response to poor service delivery.

This study aimed to understand the effectiveness of community engagement in Mangaung municipality. In this regard, the study findings indicate that community engagement in the municipal PMS in Mangaung is ineffective, primarily due to limited communication between the municipality and its residents. This was the case, irrespective of the various communication channels that exist between the community and the municipality, such as meetings, annual reports, radio, and pamphlets, among others.

The top-down approach that the municipality uses could also be another barrier to the community's effective involvement in its PMS. Moreover, the ineffectiveness of the Mangaung municipality’s community involvement in PMS was evident in its failure to engage the communities in setting up KPIs and performance auditing.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the state of participation in municipal PMS and its broader implications for participatory governance. They demonstrate that, although legislative frameworks like the MSA promote community involvement, in practice, participation is often fragmented, superficial, and symbolic. Community members across different wards reported a lack of meaningful inclusion in setting performance targets, understanding performance indicators, or providing feedback on service delivery.

In addition, the findings reveal that structures intended to facilitate participation, such as ward committees, ward councillors, IDP forums, and community meetings, are often ineffective, politically manipulated, or poorly communicated. This disconnect leads to widespread disillusionment, with communities viewing participation as a tick-box exercise rather than a space for shaping municipal priorities and influencing decisions. Poor attendance at meetings, weak feedback mechanisms, and unmet expectations reinforce the perception that municipal performance management is a closed and bureaucratic process, one that is inaccessible to ordinary residents.

6.3 Limitations of the study

This study encountered several limitations that may have influenced the depth and scope of its findings. A significant constraint was the inability to secure an interview with a ward councillor, which limited the study's insights into the political oversight of municipal administration. Moreover, although efforts were made to include a diverse range of participants, the sample may not fully represent the demographic and geographic diversity of Mangaung, which could impact the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, low levels of civic awareness among participants reduced their ability to engage meaningfully with complex aspects of PM, such as the IDP and monitoring processes.

Scheduling interviews proved challenging, leading to delays and fewer engagements than initially planned. For example, the researcher was unable to secure an interview with a member of the mayoral council (MMC). Language and translation challenges may have further affected the accuracy and nuance of some participant responses. However, I did

my best to capitalise on my ability to speak the same language as the participants and transcribe and translate the interviews myself.

Additionally, limited access to up-to-date municipal performance reports and community participation records hindered the ability to verify participants' perspectives against official documentation. The final limitation was that this study focused on one municipality, which would have allowed for a comparative analysis to reveal differences and nuances that municipalities can learn from each other. However, the results of this study can still be helpful for other municipalities to learn from and enhance community participation in their communities.

6.4 Recommendations

Given that this study was conducted in only one municipality, the researcher recommends that future studies adopt a comparative approach by including two municipalities. Furthermore, future studies can interview ward councillors to explore their understanding of PM, their role, and the role of the community.

To strengthen public participation in PMS within the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, based on this study’s findings, the researcher recommends a multifaceted approach. Given the lack of civic education, the Mangaung municipality could invest in civic education and capacity-building initiatives to empower communities with the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful engagement. The Municipality should also diversify participation platforms by combining digital tools with traditional methods to enhance accessibility and ensure inclusivity among various community groups, including youth, women, older persons, and people with disabilities.

Establishing clear communication guidelines, regular feedback mechanisms, and transparent data-sharing practices can build trust and demonstrate the value of community input. Additionally, adopting participatory monitoring tools, such as community scorecards, alongside the development of an integrated and automated performance management system, will promote consistency, accountability, and more effective citizen oversight. Additionally, fostering continuous engagement and collaboration with a broad

range of stakeholders will ensure that performance management is both participatory and responsive to community needs.

Although most legislations and policy frameworks provide for community involvement in various municipal structures, they often fail to define how communities can effectively participate. Therefore, it is recommended that policy frameworks and legislation provide precise details on what community involvement entails and how it should be implemented. This study's findings indicate that the municipality engages with residents through a top-down approach, which appears to generate tension and often results in protests. Thus, it is recommended that the municipality adopt a bottom-up approach, where it regularly gathers community inputs, implements them, and provides constant feedback.

6.5 Conclusion

As South Africa commemorates 30 years of democracy, there is an urgent need to reflect on the state of public participation in governance, a key principle rooted in the country's liberation history and formalised after 1994. Scholars and policy frameworks have established public participation as a cornerstone of democratic local governance, particularly through processes such as the IDP, budgeting, and PMS. These mechanisms aim to place communities at the heart of municipal decision-making, not just as passive recipients but as active contributors. This study aimed to answer the question: *How do citizens in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality understand and engage in public participation in a municipal PMS, especially the setting of targets and indicators and the review of municipal performance?*

It found that the implementation of public participation in Mangaung faces significant challenges due to the legacy of exclusion, limited capacity, and a lack of consistent support. It is evident that having participation structures alone is not enough; communities must be empowered, informed, and consistently engaged to contribute meaningfully to governance. Moving forward, efforts must concentrate on strengthening community capacity, improving communication, and ensuring that public participation is genuine, inclusive, and remains a fundamental part of our democratic practice.

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Appendices: List of Interview Questions

1. **Interview questions for the community members**

Awareness and Knowledge of Performance Management Systems:

- Do you know what public participation is?

- Do you know or are you aware of what performance management is?
- How familiar are you with the performance management systems used in your municipality?
- How does the municipality communicate its performance goals and progress to the community?

Community Involvement in Performance Management:

- Do communities recognise performance indicators, and how frequently are communities informed about any challenges in setting performance targets?
- In your opinion, to what extent does the community contribute to setting goals or indicators for municipal performance?
- Can you describe any instances where you or your community were involved in setting targets and indicators for the municipality's PMS?
- What mechanisms (e.g., consultations, public meetings, surveys) does your municipality use to include the community in performance management processes?
- Have you been actively involved in any forums, surveys, or meetings that discuss municipal performance and goals?

Impact and Influence of Community Participation:

- How do you feel your community's input has influenced the goals and performance indicators set by the municipality?
- Have you noticed any changes in the municipality's services or policies that were directly influenced by community feedback?
- Do you believe the municipality takes your concerns seriously when setting performance targets?

Challenges and Barriers to Participation:

- What do you think are the biggest challenges to effective community participation in municipal performance management?
- Are there any barriers that prevent you from becoming more involved in discussions or decisions about municipal performance?

Perceptions of Transparency and Accountability:

- How transparent do you believe the municipality is regarding its performance management and goal setting?
- Do you feel that the municipality is accountable to the community for achieving the set performance indicators and objectives?

Gathering and Incorporating Public Input:

- How does the municipality gather and incorporate public input when setting these targets and indicators?

- Do you feel the municipality listens to and acts upon the community's feedback in shaping performance goals?

Suggestions for Improvement:

- What steps could the municipality take to improve community involvement in developing and accessing its performance management system?
- How could communication between the municipality and the community be improved to ensure better understanding and participation?

2. Interview questions for municipal officials responsible for public participation

1. **Understanding the Public Participation Framework**

- Can you describe the framework or model that Mangaung Metro uses for public participation in municipal governance?
- What are the main goals of public participation in the Mangaung municipality?

- How does your department ensure alignment between public participation initiatives and the Integrated Development Plan (IDP)?

2. Participation Mechanisms and Tools

- What formal structures or mechanisms are in place to facilitate public participation in Mangaung (e.g., ward committees, community meetings, digital platforms)?
- How does the municipality engage with marginalised or hard-to-reach communities in the public participation process?
- Could you explain the role of technology and social media in facilitating public participation in Mangaung?

3. Effectiveness of Public Participation

- How do you measure the success or effectiveness of public participation initiatives in Mangaung?
- What feedback mechanisms are in place for residents to express concerns or suggestions regarding municipal services or governance?
- Can you provide examples of decisions or policies that were influenced by public input in Mangaung?

4. Challenges in Public Participation

What are the main challenges you face in encouraging active public participation in municipal affairs?

How does the municipality address issues such as public apathy, lack of trust, or dissatisfaction with the public participation process?

How do political dynamics within Mangaung Metro impact public participation efforts?

5. Inclusivity and Representation

- How does the municipality ensure that participation is inclusive, particularly for vulnerable or underrepresented groups such as older persons, women, and youth?
- Can you discuss any initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of older persons specifically?

- How does the municipality handle instances where certain groups feel excluded or inadequately represented in decision-making processes?

6. Collaboration with other departments

- How does the office of the speaker, which is responsible for community participation in the municipality as per section 37 k of the amended structures act, collaborate with other departments in the municipality?
- How does Section 42 of the South African legal and policy framework (e.g., the Municipal Systems Act) influence public participation efforts specifically in PMS in Mangaung.

7. Accountability and Feedback

- What accountability measures are in place to ensure that the public participation process is transparent and that the municipality follows up on public inputs?
- How does the municipality communicate the outcomes of participation processes to the public?

8. Capacity and Resources

- Does the municipality have adequate resources (staff, budget, etc.) to facilitate effective public participation?
- What capacity-building initiatives are available for municipal officials to enhance their skills in managing public participation?
- Are you aware that according to section 42 of the MSA,?
- Could you explain the role of ward committees and community meetings in performance management, and how COGTA strengthens these structures?

9. Future of Public Participation

- How do you envision the future of public participation in Mangaung? Are there any innovative approaches or reforms being considered?
- What advice would you give to improve public participation in the Mangaung Metro?

10. Closing Questions

- Is there anything else you think is important to know about public participation in Mangaung?

- What do you think other municipalities could learn from Mangaung’s approach to public participation?

3. Interview questions for the COGTA official responsible for Public participation

General Questions:

What is your understanding of P2P, IDP, and PMS in municipalities, and how are they related?

1. Role and Responsibility:

- Can you briefly describe your role within COGTA and how it relates to public participation in municipalities?
- What are COGTA's primary responsibilities supporting public participation in the Mangaung Municipality?

2**. Public Participation Framework:**

- How does COGTA ensure municipalities adhere to the legal and policy frameworks regarding public participation (e.g., Municipal Systems Act, 2000)?
- Can you explain COGTA's mandate in supporting public participation, specifically in relation to the municipal performance management system (PMS) in Mangaung?
- How does COGTA ensure that Mangaung Metro's PMS includes mechanisms for meaningful community involvement?
- What are the key objectives of COGTA's support to municipalities in involving communities in performance management?
- What mechanisms are in place to assess the effectiveness of public participation initiatives in municipalities?

3. Challenges and Gaps:

- What are some of the key challenges municipalities face when trying to implement effective public participation strategies?
- How does COGTA assist municipalities in overcoming these challenges?
- In your view, what are the gaps in the current public participation framework, and how can they be addressed?

Support and Capacity Building:

4. Capacity Building Initiatives:

- What training or capacity-building programs does COGTA offer to municipal officials to improve their public participation efforts?

- How does COGTA monitor the progress and effectiveness of these programs?

5. Resource Allocation:

- Do you believe municipalities have adequate resources (financial, human, technical) to facilitate meaningful public participation? How does COGTA intervene in resource-limited municipalities?

6. Innovation and Best Practices:

- What innovative public participation methods have you seen municipalities adopt recently? How does COGTA encourage the sharing of best practices?
- Are there any success stories or examples of municipalities effectively using public participation that you would highlight?

Evaluation and Monitoring:

7. Impact of Public Participation:

- How does COGTA measure the impact of public participation on municipal decision-making and service delivery?
- How does COGTA handle instances where municipalities consistently fail to meet public participation standards?

8. Community Feedback:

- How does COGTA ensure that communities' voices are genuinely incorporated into municipal planning and decision-making processes?

9. Continuous Improvement:

- What strategies does COGTA use to continuously improve its support for public participation at the municipal level?
- What is the relationship between the Province and the National Department of COGTA in supporting municipalities?
- What future developments or policy reforms are necessary to strengthen public participation in municipalities?

4. Interview Questionnaire with COGTA PMS Official

Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your insights are invaluable to our research on public participation and performance management in the Mangaung Municipality. The purpose of this interview is to understand COGTA's role in supporting these processes. Your responses will be kept confidential and used solely for academic purposes.

Background Information

1. Can you please describe your role within the Department of COGTA?

2. How long have you been involved in performance management in the Free State province?

Role and Responsibilities

4. How does COGTA support the municipality in the implementation of performance management systems?

5. How does COGTA ensure that Mangaung Metro's PMS includes mechanisms for meaningful community involvement?

Strategies and Mechanisms

6. What strategies does COGTA employ to enhance community participation in municipal performance management?

7. How does COGTA ensure that the community is aware of and involved in the establishment, implementation, and evaluation of municipal performance indicators and objectives?

8. What mechanisms are in place to facilitate communication between COGTA, the municipality, and the community?

Challenges and Solutions

9. What are the main challenges COGTA faces in supporting public participation and performance management in the Mangaung Municipality?

10. How does COGTA address these challenges? Can you provide specific examples of successful solutions?

11. In your experience, what factors contribute to effective public participation in municipal performance management?

Section 5: Evaluation and Feedback

12. How does COGTA evaluate the effectiveness of its support in public participation and performance management?

13. What feedback mechanisms are in place to gather input from the community and municipal officials?

14. Can you share any recent feedback from the community or municipality that has influenced COGTA's approach?

Section 6: Future Directions

15. What are COGTA's plans or goals regarding support for public participation and performance management in the Mangaung Municipality?

16. How do you envision the role of COGTA evolving in the next five years to support these processes better?

Section 7: Additional Insights

17. Is there anything else you would like to add about COGTA's role in public participation and performance management?

18. Do you have any recommendations for improving the collaboration between COGTA, the municipality, and the community?

5. Questions for Municipal PMS officials

Background Information

Do you consent to this interview being recorded for research purposes?

1. Can you please introduce yourself and your role within the Mangaung municipality?
2. How long have you been involved with the municipality's performance management system (PMS)?

Public Participation Mechanisms

3. What mechanisms are currently in place to facilitate public participation in the Mangaung municipality's PMS?
4. How are these mechanisms communicated to the public?
5. Can you describe any specific events or forums where the public can participate in the PMS process?

Setting of Targets and Indicators

6. How does the Mangaung municipality involve the public in setting targets and indicators for its PMS?
7. What criteria are used to select targets and indicators, and how is the public informed about these criteria?
8. Can you provide examples of how public input has influenced the setting of specific targets and indicators?

Review of Municipal Performance

9. What processes are in place for the public to review the municipality's performance against its set targets and indicators?
10. How often are performance reviews conducted and made available to the public?
11. What platforms or formats are used to present performance review results to the public?

Challenges in Public Participation

12. What challenges does the Mangaung municipality face in facilitating public participation in its PMS?
13. How does the municipality address these challenges?
14. Are there any groups within the community that are harder to reach or involve? If so, why?
15. How does the municipality overcome public apathy or resistance when it comes to participation in performance reviews and target-setting?

16. What are some of the political or administrative obstacles that hinder community involvement in municipal performance assessments, and how do you deal with them?

Suggestions for Improvement

17. In your opinion, what improvements could be made to enhance public participation in the PMS?
18. Are there any best practices from other municipalities or organizations that Mangaung could adopt?
19. What additional support or resources would the municipality need to improve public participation in the PMS?

Feedback Mechanisms

20. What is the Municipality's Role in Addressing Feedback and Performance Gaps
21. What mechanisms are in place to ensure that community feedback on municipal performance is effectively integrated into performance improvement plans?
22. Can you provide an example of a situation where community feedback led to a significant change or improvement in municipal performance management?

Concluding Questions

23. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the municipality’s efforts to facilitate public participation in its PMS?
24. Do you have any additional documents or materials related to public participation in the PMS that you could share with me? For document analysis