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The effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation at Mbuzini, Nkomazi Local Municipality

Submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management at the University of Witwatersrand in fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Management in Governance & Management (Coursework)

By

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November 2025

Abstract

The state is constitutionally obligated to encourage public participation in governance, prioritising citizen engagement over legal compliance. Municipalities, as the closest level of government to the populace, are responsible for empowering citizens to engage in governance matters. The study used a mixed methods approach with an explanatory sequential strategy, incorporating interviews with key informants and a self-administered questionnaire. For the quantitative aspect, random selection was employed to ensure equal participation among all Mbuzini community members, while purposive sampling was used for the qualitative data collection with the Mbuzini ward committee and two officials from the Nkomazi Local Municipality. The findings of this study indicate a significant disconnect between community members and ward committees in the Mbuzini ward resulting in dissatisfaction and protests. Ward committees are willing to engage but face challenges due to inadequate communication tools, particularly for older residents. This communication gap, along with community ignorance and disinterest, leads to unrealistic expectations and uncoordinated protests. The study identified significant obstacles to public involvement in government decision-making, noting that the municipality's focus on compliance with regulations undermines genuine community needs, and further alienates residents. Despite claims of effective monitoring mechanisms, ward committees find them ineffective. In addition, financial constraints on the Nkomazi Local Municipality limit grant funding and capacity, contributing to dissatisfaction with service delivery and triggering protests. While residents are aware of the committees' roles, they are dissatisfied due to inadequate consultations, poor feedback, unclear roles and lack of training. These challenges, along with the misinterpretation of roles and low community engagement, impede effective participation. Recommendations include regular training for committee members, innovative engagement strategies and increased municipal funding.

Keywords: public participation, citizen engagement, ward committees, Mbuzini community, Nkomazi Local Municipality, community dissatisfaction, financial constraints, service delivery

Declaration

I, **Cynthia Philile Mahlalela Student No: 2626389** declare that this research report is my own work and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. I further declare that:

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b. This report does not contain other scholars' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
    i. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;
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c. This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged and the source being detailed in the dissertation and in the references sections.



_____

Cynthia Philile Mahlalela
November 2025

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I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to the successful completion of this research project. Conducting this study was a challenging journey that required not only commitment and dedication but also the invaluable support of many individuals.

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List of Abbreviations

CDW	Community Development Workers
COGTA	Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
RSA	Republic of South Africa

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The involvement of the general population is crucial in a democratic system, as they have the ability to voice their opinions, cast votes and engage in political activities. On the other hand, public reluctance to participate in government decision-making is a growing challenge. While there are government programmes designed to guarantee public engagement, their efficacy is debatable. Among the efforts to increase public involvement is the creation of ward committees. This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of ward committees in improving public involvement in government decision-making. This chapter gives an overview of the study by first discussing the background and context of the study, then exploring the research problem, objectives, questions, significance, findings and lastly, the delimitations.

1.2 Background to the Study

In South Africa, apartheid severely obstructed citizen involvement by systematically excluding most people from substantial engagement in governance affairs (Zulu, 2020). However, post-1994 and the abolishment of apartheid, the country has moved strongly towards inclusive governance through the constitution and other statutes that advocate equitable public involvement (Sibiya, 2011). According to the study conducted by Maphazi et al. (2013), there is a constitutional obligation incumbent upon the state to establish forums and processes aimed at promoting public participation. Therefore, prioritising citizen engagement over mere legal compliance is crucial in pursuing effective governance and the promotion of societal progress. In order to facilitate meaningful citizen participation, it is imperative for people to possess an in-depth understanding of the functioning of all aspects of government. Municipalities, being the most proximate level of government to the populace, bear the responsibility of empowering citizens to foster meaningful engagement in matters pertaining to governance.

Sigenene (2024) argues that in South Africa, local government plays a crucial role in regulating municipalities, complementing the overarching frameworks established by the constitution aimed at fostering socioeconomic development, particularly addressing the needs of impoverished and disadvantaged communities. Despite the clear directive of the constitution, Duma (2019) highlights a concerning trend in certain municipalities in the country where community input is undervalued in decision-making processes. This lack of responsiveness to citizens' needs creates a disconnect between local governments and the communities they serve, undermining the principles of local democratic values and weakening the principles of Batho Pele.

1.3 Citizen Participation Legal Framework

In South Africa, the legal framework for citizen participation in decision-making is multifaceted, encompassing constitutional, legislative, regulatory and administrative provisions. Central to this framework is the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), Section 152(1) (e) which mandates local governments to promote citizen involvement in municipal affairs, highlighting the state's responsibility to meet the fundamental needs of its citizens. The White Paper on Transforming Service Delivery (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1997) emphasises the importance of viewing citizens as consumers and advocates for their active engagement in service delivery decisions, aligning with the Batho Pele principles that prioritise service quality and responsiveness. This involves serving individuals with attentiveness and regard while ensuring that the stated levels and calibre of service consistently meet the most stringent standards (Rooyen & Mokoena, 2013).

Similarly, the White Paper on Local Government (RSA, 1998) introduces strategies for local governments to involve citizens and civic organisations in municipal matters, recognising their roles as voters, individuals susceptible to local government laws and regulations, consumers and recipients of services provided by municipalities, and collaborators in resource mobilisation for the municipality's development. The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (RSA, 2000) further reinforces the necessity of fostering a democratic environment within municipalities, mandating active community participation in governance and decision-making processes. This

includes various forms of public engagement, such as assemblies and consultative discussions, as outlined in Chapter 4 of the Act.

Moreover, the Local Government: Municipal Planning and Performance Management Regulations (RSA, 2001) require municipalities to involve community members in developing and evaluating performance management systems, ensuring that citizen input shapes key performance metrics and Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). The Public Participation Framework for the South African Legislative Sector (2013) outlines the responsibilities of the legislative sector in promoting citizen engagement, ensuring that public participation strategies are inclusive, clear and open to accountable measures. This comprehensive legal framework underscores the critical role of citizen participation in enhancing democratic governance and service delivery in South Africa.

The question is whether these legislative provisions are effective enough in promoting public participation at the local government level. Municipalities must establish platforms for active public involvement in service delivery to prevent passive community involvement and protests against government decisions. Masiya et al. (2019) argue that without such mechanisms, community involvement becomes passive. The public can be actively involved in municipal activities and the provision of basic necessities through mechanisms like ward committees, community development workers, community-based planning, traditional authorities and other available platforms. This study will focus on assessing how effective is the Mbuzini ward committee within Nkomazi Local Municipality at enhancing citizen involvement, identifying systems in place to track and assess how well the ward committee is working, and what challenges the ward committee faces in ensuring citizen participation in the delivery of municipal services.

1.4 Context of the Study

Nkomazi Local Municipality falls under Ehlanzeni District of Mpumalanga Province which is in the north-eastern part of South Africa. The municipality is classified as Category B and is located between the Kingdom of Eswatini and Mozambique. The area is bordered by the Kruger National Park to the north and the City of Mbombela

to the west. It is the smallest of the four municipalities that falls within Ehlanzeni District and encompasses 17% of the district's size. The area is linked to Eswatini through provincial highways and to Mozambique via railway lines and the primary national road (N4), creating the Maputo Corridor. Mbuzini is a small rural area within the Nkomazi Local Municipality that is close to the border of Mozambique and Eswatini (Nkomazi Local Municipality Integrated Development Plan, 2018/22) (Department of Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs [COGTA], 2018).

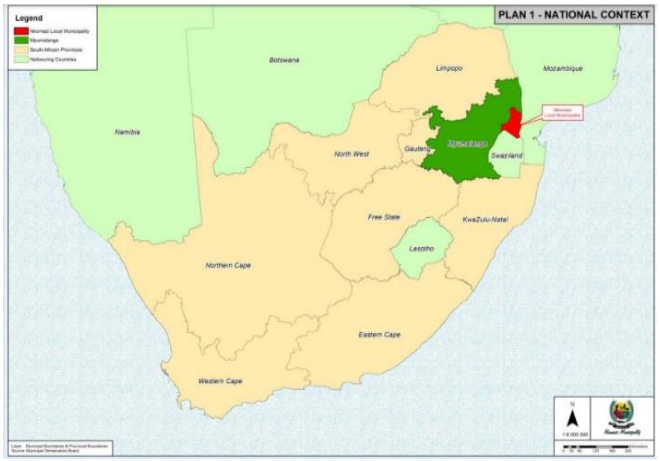


Figure 1.1: Nkomazi Local Municipality Map (Provincial/national context)

Source: Department of Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs (2018)

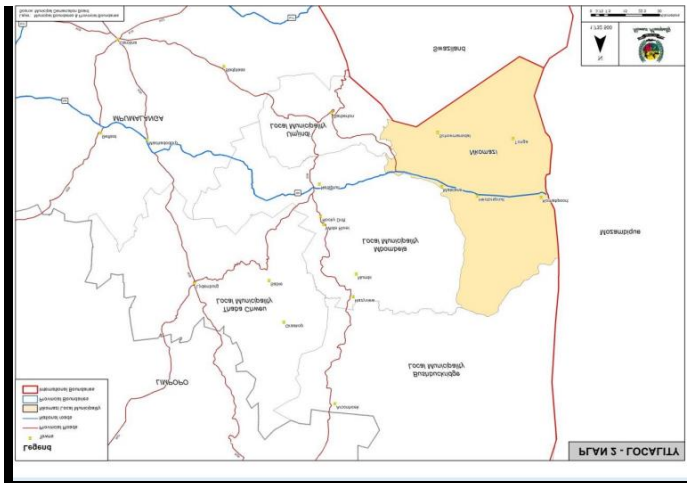


Figure 1.2: Nkomazi Municipality Map (local context)

Source: Department of Cooperative Governance & Traditional Affairs (2018)

1.5 Problem Statement

The participation of the general public plays a crucial role in the functioning of a democratic system. In a democratic society, every individual has the opportunity to actively engage in public affairs through various means. These means include expressing their political perspectives without hindrance, openly sharing personal opinions on prevailing issues, articulating their expectations without fear of intimidation, exercising their right to vote, participating in political movements or community organisations, and even pursuing candidacy in democratic electoral processes. There has been a notable rise in public reluctance to participate in the process of service delivery at the municipal level. There are many government initiatives or programmes designed to guarantee that the public participate in the provision of services. These strategies include ward committees, community development workers, community-based planning, traditional authorities, and other strategies (Maphazi et al., 2013). The question is: Are these initiatives or policies sufficient and successful to fulfil their intended goals? Are these programmes subject to monitoring and evaluation to assess their effectiveness? In attempting to answer these questions this study also set out to assess to what extent the general public comprehended their role in the process.

This study is aimed at assessing how effective is the ward committee of Mbuzini community in enhancing citizen involvement in the service delivery process within the Nkomazi Local Municipality. The research site of Mbuzini was chosen because of the research gap in the literature. The study involved identifying the role of ward committees in enhancing public participation in government decision-making processes, the mechanisms established to monitor and evaluate municipal policies aimed at enhancing public participation, and the challenges faced by ward committees in enhancing public participation.

1.6 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of ward committee of Mbuzini community in enhancing public participation in the government decision-making processes within the Nkomazi Local Municipality. This research employed a

two-phase, explanatory, sequential, mixed methods approach. The initial stage of the study involved a quantitative investigation into the effectiveness of the Mbuzini ward committee within Nkomazi Local Municipality in improving citizen involvement in government decision-making processes. This was followed by a qualitative data collection phase as a follow-up and further identifying the mechanisms established to monitor and evaluate the ward committees. Furthermore, the qualitative aimed to explain the effectiveness of ward committees in improving public participation in the government decision-making processes. This was accomplished through conducting key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders, experts and individuals with direct experience in the Mbuzini Local Municipality.

1.7 The Research Objectives and Question

This study explored the effectiveness of the Mbuzini ward committee in enhancing public participation in government decision-making processes, responding to the following research objectives and questions:

1.7.1 Research objectives

The objective of this study was to explore the effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation by identifying:

- the role of ward committees in enhancing public participation in government decision-making process;
- mechanisms put in place to monitor and evaluate ward committees; and
- challenges faced by ward committees in enhancing public participation.

1.7.2 Research questions

The study achieved the abovementioned objectives by answering the following questions:

- What was the role of the Mbuzini ward committee in enhancing public participation in the government decision-making process?
- How was the Mbuzini ward committee monitored and evaluated?

- What were the challenges faced by the Mbuzini ward committee in enhancing public participation?

1.8 The Significance of the Study

Ward committees' effectiveness is subject to debate in most local governments nationwide. The local sphere of government is considered to be the government entity in the most convenient proximity to the citizens. Thus, robust and efficient ward committees are essential to encourage substantial involvement in planning. The study explored the effectiveness of the ward committee in the Mbuzini community and explored how efficient ward committees could improve public engagement and participation in municipal administration and decision-making.

It is believed that the results of this research could strengthen public involvement and engagement in local government administration and decision-making. Even though the findings of the research cannot be generalised to the rest of the communities within Nkomazi Local Municipality, they might still help aid the municipality in enhancing its systems, procedures and strategies for public participation, particularly how ward committees operate.

1.9 Delimitations of the Study

This study focuses on the Mbuzini community located within the Nkomazi Local Municipality, adopting a mixed methods approach that included a survey and interviews. The study employed random sampling for the quantitative phase to ensure equal involvement from all community members and purposive sampling of municipal personnel for the qualitative phase.

1.10 Structure of the Research Report

The research paper consists of six chapters. The sequence of the chapters flows as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

The research topic is introduced and the study's background is outlined in this chapter. The chapter also provides the research problem, objectives and questions. Furthermore, the researcher goes on to describe the context, relevance, and delimitations of the study. The layout of the research report is also outlined in this chapter, and it is then followed by the literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews literature which discusses public participation and participatory democracy. It covers factors that influence participation, government decision-making, the role of the state in promoting participation, and municipal strategies. Particular attention is given to ward committees and their roles and responsibilities, as well as the difficulties they encounter in involving communities. It delves into the theoretical framework which set the direction for the research and examines how it is applied to the study.

Chapter 3: Research Strategy, Design, Procedure and Methods

This section explains several research processes and evaluates the suitability of the approach selected for this study. It provides an assessment of the notions of validity and reliability, in addition to the limitations and ethical considerations that were observed. This chapter details the study strategy employed, including sample methodologies, data collection procedures and data analysis tools.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Results and Findings

This chapter conveys and discusses the data gathered from those who participated. The results are presented as quotes taken directly from the responses and an overview of their viewpoints. The presentations elaborate on the information obtained

which informed the researcher on how various contexts and conditions influenced the perspectives of the participants.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Analysis of Findings

This chapter provides an examination of the results and the themes that have been identified from the preceding chapters of the study.

Chapter 6: Research Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter consolidates the knowledge acquired from the research and provides recommendations and proposed approaches to be considered, derived from the study's findings. The constraints are restated, and recommendations for future research are proposed.

1.11 Conclusion

This chapter serves as an outline of the study. It introduced the topic and outlined the background of the study. It also provided the research problem, objectives and questions. Furthermore, the researcher went on to describe the context, relevance and delimitations of the study. The layout of the research report was also outlined in this chapter. The next chapter discusses the literature that was considered significant in this research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

As far as public participation in government affairs goes, citizens are the centre of the process and should be the main role players. If residents participate actively in all public issues activities and are knowledgeable about them, they will have more faith in municipalities (Mamokhere & Meyer, 2022). As reported by Maphazi et al. (2013), several recently published studies on citizen involvement show that the anticipated involvement has typically fallen short of what the state had hoped for, and there is still a considerable amount of indifference, particularly when it comes to issues involving municipalities. This highlights a gap between the ideal of active citizen participation and the reality of indifference, suggesting a need for strategies to foster greater involvement. This section of the study reviews the literature that contextualises and describes the research gap. In doing so, public participation and participatory democracy, participatory spaces and factors influencing public participation will be discussed. It will also explore the role public involvement plays in government decision-making processes, the role of the state in enhancing public participation, the strategies employed by the municipality to enhance public participation with an emphasis on ward committees, including their roles and responsibilities as well as the challenges they face in getting communities involved.

2.2 Public Participation and Participatory Democracy

Abels (2007) emphasises the importance of citizen involvement in democracies, highlighting the need for improved and strengthened participation in various social spheres. Decentralised governance theory, which distributes power away from the central government, promotes citizen involvement and decision-making, improving government quality and empowering marginalised individuals (Moyo & Madlopha, 2016). Petunia and Selepe (2020) stress the need to foster an environment that promotes participatory democracy. Notwithstanding these theoretical frameworks, the real problem of attaining significant public participation in municipal matters still persists in South Africa. Public participation empowers communities to set priorities,

collaborate with local government and find solutions to problems, leading to problem resolution and advancements (McKenzie & Mostafa, 2018).

2.2.1 Participatory spaces

According to Selepe (2023), municipalities ought to build systems to facilitate citizen involvement in their activities, fostering a culture of participatory governance. It is therefore essential for councils to cultivate an environment conducive to the engagement of citizens and stakeholders in municipal affairs. Participatory spaces are discussed below.

2.2.1.1 Public consultation, hearings and meetings

According to the Local Government: Municipal System Act 32 of 2000 (RSA, 2000), municipalities are required to carry out public hearings and engage in community consultation prior to the adoption or modification of projects or by-laws. Public participation in state agencies or municipalities involves consultations, meetings or hearings where input from communities is sought. Invitations are extended to members and relevant entities, and registers of attendance are filed for future invitations. Feedback is provided after careful debates (Phago, 2008). As emphasised by Maphazi et al. (2013), it is important for ward committees to engage in frequent consultations with people and then provide outcomes and suggestions for improvement.

As argued by Selepe (2023), citizens' involvement in decision-making processes, such as focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, allows for the expression of their perspectives on development initiatives, emphasising the importance of extensive deliberation and community consultation in such initiatives. Public hearings are official gatherings where individuals from the general public engage in discussions with government officials to debate on certain issues, such as proposed legislation or regulations. For instance, the municipality may deploy suggestion boxes to enable individuals to offer comments on certain matters (Petunia & Selepe, 2020). It is therefore evident that public consultations and engagements are essential for improving government effectiveness and promoting community development. They enable meaningful dialogue between officials and citizens, ensuring that diverse

public perspectives are acknowledged and integrated into decision-making processes.

2.2.1.2 Izimbizo

According to Maphazi et al. (2013), Izimbizo programmes are a form of grassroots outreach that aims to understand the needs and desires of residents, fostering direct engagement between communities and local government. These initiatives promote sustainable livelihoods and foster collaboration among municipalities and neighbourhoods. Public participation has a positive effect on policy results, community interaction and corporate governance; furthermore, these tactics play a significant role in promoting development and growth (Petunia & Selepe, 2020).

The Imbizo platform has gained significant popularity in South Africa since its adoption in 2001, serving as a prominent avenue for debating policies and the implementation of government solutions. It enables direct interpersonal communication between state officials and citizens within communities (Phago, 2008).

2.2.1.3 Conferences, workshops and events

As argued by Phago (2008), the active engagement of community members in educational activities such as conferences and seminars plays a pivotal role in fostering local economic growth and ensures that stakeholders are adequately informed. The objectives of community involvement encompass the following key aspects:

- facilitating the collection of information;
- assuring the trustworthy transmission of information;
- fostering public comprehension, encouraging engagement in pertinent activities; and
- promoting inclusivity by incorporating the perspectives of non-active segments of the population.

2.2.1.4 Social media

According to Agostino and Arnaboldi (2016), social media enhance public communication and engagement by enabling interaction, comment exchange and information generation. It fosters civic participation, enables instant communication between local authorities and the public, and distinguishes itself from traditional participatory methods. Social media platforms have completely altered the role of the public, shifting them from passive spectators to active contributors, collaborators, and content creators, with varied degrees of involvement ranging from basic likes to more advanced kinds of engagement (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021).It is therefore evident that social media platforms can enhance citizen involvement in the quality of democracy, as a collective voice on these platforms is more influential than physical protests, especially in the contemporary era.

The discussed mechanisms are identified as vital tools for enhancing community involvement. They do not only allow for diverse citizen input but also promote direct communication, education, and real-time interaction, ultimately empowering citizens in governance. Therefore, the establishment of these participatory spaces is critical for enhancing government effectiveness and driving community development.

2.2.2 Factors influencing participation in the decision-making process

According to Phago (2008), the study of community involvement is essential in order to comprehend diverse perspectives and patterns pertaining to governance. Four individual characteristics influence public participation:

- Response to stimuli. The environment is stimulated by diverse sources such as the media, meetings, discussions and related publications. The societal context significantly shapes the extent of public engagement among citizens.
- Personal circumstances. The primary determinant of community engagement is the effect exerted by an individual's own opinions, mindset, expertise and qualities, among other factors.
- Individuals' social standing. This phenomenon arises from individual characteristics such as age, gender, level of education, ethnicity and location, among other factors.

- Surrounding environment. In contrast to the factors previously examined which mostly focused on internal aspects within the individual; this context encompasses several elements such as the cultural context, socio-structural characteristics of communities and the political landscape.

Factors such as accountability, openness, communication, diversity representation, dominance dynamics, citizen-oriented participation, social background and even toxic relationships have an impact on citizen involvement, which in turn affects the delivery of municipal services (Selepe, 2023). From the aforementioned factors, it is evident that public willingness to participate in decision-making is influenced by a range of internal and external factors, highlighting the complexities that must be understood to improve municipal service delivery.

2.3 The Role of Public Involvement in Government Decision-making Process

According to Maphazi et al. (2013), community involvement allows citizens to learn about and contribute to public affairs, which offers the community an opportunity to endorse state decisions in order to avoid lengthy disputes and expensive interruptions, build a foundation for mutual understanding that can be applied in prospective decisions, and foster a culture of collaboration that builds confidence between the government entity and citizens.

As noted by Ngwenya et al. (2021), active involvement of the public in legislative processes is of the utmost importance in fostering an educated populace that comprehends the complexities of the problems in the provision of services, as well as the associated difficulties, barriers and strategies for resolving them. The key acknowledgement is that in situations where amenities are unable to be delivered within anticipated timescales, maintaining regular dialogue and transparency fosters peace and cohesiveness in a nation (Ngcamu, 2019). Community involvement is regarded as a kind of participatory interaction that places the focus on problem-solving with the ultimate goal of achieving processes of decision-making that are both representative and empowering (Masiya et al., 2019).

As argued by Ngwenya et al. (2021), public involvement in the provision of services may additionally address the shortcomings in the process, find ways to resolve challenging issues and improve community fulfilment; community inclusiveness is thus seen as a tool to increase transparency and foster citizen confidence. Citizen engagement generates an atmosphere in which citizens feel that they are part of the process and that they are devoted to it, ensuring that policies are carried out without hitches. This kind of engagement may thus be useful the facilitating of the execution of policies by fostering solidarity and removing obstacles (Maphazi et al., 2013).

Even though the importance of the involvement of the public in the provision of services is emphasised, public participation has also been criticised in the sense that it might cause delays in decision-making and intensify disagreement; this may result in public frustration whenever the state fails to meet their aspirations and trigger a descending trend of diminished transparency and increased mistrust (Tshoose, 2015). Maphazi et al. (2013) similarly argue that the involvement of citizens in decision-making processes has the potential to impede the efficiency of providing services because of the inherently lengthy and costly nature of such engagements. This assertion is substantiated by the observation that the establishment of ward committees, aimed at facilitating development initiatives, is seen as a potentially laborious process.

In short, public involvement in government decision-making is vital for enhancing transparency, collaboration, and representation, which can lead to improved services and citizen satisfaction. However, it also presents challenges such as inefficiencies and unmet expectations that can undermine trust in government. Thus, effective management of public participation is essential to harness its benefits while mitigating potential drawbacks, ensuring a balanced approach to governance.

2.4 The Role of the State in Enhancing Public Participation

A study by Mamokhere and Meyer (2023) claims that municipalities ought to keep promoting an environment in which the public feels empowered and included. The National Policy Development Framework (2020) similarly argues for interaction between the state and the public as an essential tool for gaining support, outlining

allocated tasks and obligations, and outlining plans for execution. The RSA Constitution of 1996 also makes provision for citizen participation in the process of making policies. The public must be informed of the programmes that are going to take place, collaborates with state institutions in holding authorities accountable, and makes submissions on how the programme is working out.

According to Tshoose (2015), South African municipalities have recently been tasked with formulating specific policies aimed at addressing the needs of the community, with the added requirement of obtaining consensus from their citizens. In accordance with Act No. 177 of the Municipal Structures Act of 1998, municipalities are obliged to provide strategies that facilitate consultations with the communities. At the municipal level, many systems are implemented to facilitate and promote citizen participation in the delivery of services. However, as Maphazi et al. (2013) suggest, public involvement is a complicated process. As a matter of fact, no prototype exists for it. While the framework for public participation is established, the effectiveness of these strategies remains contingent on their adaptability to the unique dynamics of each municipality. The municipal strategies used to increase public involvement are discussed below.

2.4.1 Municipal strategies to enhance public participation

As claimed by Maphazi et al. (2013), effective development is contingent upon the active involvement of those who benefit, citizens in particular, in both the preparation and execution stages. A synopsis of potential frameworks and methodologies for improving community involvement and engagement — with a focus on ward committees — is discussed below.

2.4.1.1 Community development workers

Community development workers (CDWs), as defined by Maphazi et al. (2013), are knowledgeable individuals who collaborate with grassroots activists to assist citizens with the acquisition of knowledge and sources of assistance. These individuals play a crucial role in addressing the demands of communities, attaining objectives and preserving overall welfare. The ideal candidate should possess a diverse range of talents, including a broad understanding of many government ministries as well as

being a proficient listener and communicator. The role of CDWs can never be underrated; as emphasised by Mokoena and Moeti (2017), they are institutional bodies that have been formed with the primary objective of facilitating communication and collaboration between government entities and those needing public necessities. They supplement local government and enhance democratic processes within communities, with varying responsibilities and crossovers with other entities. These public workers, designated under the Public Service Act, operate within municipalities; however, they face challenges in fulfilling their statutory responsibilities, as demonstrated in 2009 in Mpumalanga Province owing to issues such as delayed community concerns, conflicts, inadequate ward committee performance, and budgeting processes (Rooyen & Mokoena, 2013).

Even though the CDWs are a good initiative, Tshishonga and Mafema (2010) point out the drawbacks associated with the establishment of the CDWs. These drawbacks encompass their complex systems, public scepticism arising from concerns about them being state spies, misconceptions regarding their tasks and duties, and ambiguity surrounding oversight. Their close liaison with the Department of COGTA elicited feelings of apprehension and discord among municipal officials and councillors. The absence of a proper framework for introducing them to all parties involved, including state agencies, the private sector and the societies where they operate, also questions their viability.

2.4.1.2 Community-based planning

According to Moyo and Madlopha (2016), community-based planning is an open-ended planning approach that aims to facilitate public engagement and foster connections to the IDP. Through the use of community-based planning, local governments are better equipped to comprehend and anticipate the demands of their constituents; the technique advocated promotes a bottom-up planning strategy, in contrast to the conventional top-down strategy. The utilisation of the bottom-up method facilitates the establishment of citizen ownership in the process of providing services and progress, promoting the active involvement of disadvantaged groups, and reinforcing the responsibility of municipalities (Petunia & Selepe, 2020).

A study by Matyana and Mthethwa (2020) regards the IDP as a tool used by municipalities to involve the general population in providing services. Increased community engagement in the IDP process positively impacts the provision of services and alignment with society's interests. It enhances decision-making quality, facilitates strategic approaches and maintains municipal credibility. It also helps to mitigate autocratic leadership styles and deter the misuse of authority by municipal authorities. Overall, IDPs promote community growth and mitigate government corruption.

The underlying assumption is that individuals living inside a community are entitled to choose the trajectory of upcoming developments in their communities; moreover, this planning strategy fosters a collective feeling of responsibility within the community, thereby facilitating the provision of services and promoting overall growth. It plays a crucial role in facilitating the active participation of the most economically disadvantaged individuals and marginalised segments of the population in the local government process (Maphazi et al., 2013).

2.4.1.3 Traditional authorities

As pointed out by Maphazi et al. (2013), traditional leaders are significant in facilitating the involvement of communities within the realm of local governance. Mudimeli (2019) indicates that The Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003 recognises the significance of tribal-level governance and its connection to municipal structures. Traditional councils play a crucial role in fostering citizen participation within the framework of the IDPs of municipalities. Nevertheless, there are ongoing issues that continue to exist within the context under discussion. These challenges include the politicisation of community matters, the absence of well-defined positions, and the influence of partisanship. The fact that municipalities that have traditional leaders under their authority generally acknowledge having a poor functional rapport with them is of huge concern (Silima & Auriacombe, 2013).

2.4.1.4 Ward committees

As mentioned by Rooyen and Mokoena (2013), in 2000 South African municipalities implemented ward committees as a novel form of local governance to address

pressing national matters like marginalisation, unemployment, stagnancy and impoverishment. These committees serve as representatives of communities and promote information exchange among municipal governments and the general populace. Silima and Auriacombe (2013) provide a systematic framework for public involvement, fostering productive engagement with municipalities and surrounding communities. However, the government has proposed making the ward committee system mandatory for all municipalities, particularly underprivileged communities and townships (Piper & Deacon, 2009). Although there is no obligation to establish ward committees, most municipalities have opted for their implementation (Maphazi et al., 2013).

According to Rooyen and Mokoena (2013) ward committees should not replace other methods of community engagement and transparency. Instead, a method should be implemented to enhance ward councillors' ability to serve constituents, provide extensive consultation processes and foster accountability. Silima and Auriacombe (2013) agree that councillors should maintain accountability to constituents, and political parties and avoid relying solely on the ward committee. The ward committee system is under strain because of the quality of governance, financial administration and service provision.

It is notable that these strategies present valuable opportunities for enhancing public participation, however, their success depends on overcoming existing challenges, building trust, and ensuring inclusive engagement from all community members. A comprehensive approach that integrates these frameworks and emphasises transparency and accountability is crucial for fostering effective community engagement and achieving sustainable development.

2.4.2 Role and responsibilities of ward committees

Ward committees, as defined by Mnqayi (2021), are consultation platforms that provide suggestions and advice to local councillors or municipal councils on issues affecting their ward. They facilitate engagement between the government and residents, address strategic municipal concerns and submit quarterly reports.

According to Rooyen and Mokoena (2013), ward committees have the following role and responsibilities:

- Ward committees are crucial for democratically elected councillors to represent constituents efficiently and foster civic engagement. They must be reflective of the specific ward they serve, ensuring inclusivity and diversity.
- Individuals should be involved in critical areas like IDP, municipal performance management and council projects, identifying and initiating initiatives to improve local population well-being.
- They should also assist councillors in dispute resolution, monitoring municipal performance and contributing to public education programmes.
- Ward committees play a crucial role in research, outreach, information dissemination and council initiatives. They oversee project advancement, provide constructive input, establish performance areas and evaluate the efficiency and productivity of municipality service provision.

Ward committees collaborate with municipalities to promote modern government models, aiming to improve economic empowerment, infrastructure development, grassroots democracy, social cohesion, sustainable service provision, and citizen well-being (Silima & Auriacombe, 2013).

According to Seitlholo (2016), ward committees are crucial for improving accountability among democratically elected officials and promoting active participation in policy matters. They enable citizens to evaluate their performance, contribute to democratic legitimacy and ensure efficient service provision within municipal systems. Despite challenges, ward committees can involve communities in project planning, execution and assessment stages, strengthening council roles and enhancing service provision. This approach ensures efficient service provision within municipal systems (Thornhill & Madumo, 2011). This indicates that the system of ward committees plays a vital role in fostering advocacy and collaboration, ultimately enhancing decision-making through the important connection between ward residents and municipal administration.

The studies above suggest that ward committees play a crucial role in fostering democratic engagement and enhancing the relationship between local councillors and constituents. They tackle municipal issues through initiatives such as IDP and performance management, engaging residents to improve local well-being and accountability. Furthermore, these committees assist in dispute resolution and public education, with their collaborative efforts having the potential to enhance service delivery and reinforce grassroots democracy.

2.4.3 Ward committees and the Integrated Development Plan

The IDP is a strategic framework aimed at enhancing local governance through stakeholder participation, as noted by Moyo and Madlopha (2016). It enables local governments to identify and implement development initiatives tailored to municipal needs, fostering democratic representation and local growth. Mamokhere and Meyer (2023) similarly emphasise the importance of the IDP in improving living standards by aligning government efforts and engaging relevant parties, despite challenges like limited resources and public demonstrations, leading to better service delivery and community empowerment.

In order to achieve municipality objectives, Thornhill and Madumo (2011) stress the importance of ward committees in IDP implementation, emphasising their role in budgeting, performance control and community participation. Selepe (2023) also argues that active community involvement in IDP enhances service provision, strengthens democratic processes and improves government response. It also fosters a sense of ownership among community members, promoting active participation in development projects. However, McKenzie and Mostafa (2018) note that some scholars criticise the IDP, arguing that many municipalities have neglected their duties, turning it into a mere compilation of desired outcomes.

The aforementioned data suggest that IDP is essential for enhancing local governance and community engagement by aligning development with municipal needs. Ward committees facilitate community participation but face challenges like resource limitations and inadequate training, which must be addressed to maximise the IDP's potential and achieve sustainable local development.

2.4.4 Challenges faced by ward committees

Municipalities still struggle to foster community participation, despite efforts to improve public engagement. Tshoose (2015) points out the inadequacy of mechanisms for rural community involvement in IDP, underscoring the necessity for continuous planning and inclusivity. Furthermore, challenges like disorganisation and limited capacity hinder participation, leading to diminished representation of community voices. Despite the emphasis placed on facilitating democratic participation at the municipal level, Seitlholo (2016) highlights that research in recent years has consistently shown significant shortcomings in the effectiveness of ward committees in facilitating citizen engagement in municipal processes.

According to Rooyen and Mokoena (2013), the existing structures are poorly represented, leading to challenges in incorporating diverse perspectives from different sectors. Therefore, Masiya et al. (2019) urge a reassessment of municipal government in South Africa to improve citizen involvement in decision-making processes and enhance the relationship between societies and local governments.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study explores public participation and service provision using Arnstein's Ladder of Participation as a theoretical framework. It emphasises the importance of citizen involvement in governmental affairs and operations, aiming to improve understanding of different tiers of citizen involvement in decision-making processes.

Arnstein's (1969) eight levels of participation in public service delivery are explained by Masiya et al. (2019). The first tier involves manipulation, where citizens make decisions to achieve goals. The second tier involves therapeutic interventions, influencing self-education. These strategies are used by municipalities to gain support. The third tier involves unidirectional information dissemination. The fourth tier of public involvement involves consultation, which uses surveys and community gatherings but is ineffective. The fifth stage involves placement, where the authorities assess suggestions. The sixth tier involves partnerships, reconfiguring power dynamics through negotiation.

The seventh stage grants authority to individuals who represent the majority in committees. The final stage is public control without middlemen in planning, policymaking and execution. As discussed above, these levels illustrate a spectrum of participation, starting from manipulative tactics and superficial consultations to genuine partnerships and empowerment of citizens. The framework emphasises the progression from passive involvement to active control, culminating in direct public oversight of planning and policymaking.

The theoretical framework of public involvement and the provision of services was explored to analyse and contextualise the effectiveness of the ward committees in encouraging citizen involvement. According to Matyana and Mthethwa (2020), the collaborative influence of communities can improve municipal services, pressure local leadership and mitigate democracy deficiencies. Public involvement also improves socioeconomic conditions for marginalised groups, contributing to overall welfare in local government jurisdictions. According to Mamokhere and Meyer (2023), Arnstein's ladder of public engagement emphasises the crucial role of local governments in citizen input but often falls short. Strategies like media releases, notifications and meetings can address this issue.

Vogel et al. (2014) outline the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum, which includes five distinct goals organisations can strive to achieve to ensure citizen involvement:

- Information: Offering impartial and factual information to facilitate the public's comprehension of issues, potential resolutions and alternative approaches.
- Consultation: Engaging in direct interaction with the community to continuously comprehend their concerns as well as desired outcomes.
- Engage stakeholders: Facilitating the acquisition of public input regarding the identification of issues, proposed solutions and alternate analyses.
- Collaboration: Engaging in partnerships with the general public to foster the co-creation of alternatives, the identification of preferred options, and the process of making decisions.
- Empowerment: Giving the whole populace the power to make decisions.

Even though Arnstein's ladder was conceptualised thirty years ago, Bobbio (2019) argues that public involvement structures remain consistent with a shift in terminology. However, the framework lacks a single metric for assessing political impact, and a hierarchical ranking of all participatory structures is not feasible.

In South Africa, there is a lack of capacity-building support and limited knowledge about municipalities, indicating a lower level of participation in decision-making processes. Municipal authorities need to play a more prominent role in fostering public engagement, especially in rural communities (Raga et al., 2011). Tshoose (2015) points out the need for improved ward committees to boost rural civic engagement in municipal decision-making, highlighting a lack of information on rural resident empowerment. Ward committees advocate active community involvement in planning and decision-making, demonstrating the last three tiers of the participation ladder. In terms of these elements, citizens form partnerships through which power may be delegated to control decisions affecting their livelihood; this demonstrates the importance of community involvement in decision-making processes (Silima & Auriacombe, 2013). This collaborative method empowers individuals to influence life-changing choices, highlighting the importance of community engagement in policy implementation.

Municipal government relies heavily on citizen involvement for effective functioning. The Arnstein ladder of participation can foster meaningful citizen engagement, leading to improved service provision, increased public trust and reduced polarisation. A study conducted by Ngcamu (2019), found that demonstrations often result from insufficient interaction between local governments and citizens. Implementing consultations — including surveys, community gatherings and inquiries — can help alleviate these demonstrations and improve the overall interaction between local governments and their constituents.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the significance of public participation and participatory democracy in the decision-making processes of government. By examining the various factors that influence public involvement, the role of the state, and the

strategies employed by municipalities, particularly through ward committees. It further identified existing gaps in knowledge and practice. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for enhancing community engagement and addressing the challenges faced in fostering effective public participation. The next chapter discusses the various research procedures and methodology employed the study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH STRATEGY, DESIGN, PROCEDURE AND METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This section outlines various research procedures and assesses the chosen methodology for the study. It includes an overview of the research strategy, detailing sampling techniques, data collection methods and data analysis approaches. It also discusses the concepts of validity and reliability, addresses limitations and highlights the ethical protocols adhered to throughout the research process.

3.2 Research Paradigms

According to Dawadi et al. (2021), research paradigms are methodologies used to understand and analyse information. Positivists focus on objective methods, using quantitative instruments for quantitative outcomes (Hampson & McKinley, 2023). Post-positivism encourages collaboration between academics and participants (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Interpretivism uses multiple facts and interviews for the investigation of social phenomena (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). As stated by Yong et al. (2021), constructivism opposes singular approaches and emphasises diverse views. Pragmatism considers objective and subjective information, allowing researchers to select optimal methodologies. For this mixed methods research design, a pragmatic paradigm was chosen as the most appropriate.

Pragmatism, a widely accepted paradigm for mixed research methodologies, emphasises practicality, responsiveness to the context, and potential consequences (Hampson & McKinley, 2023). However, Maarouf (2019) argues that pragmatism has faced criticism for not adequately addressing the divergent assumptions between qualitative and quantitative paradigms. This study establishes pragmatism as a unified and comprehensive paradigm.

3.3 Research Approach

This study explored the effectiveness of ward committees in promoting public participation in government decision-making in Mbuzini, Nkomazi Local Municipality.

Using a mixed methods approach, the study employed an explanatory sequential strategy, including a survey using a self-administered questionnaire and interviews with community member and key informant participants. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define mixed methods research as the comprehensive collection, analysis and interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of projects. Random sampling was used for the quantitative portion and for the follow-up interviews with community members, ensuring equal participation for all Mbuzini community members, while purposive sampling was used for the qualitative section, selecting key informants from municipal personnel.

3.4 Research Design

A study's research design is a systematic framework that facilitates the collection, quantification, and analysis of data (Pandey & Pandey, 2015). According to Dawadi et al. (2021), there are three primary mixed methods designs in social sciences: exploratory sequential mixed methods, explanatory sequential mixed methods and convergent parallel mixed methods. Swedberg (2020) highlights the exploratory sequential mixed methods approach, which begins with a qualitative study and then uses data analytic techniques to design and execute a quantitative study. The explanatory sequential mixed methods approach involves conducting a quantitative study, analysing the results, and providing a comprehensive explanation of the findings through qualitative research (Toyon, 2021). The convergent parallel mixed methods approach combines qualitative as well as quantitative information in order to conduct a comprehensive investigation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This study integrated quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis over multiple stages. Quantitative data was collected through surveys, followed by analysis. The results informed the subsequent phase, which involved follow-up qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with community members and key informants. A quantitative study was conducted on a larger community sample, followed by a qualitative study focusing on key participants like community members, ward committee members and municipal officials. Sharma et al. (2023) believes that applying various data gathering and analysis techniques improves the accuracy and dependability of the results as it offers a distinct viewpoint

regarding the research questions. As defined by Ty (2024) validity refers to the credibility of study findings derived from integrated data, while reliability is attained by triangulation, which involves the combination of qualitative as well as quantitative information to ensure replication of the study. Therefore, in this study, the research design helped to identify strengths, acquire comprehensive data and enhance the validity and reliability of the results, thereby enhancing the understanding of public participation within the Mbuzini community.

3.5 Research Procedures and Methods

This section details data collection instruments, target population, sampling technique, ethical considerations, data collection, storage, processing, analysis, and participants' descriptions.

3.5.1 Data collection instrument

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), there are various methods for collecting relevant data, each presenting significant differences in expenses, time and resources required by the researcher. This study used self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured interviews for data collection, highlighting disparities in expenses, time and resources. The initial information influenced the instrument needed for further data collection. The survey was developed on Google Forms and printed for those without internet access and the elderly. The reliance on self-administered questionnaires alone proved insufficient to address all research questions of the study. A self-administered questionnaire was initially developed for the quantitative part of the study, but many elderly participants required assistance to complete it owing to difficulties in reading and writing.

The data collection method used in this study proved effective, allowing for simultaneous contact with a large number of participants while maintaining their anonymity. However, Pandey and Pandey (2015) posit that this approach could generate limited responses due to a lack of personal interaction and potential inaccuracies. To address these limitations, the researcher engaged directly with participants in the field, clarifying uncertainties and encouraging participation. This

approach not only increased the sample size but also improved the reliability of the results through follow-ups, ultimately enhancing the study's overall efficacy.

To enhance data collection and gain a comprehensive understanding, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The semi-structured interviews with community members and key informants using open-ended questions were conducted after the completion of the survey. The interviews were conducted in a focus group setting for the ward committee and individual interviews with selected community members and municipal officials. The primary data collection method involved key informant interviews with ward committee members and municipal officials with first-hand expertise in public participation within the Mbuzini community. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable environment, with participants chosen based on their expertise in public engagement and service offerings. Privacy and confidentiality were ensured, and ethical considerations were carefully adhered to. Despite being time-consuming, this approach was expected to provide significant data and valuable insights into the research endeavour.

3.5.2 Target population and sampling

The study used simple random sampling for the quantitative portion, providing equal opportunities for all participants. It involved a survey with 250 participants from the general population in Mbuzini and 15 participants for individual interviews as a pollow-up. This particular technique is highly appropriate for the study since it provides equal opportunities for all individuals to participate (Etikan, 2017). A focus group interview with 10 ward committee members was planned but only six were able to participate. Two officials from the municipality were also interviewed. The sample consisted of both male and female subjects from the Mbuzini community. According to Shaheen and Pradhan (2019), the recruitment of participants significantly impacts the appropriateness and representativeness of the sample. Consequently, diverse strategies were applied for recruitment in order to enhance the sample size and ensure the accurate representation of the intended target group.

Purposive sampling was used in the qualitative study to select participants with high expertise in a specific field or subject. This method involves proactively determining the specific categories of participants to include, drawing from literature, prior experience, or theoretical frameworks (Busetto et al., 2020). Informed consent and permission were obtained from experts in the field of study. Purposive sampling was used to enhance the process of capturing the perspectives of individuals with specialised knowledge and expertise in the public participation process in Mbuzini, Nkomazi Local Municipality.

Yamane's formula ($n = N/ (1+N (e)^{2)}$) was used for calculating the sample size for the quantitative study:

n = the sample size

N = the population of the study

e = the margin of error in the calculation (Adam, 2020).

While the Cochrane formula is often used, in this study, the Yamane Formula was more suitable for sample size calculation given that the population was known. The formula provides flexibility in determining the required sample size enabling the collection of samples of varied sizes with a confidence level of 95% with varying standard errors. Therefore, the population of Mbuzini is n=9948, which was rounded off to n=10000. Given a standard error of 3%, the sample size required is 1000. For a 5% standard error, the sample size needed is n=385. A standard error of 7% corresponds to a sample size of n=200, while a standard error of 10% requires a sample size of n=99.

Given the limitations of a master's half course and limited time and budgetary constraints, for the quantitative sample, the researcher managed to gather a sample of n=250. The standard error for this sample size is not included in Yamane's table, hence it must be computed. According to Franklin (2007), the standard margin of error for a singular proportion is a 95% confidence interval, and the formula used to compute it is as follows:

$$MOE = \frac{1}{\sqrt{n}}$$

Where n = sample size

$$MOE = \frac{1}{\sqrt{250}}$$

MOE= 0, 06324 X 100

MOE = 6, 3%

Therefore, the margin of error/precision error is 6%.

- **Description of participants**

The demographic characteristics of the participants and other relevant qualities pertaining to the research were delineated in order to establish their credibility as reliable sources of information. This study describes the participants' roles in public involvement and their years of experience, particularly as key informants. Based on the figures presented in the Nkomazi Local Municipality Integrated Development Plan 2018/22, the population of Mbuzini is composed of many racial groups. The majority — 9865 individuals — are of black African descent, accounting for around 87% of the total population of Nkomazi municipality. Additionally, there are 83 individuals of Coloured ethnicity, representing 9.3% of the Nkomazi municipality's population. The Indian/Asian community comprised 30 individuals, making up 2.3% of the population of Nkomazi municipality. Lastly, there are five individuals of white ethnicity, constituting 0.1% of the population. The remaining six people account for a proportion of 1.3%. The primary language spoken in the area was predominantly SiSwati, with a minority of individuals speaking Xitsonga.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Prior to commencing the study, an ethics application was forwarded to the Human Research Ethics Committee to obtain ethical approval; the ethics clearance certificate was obtained. Participants were required to sign a consent form and acknowledge that their information would be used solely for research purposes. They were

informed of the study's objectives and had the autonomy to withdraw at any time. The anonymity of their identities was maintained to ensure confidentiality. Safety was a top priority, and data collection was restricted to essential criteria to protect privacy. An anonymisation process was used to eliminate or obfuscate personal information at the earliest stages of data handling. Community members and ward committee members were interviewed separately in different locations.

During the focus group, participants were assigned codes from 1 to 6 in order to safeguard their anonymity. Before the interviews, the purpose of the study was clearly communicated, and all participants signed consent forms. While ward committee members and municipal officials consented to recording the interviews, most community members opted out. The researcher honoured these preferences and proceeded with unrecorded interviews. Participants were informed that verbatim quotations might be used in the final report but assured that all data would remain anonymous. The research was independently conducted by a student without institutional funding and took place in the researcher’s own neighbourhood.

3.6.1 Data collection process and storage

This study used quantitative findings to select participants for the qualitative phase, establishing a connection between numerical findings and qualitative information. A self-administered questionnaire was developed on Google Forms, enhancing the study's efficacy and maintaining anonymity as argued by Creswell & Creswell (2018). Hard copies were printed for those without internet access and elderly participants. Data were stored securely in encrypted files on Google Cloud, and follow-up interviews were conducted with community members, ward committee members and municipal officials. The data were recorded, transcribed, translated and stored on Google Drive.

- **Notes on sources**

Initially, the participants were prompted to respond to the quantitative instrument (survey) with a simple "yes" or "no"; however, some of the participants chose to maintain a neutral stance on certain matters. As a result, the researcher was

compelled to reassess and enhance the research instrument by incorporating the "Neutral" option into some of the questions. During that qualitative data collection, most of the community members did not consent for the interview to be recorded. Getting the ward committee together for the focus group interview was a bit challenging due to their different commitments to the point that six of the ten members were present. Most of the community members including the ward committee preferred to respond in their own language resulting in lengthy data processing.

3.6.2 Data processing and analysis

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the data analysis process is a systematic process that involves categorising data, organising it into tables and deriving statistical conclusions. The study objectives and purpose guided this process, facilitating the identification and categorisation of relevant concepts. Data were tabulated using percentages, coefficients and other statistical measures. Results were presented using descriptive statistical methods, including charts, tables and pie charts. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and translated, and field notes were compiled. The transcription process took one month.

The qualitative data were analysed using Atlas.ti for categorisation and themes. Thematic content analysis was employed to identify emergent patterns. Thematic analysis is a comprehensive method for identifying recurring trends or themes in data, particularly useful when investigating diverse experiences (Onwuegbuzie & Collins 2015). This study used this technique to establish connections between data trends, literature and theoretical works.

3.7 Limitations, Feasibility and Positionality

3.7.1 Research limitations

The study's limitation is its inability to generalise to a wider South African municipality population, as its findings are only applicable to the Mbuzini community in Nkomazi Local Municipality, limiting its applicability to a wider population. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), there are several challenges associated with this

design, including the requirement to follow up on quantitative results, the need to select participants for clarification, the need to pre-specify the qualitative phase, and the long completion time. In this study, the researcher collected quantitative data for five weeks and from the developed semi-structured questions dedicated two months to qualitative part of the study for a comprehensive meaning of the study. Time constraints were a primary limitation, but the researcher worked diligently to efficiently utilise available time.

It was unfortunate that the study happened at the same time as national elections in the country. This caused confusion and reluctance among interviewees to take part. This indicated how outside events can affect research efforts. To provide a comprehensive explanation, the researcher had to be physically present in the community. The researcher also struggled to secure interviews with the ward committee because of their election campaign commitments, causing delays in data collection.

The qualitative study aimed to enhance the insights gained from the quantitative survey results by employing two methods – interviews and focus groups – with community members and officials. From the 250 survey participants, the researcher carefully selected 15 participants who could offer meaningful insights, but some expressed reluctance because of fears of victimisation. To mitigate these concerns, the researcher was transparent about the study's objectives and assured anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. This strategy not only facilitated the collection of rich data but also created a safer space for participants to express their views, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the survey findings.

The researcher identified the potential for misleading or insufficient information in qualitative research as a weakness. To address this, the researcher used cross-corroboration techniques to resolve uncertainties during data collection. They explored alternative data sources, such as municipal documents and the IDP, to validate the information provided by relevant agencies for citizen engagement in the Mbuzini community in Nkomazi. Corroboration involves incorporating empirical evidence and theoretical understanding (Thoring et al., 2023). Network coverage limitations also hindered the implementation of self-administered questionnaires on

Google Forms in certain community areas, but hard copies were used for data collection continuity.

3.7.2 Research feasibility

The study employed a mixed methods approach because of its adaptability and capacity to bridge various disciplines and research frameworks. This approach enriched the study's design by allowing the integration of diverse methodologies, which aided in identifying factors that influenced the success or failure of ward committees in enhancing public engagement. It laid the groundwork for more extensive future research and addressed knowledge gaps in the area. Furthermore, the mixed methods approach was cost-effective, using a smaller participant group, which was particularly beneficial as the study was self-funded. This methodology also enhanced the researcher’s understanding of how the Nkomazi Local Municipality encouraged citizen participation, informed the development of survey questions, and helped identify effective strategies for achieving the study's objectives.

3.7.3 Positionality

The researcher’s positionality in the study was notably beneficial because of their upbringing in the same neighbourhood as the participants. This shared background provided the researcher with a deeper understanding of and empathy for the participants' experiences and perspectives. The researcher’s fluency in the local language facilitated more comfortable and authentic communication, as many participants preferred to express themselves in their native tongue. Even though the researcher's positionality can positively impact the study, the potential for bias remains. Cooper et al. (2024) emphasise the necessity for researchers to create a positionality declaration that recognises biases and the influence of personal values, aiming to enhance research integrity, uphold ethical practices, and promote equity and inclusion, regardless of decision to disclose. In this study, the researcher’s neutrality, stemming from a lack of involvement in local political affairs, allowed for an unbiased approach to the study, fostering trust and openness.

3.8 Conclusion

This study effectively used a mixed methods approach to assess the role of the ward committee in enhancing public participation in decision-making within Mbuzini, Nkomazi Local Municipality. By employing both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, including questionnaires and interviews, the research gathered insights from a diverse sample of participants. The study adhered to ethical standards, obtaining necessary approvals before data collection. The choice of mixed methods allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the topic, highlighting the flexibility and interdisciplinary potential of this research design. The next chapter is the presentation of the research findings.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore ward committees' effectiveness in enhancing public participation in the government decision-making process within the Mbuzini community in Nkomazi Local Municipality. This research employed a two-phase, explanatory, sequential, mixed methods approach. The initial stage of the study involved a quantitative investigation into the effectiveness of ward committees in the Nkomazi Local Municipality in improving public participation in the government decision-making process. The results obtained from the quantitative phase were subsequently followed by qualitative data collection as a follow-up and further to identify the mechanisms established to monitor and evaluate the ward committees. Furthermore, the qualitative follow-up to the quantitative data collected explained the effectiveness of ward committees in improving public participation in the government decision-making process. This chapter presents the data obtained from these methods.

4.2. Presentation of the Quantitative Data

In this study, the Yamane Formula was chosen for sample size calculation due to the known population of Mbuzini, which is approximately 10,000. This formula allows for flexibility in determining sample sizes with a 95% confidence level and varying standard errors. Based on different standard errors, the required sample sizes were calculated: 1,000 for 3%, 385 for 5%, 200 for 7%, and 99 for 10%. However, due to limitations of a master's half course, limited time and budgetary constraints, the researcher was only able to gather a sample of 250. The standard error for this sample size was not available in Yamane's table, so it was computed using a formula for the margin of error (MOE). The calculation resulted in a margin of error of 6.3%, indicating a precision error of 6%. This sample size was deemed sufficient for the study and the area under study is represented by a diverse population.

4.2.1 Demographics of participants

This section presents the diverse demographic details of the participants using descriptive data. It is crucial to incorporate the demographic data of the participants in the study as this comprehensive description enabled the researcher to ascertain

the applicability of research findings and further allowed for the comparison of replies across various demographic groupings, enhancing the study's analysis. In addition, it furnished the necessary information for synthesising the study. Below is the descriptive data on the participants' demographic characteristics, starting with gender (see Figure 4.1), race/ethnicity, age and then educational level.

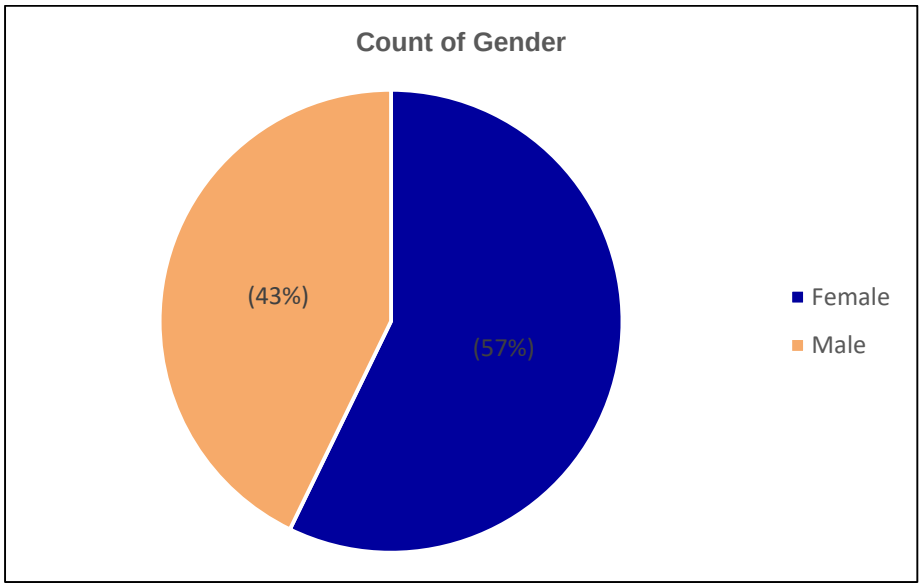


Figure 4.1: Gender

Based on the findings shown in Figure 4.1, there was a higher proportion of females than males. There were 107 male participants making up 43% of the total sample size with 143 females making up 57% of the sample size. Statistics South Africa reported that the gender distribution in South Africa during the 2022 demographic survey was 48.5% male and 51.5% female making the gender proportion of the study acceptable.

Table 4.1: Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Responses	Percentages
African	248	99.20%
Coloured	1	0.40%

Indian	1	0.40%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

The results of the research demonstrated in Table 4.1 indicate that information was gathered from a total of 250 participants with 248 who identified as Black or African, one as Coloured and one as Indian. According to the figures supplied by the IDP of the Nkomazi Local Municipality, the Mbuzini village is predominantly inhabited by Africans, which makes these findings acceptable.

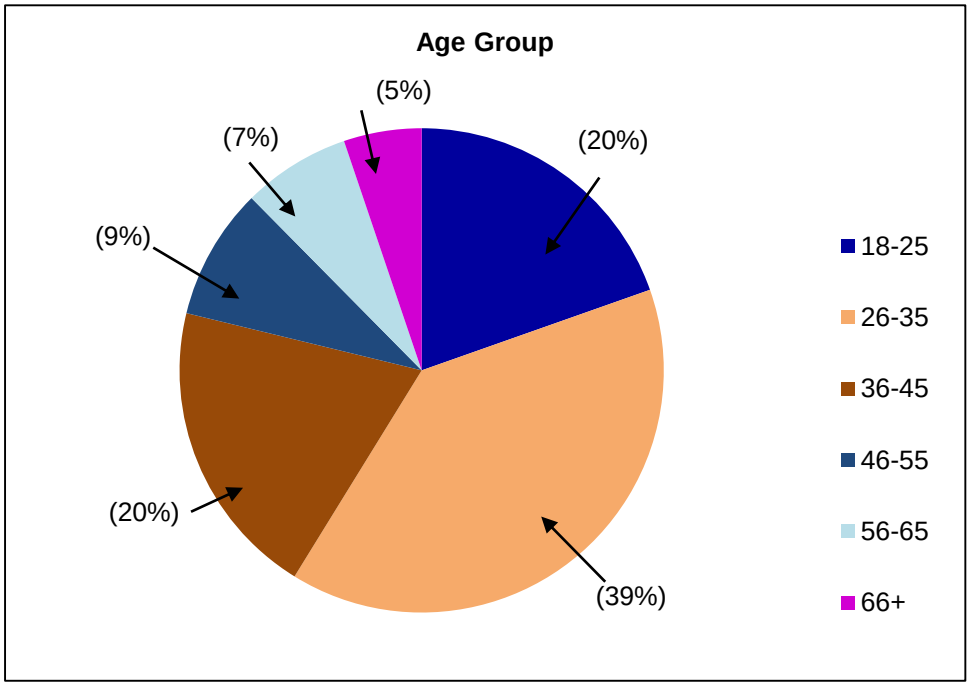


Figure 4.2: Participants' age groups

Figure 4.2 presents the age breakdown for the participants involved in the study. The sample exclusively consisted of residents residing in the Mbuzini community which was the specific area of interest. As displayed in the above figure, the outcomes of the sample size were categorised by age group. The data shows that of the 250 participants, 20% belonged to the 18–25 age group, 39% belonged to the 26–35 age group, and 20% belonged to the 36–45 age group. Out of the total population, 9% belonged to the age category of 46–55, 7% belonged to the age group of 56–65, and 5% belonged to the age group of 66 and above.

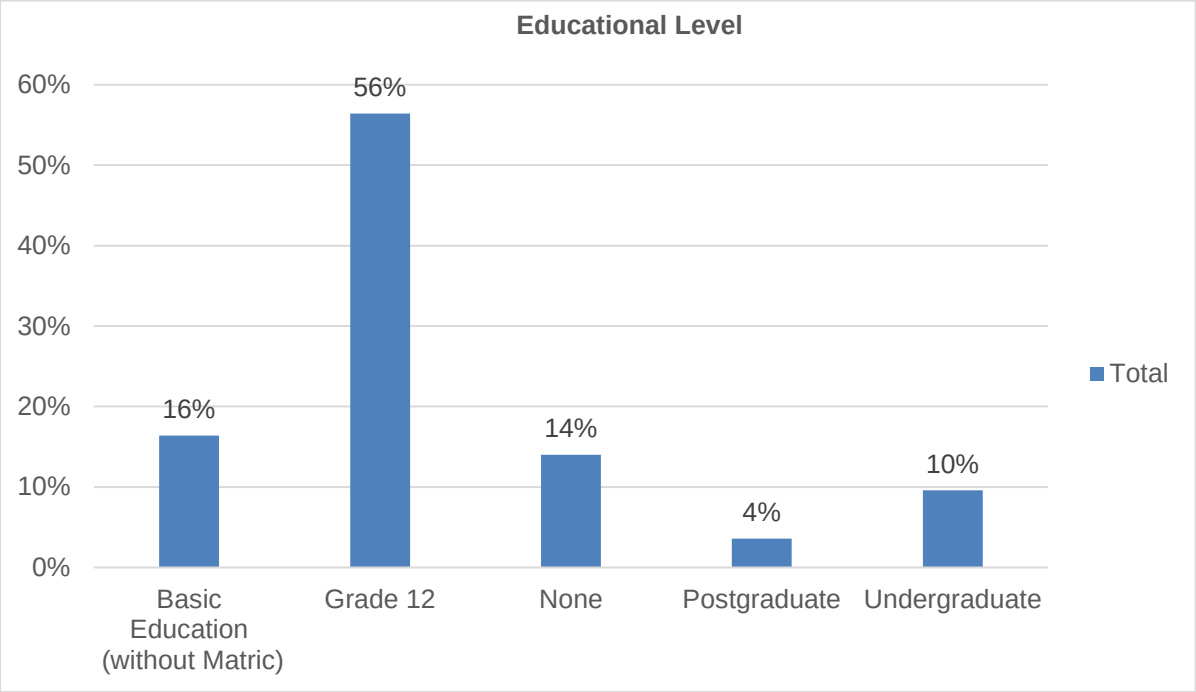


Figure 4.3: Educational level

According to Figure 4.3, 16% of the participants possessed a basic education but had not completed grade 12/matric, whereas 56% had completed grade 12/matric. Fourteen per cent of the sample size lacked formal education, 4% held postgraduate degrees and 10% had obtained undergraduate degrees.

4.2.2 Quantitative responses to the survey questionnaires

Table 4.2: Being aware of the ward committee

Row Labels	Responses	Percentage
Yes	230	92%
No	19	8%
Neutral	1	0.4%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 1, the participants were asked if they were aware of the ward committee in their community. Of the 250 participants, 92% agreed that they were aware of the ward committee in their community. Conversely, 8% of the participants indicated that they were not aware of the ward committee, and 0.4% opted to remain neutral regarding the matter.

Table 4.3: Being familiar with a ward committee

Row Labels	Responses	Percentages
Yes	194	78%
No	56	22%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 2, participants were requested to indicate their familiarity with those serving on their ward committees. Table 4.3 above illustrates how each of the 250 participants responded to the survey. Out of the 250 participants, 78% stated that they were acquainted with those who served on their ward committees, while 22% responded that they were not familiar with the ward committee members in the community.

Table 4.4: Knowledge of the nomination process of ward committees

Row Labels	Responses	Percentage
Yes	144	58%
No	106	42%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 3, the participants responded to a question about their familiarity with the process of nominating the members of the ward committee. Among the 250 participants, 58% indicated that they were familiar with the procedure for nominating the members of the ward committee, whereas 42% reported being unfamiliar with the process.

Table 4.5: Participation in the nominating process

Row Labels	Responses	Percentage
Yes	129	52%
No	121	48%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 4, it was requested of the participants to indicate whether they had been involved in the nomination process for the members of their ward committee. Out of the total of 250 participants, 52% stated that they had previously taken part in the nomination process for their ward committee, while 48% mentioned that they had never been involved in the process before.

Table 4.6: Fairness of the process

Row Labels	Responses	Percentages
Yes	137	55%
No	39	16%
Neutral	74	29%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 5, participants had to give their perception of the ward committee nomination process in terms of its fairness and impartiality. A total of 250 participants responded, with 55% expressing satisfaction with the process indicating that it was both free and fair. In contrast, 16% expressed a lack of confidence in the process's integrity and fairness, whereas 29% chose to maintain a neutral stance on this matter.

Table 4.7: Satisfaction with the ward committee

Row Labels	Responses	Percentages
Yes	142	57%
No	86	34%
Neutral	22	9%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 6, participants who took part in the survey were asked to indicate if they were satisfied with the ward committee in their community. All 250 participants responded and 57% expressed satisfaction with the ward committee in their community. However, 34% conveyed their discontent with the ward committee in their community, with 9% choosing to remain impartial on this matter.

Table 4.8: Understanding of the role and responsibilities of the ward committee

Row Labels	Responses	Percentages
Yes	213	85%
No	32	13%
Neutral	5	2%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 7, the participants responded to a question regarding their knowledge of the duties and functions of the ward committee. Eighty-five per cent of the 250 participants indicated that they had knowledge about the role and responsibilities of the ward committee. Inversely, 13% stated that they were uninformed about the ward committee's duties and responsibilities and 2% opted to remain neutral on this matter.

Table 4.9: Ward committee meeting attendance

Row Labels	Responses	Percentages
Yes	173	69 %
No	77	31%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 8, when asked whether they had previously attended a ward committee meeting in their community, 69% of the 250 participants reported having attended a ward committee meeting in their community, whereas 31% indicated that they had never attended such a meeting before.

Table 4.10: Productivity ward committee meetings

Row Labels	Responses	Percentages
Yes	134	54%
No	47	19%
Neutral	69	27%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 9, participants were questioned on the productivity of the ward committee meetings they had attended. Of the 250 participants, 54% expressed their satisfaction with the productivity of the ward committee meetings they had attended. Even so, 19% expressed their dissatisfaction with the ward committee meetings, while 27% of the participants opted to remain neutral on this matter.

Table 4.11: Feedback on matters raised in the meetings

Row Labels	Responses	Percentages
Yes	108	43%
No	69	28%
Neutral	73	29%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 10, the participants were asked if they received feedback on the matters they raised in the ward committee meeting. A total of 250 participants responded, with 43% indicating that they did receive feedback. However, 28% said that they did not receive any feedback, while 29% opted to remain neutral on this matter.

Table 4.12: Significance of participation in the decision-making process

Row Labels	Responses	Percentages
Yes	183	73%
No	48	19 %
Neutral	19	8%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 11, the participants were asked about their take on the significance of participating in the decision-making process within contemporary democracy. Out of the 250 participants, 73% reflected that it was important to participate in the decision-making process. In contrast, 19% did not consider participating in the decision-making process significant, and 8% opted to remain impartial on the matter.

Table 4.13: Participation willingness

Row Labels	Responses	Percentages
Yes	182	73%
No	57	23%
Neutral	11	4%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 12, the participants were asked if they were encouraged to participate in the decision-making process. A total of 250 participants provided responses, with 73% of them indicating that they were eager to take part in the decision-making process. However, 23% expressed that they were not motivated to participate in the decision-making process, while 4% opted to remain neutral on this matter.

Table 4.14: Existence of ward committees

Row Labels	Responses	Percentages
Yes	201	80%
No	25	10%
Neutral	24	10%
Grand Total	**250**	**100%**

In Question 13, the participants were asked if they regarded the existence of ward committees as essential to the process of making decisions. Of the 250 participants, 80% indicated that the existence of ward committees was crucial for decision-making. However, 10% did not consider the existence of ward committees crucial in the decision-making process, while 10% opted to remain neutral on this matter.

4.3 Presentation of the Qualitative Data

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with community members and key informants following the completion of the survey. Open-ended questions were used for this project as a follow-up in a focus group setting for the ward committee and individual interviews with the selected community members and municipal officials. In this instance, the primary data collection method involved conducting key informant interviews with the six ward committee members and the two municipal officials who possessed a comprehensive understanding of public participation within the Mbuzini community. This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation in the government decision-making process by identifying the role of ward committees in enhancing public participation in the government decision-making process, the mechanisms established to monitor and evaluate municipal policies aimed at enhancing public participation, and the challenges faced by ward committees in enhancing public participation.

4.3.1 Responses from semi-structured interviews with community members

Fifteen participants were randomly chosen from the survey participants to be interviewed with the aim of gaining a full knowledge of the study. The participants were interviewed on their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of ward committees; the role played by the ward committee in ensuring that the public takes part in the government decision-making process; if the ward committee was doing enough to involve the community in government decisions; their willingness to participate; and their recommendations on how to enhance the functionality of the ward committee. They agreed that they would be identified as participants 1 to 15 in this study.

4.3.1.1 Understanding of the roles and responsibilities of ward committees

The community members were asked about their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of ward committees and the participants indicated that the ward committee is responsible for understanding the community's needs and addressing them. In response to this question, participant 1 said:

> *I think the role of the ward community is to know the needs of the community and see what where is the community lacking and what they can help with.*

In agreement with participant 1, participant 2 indicated that the ward committee should assist the community by providing services:

> *…the ward committee is to help the community with services and fix things in community.*

Participant 4 stated that the ward committee acts as a bridge between the community and the municipality, meeting regularly to raise concerns and make recommendations on community projects.

> *The role of the ward committee is to act as a bridge between the community and the municipality or city manager.*

In accordance with participant 4, participant 5 said that ward committee members act as liaisons between the public and the municipality via the ward councillor.

> *Ward council members serve as a conduit for communication between the public and the municipality.*

They also encourage community participation in community-led projects. The committee represents the community in government decision-making, ensuring needs are met and services are delivered. Participant 9 indicated the following:

> *The ward committee is supposed to represent the community in the government decision-making and ensure that the needs of the community are met and services are delivered.*

Concurring with participant 9, participant 5 stated:

> *I my understanding a ward committee make representations and recommendations on local government issues in their wards.*

According to participant 15, the ward committee has to take an active role in meeting community needs and making sure that everyone in the community is happy.

> *The responsibility of the ward committee is to take care of the needs of the community. They must also ensure that the community is well settled. … This applies to all the needs of the community they must be hands on.*

In addition, participant 14 stated that the ward committee is responsible for taking care of the needs of the community and is the first to be notified about concerns in the community:

> *The responsibility of the ward committee is to take care of the needs of the community. If the community have issues, they are the first people the community should report to including the ward councillor.*

It presents and recommends community challenges, holds councillors accountable and engages the community through regular meetings. Participant 13 said:

> *The ward committee presents and make recommendations about the challenges of the ward and it is the one that communicates with the municipality and the community members through the ward councillor. … It is also able to hold the ward councillor accountable for the challenges in the community. It engages the community through regular meetings.*

The ward committee serves as a liaison between the community and the municipality, meeting regularly with the councillor to discuss community concerns, make recommendations on projects and update communities about the progress of the projects. Participant 8 indicated:

> *...is to establish communication between the community members and the municipality through the ward councillor. They make sure that they take all the community issues and discuss them with the ward councillor.*

In agreement with the statement made by participant 8, participant 5 stated:

> *...is to communicate with the government and give feedback to the community and assist the community with basic needs and attend to their complaints.*

4.3.1.2 The role played by the ward committee in ensuring that the public takes part in the government decision-making processes

When asked if the ward committee plays a role in ensuring that the public takes part in the government decision-making process, most participants agreed that the ward committee plays a crucial role in ensuring community participation in government decision-making. They indicated that the ward committee does so by communicating with the community by holding meetings to discuss projects and listen to their concerns. The committee works closely with the public, mobilising them to address concerns and presenting their views to the municipality. Participant 3 stated:

> *They do play a crucial role because they take the issued as they are from the community members and report them further.*

Participant 6 emphasised the matter of the ward committee working with traditional leaders to ensure information is easily accessible. He said:

> *Thirdly, the ward committee works hand-in-hand with the traditional leaders which makes it easier for the public to get the necessary information and also to present a certain suggestion to the ward committee then the ward committee take it to the ward councillor then the ward councillor takes it to the local government.*

In agreement with that, participant 10 said:

> *Yes, I can say they play a role because every three months they call meetings and address us issued and update us on ongoing and proposed projects.*

The ward committee serves as a link between the community and the municipality as indicated by participant 11:

> *Yes, because the ward committee serves as a link between the community and the municipality, therefore, the ward committee present the views of the community to the municipality through the councillor.*

However, a few participants had a contrasting view on this matter. They indicated that the ward committee's role in involving the community is not fully realised. As stated by participant 2, the ward committee fails to engage the community in any activities or decision-making processes:

> *No, I do not see anything that they are doing. They do not involve the community in anything.*

Participant 5 expressed that the ward committee lacks a comprehensive understanding of their position and duties, and they make choices without seeking input from the community:

> *In my community, no, I do not think they understand very well their role and responsibilities they just take decisions without consulting the community.*

A deficiency in both the ward committee and the community as a whole was reported by participant 13:

> *…but it does no play that role to the fullest in this regard. I can say it is still lacking from both the ward committee and the community at large.*

4.3.1.3 The ward committee's efforts to involve the community in government decisions

The participants were asked if the ward committee is doing enough to involve the community in government decisions. The majority of the participants indicated that the ward committee is not doing enough to involve the community in government decisions. Participant 3 believed that the ward committee should do more to involve the community instead of only doing so when there are complaints:

> *No, I cannot say they are doing enough, they still have do more in terms of getting the community involved because in most cases they do things in isolation and only involve the community when there are complaints from the community.*

Concurring with participant 3, participant 4 indicated that the ward committee is inadequately fulfilling its duties, as both elected and community members appear to lack comprehension of their respective responsibilities:

I do not think the ward committee is doing enough. Because the elected members does not understand their roles and responsibilities and even the community members do not know that is the ward committee responsibilities for.

According to participant 5, the community is struggling to understand the roles of the ward committee and councillor, making it difficult for them to perform effectively:

No well they are not doing well. The community does not understand or cannot differentiate the duty of the ward committee and councillor so it becomes difficult for them to perform.

Participant 11 voiced that the ward committee does things without involving the community as the basis for his disagreement:

No, they only do what they think is needed by the community, we just see other things happening without understanding how those things came about. Sometimes these things are good for the community, however, the issues is that the community is not involved.

Participant 14 highlighted the matter of ward committee members' disagreements and lack of information impeding the effectiveness of the ward committee:

I can say they are not doing enough because as individuals they sometimes have their disagreements amongst themselves within the committee. They sometimes do no inform us about things that are happening in the community. For example, no there is an issue about a learnership, the ward committee is quiet.

Even though most of the participants indicated their dissatisfaction, some agreed that the ward committee was doing enough. Participant 7 indicated that the ward committee involves the community in the decision-making process, fostering a sense of belonging which enables the generation of informed decisions that align with the best interests of the community:

Yes, because they involve community members to comment through the process which could lead to good community and right decisions.

Participant 14 stated that the ward committee is doing enough because the community is often contacted and informed about upcoming projects, considering their views or forwarding them:

> *Yes, because they do try to call us as the community and inform us about upcoming projects and listen to our views. In most cases they do take our views into consideration or forward.*

According to participant 15, the ward committee also assists the government in distributing services based on community needs, identifies community needs and collaborates with the government to ensure the correct service recipients receive them.

> *Yes, because if the government is bringing services to the community, the ward committee assist the government to distribute the services accordingly since they know better about the needs of the community. The ward committee does the ground work to identify all the needs of the community then work hand-in-hand with the government to ensure that the services are received by the right recipients.*

4.3.1.4 Willingness to participate

The participants were further questioned on whether they feel motivated to participate in the governmental decision-making process and most expressed their desire to participate in government decision-making to improve their community and voice their opinions. Participant 1 voiced a desire to contribute to the community by voicing her opinions and assisting the community:

> *Yes, I am encouraged, I with that I can voice my opinion on things that the community needs and that that I can help the community with, I really wish I can be part.*

Participant 2 conveyed enthusiasm to engage in communal activities:

> *Yes, if there are things that are happening in the community I am eager to take part.*

Participant 3 affirmed his desire to participate in decision-making processes to improve people's lives, but acknowledged that his current affiliation with an organisation may limit their ability to represent their views:

Yes, as an individual like myself, being part of the decision-making process is a good thing and I would love to be part because indeed it's about making the lives of people better. However, I am currently attached to a certain organisation and I may not be able to represent myself or my own views but for the organisation that I am attached to since wherever I go I am a brand of that particular organisation.

Participant 4 expressed concern over the political conflict in the ward councillor–municipal relations:

I would like to participate but my perception is that there is a lot of politics and dirty games between the ward councillor and the municipality. … We have instances where the councillor is from political party "A" and the municipality is ran by political party "B". I do not think that party "B" in the municipality can be in fully support of the initiatives coming from a community where the ward councillor is from party "A".

Participant 5 was encouraged to participate in government decision-making, recognising the lack of voice for the poor and the need for community-oriented individuals:

Yes, I have that courage to take part in government decision-making, why I will do that because I feel like most of the people in our society do not have a voice to speak. We need people who will speak for the poorest people plus we need people who well work for the community not for the personal gain.

Participant 6 also agreed that he is encouraged to take part in government decision-making, but admits that encouragement is more common during elections:

Yes, I can say yes I am encouraged, but not always. I am encouraged mostly when elections are closer, it's when they encourage us.

Participant 14 opined that participating in decision-making processes enables citizens to express their opinions and ensure government accountability whenever there are corruption allegations.

Yes, I am encouraged to be part of the decision-making process and if I am part I believe that can assist the government in taking decisions that involves my views. And if there are corruption allegations, I can be able to hold the government accountable.

Participant 15 expressed a desire to contribute to community development but struggles to access government platforms to voice their opinions:

> *Yes, I am encouraged, I wish I can part and voice my opinion on how we can develop our community, however, I feel like I am unable to do that because I cannot access the platforms to reach out to the government.*

Although most participants were encouraged to take part in government decision-making, two participants indicated that they were not encouraged at all to take part in the process because they had doubts that their views would be valued. Participant 9 expressed scepticism about the worth of his opinions being taken into account in the decision-making process. He said:

> *No, I am not encouraged because I do not think that my views and opinions will be valued and be considered during the decision-making process.*

Concurring with participant 9, participant 12 expressed disapproval of the government's actions, deeming them demoralising. The participant argued that the perspectives and ideas of the people are not given importance until they are expressed through demonstrations:

> *No, the way things are done they are discouraging, I do not think the government values the views and opinions of the communities unless they start protesting.*

4.3.2 Responses from the focus group interview with the Mbuzini ward committee

The ward committee of Mbuzini was interviewed in a focus group setting to understand their roles, responsibilities, challenges and recommendations for improving their functionality. Despite the researcher's efforts, only six of the 10 members were actively engaged, indicating a need for improvement.

4.3.2.1 Roles and responsibilities of ward committees

The ward committee members were questioned about their specific roles in facilitating community involvement in these processes. Participant A emphasised the

necessity of including all stakeholders in the ward committee to ensure diverse community perspectives are represented.

> *I think the first important thing to do is to make sure that when the ward committee is elected, the representation of all stakeholders is there and if there are issues where the community at large is affected, meetings should be called so that people have input.*

Participant B indicated the significance of involving the community members in the IDP process:

> *I would like to add, in decision-making there are places where the community is needed very much because if we look before there is a budget there must be IDP where we include the needs of the community and the different structurers also bring the needs they have.*

Participant C pointed out the role of the ward committee in engaging the community and representing the needs of the community honestly:

> *The role of the ward committee is to engage all community members within the ward and to get their views as well as getting the decisions of the people that in each.... This is what we are basically for and also to monitor all things happening within the ward and make sure that we represent the government and to represent community honestly.*

4.3.2.2 Community meeting frequency and committee meeting importance

The ward committee was questioned on the frequency of their community meetings and their conviction of the significance of including community people in these gatherings. Participant C emphasised the importance of monthly public meetings in the ward committee structure as they serve as a bridge between the government and the public.

> *I will say that there is a law that guides the ward committee structure of the government. … The ward committee meetings must be held once a month. There should be a meeting held every three months to hold a meeting that involves the*

public… yes it is important because remember we are saying the ward committee is a bridge between the government and the masses.

Participant B acknowledged that the Municipal Structures Act mandates monthly and quarterly community meetings, but challenges like urgent projects and ward committee concerns cause postponements, necessitating alternative meetings to address these matters.

We plan to have meetings with them but due to other commitments, the process of meetings is disrupted, because it happens that there are urgent meetings that there is a project that the committee must report on or you have to go and solve issues … but the Municipal Structures Act says that there must be one meeting a month. These are the challenges that we face that we do not usually meet 12 times a year, sometimes it happens that maybe two or three months we do not have meetings but in other months we then have them.

Participant D provided insights regarding community attendance at the ward committee meetings, following the committee's mandate to engage with the community.

The community comes in large numbers, if we call meetings, the community comes, especially if there is a project, we announce that there is a project that we want to explain to them and the labourers who will help in this project will be hidden, they will come in large numbers because we already know that the level of work is low, young people and many workers will come in large numbers and they will listen to what we will tell them and they will voice their complaints.

In contrast to later participants' reports, Participant C reported that community members often lack the enthusiasm to attend meetings if employment is not mentioned.

Maybe our answer towards that should be twofold, in the meetings that are called, the response of the community if you have not mentioned employment, nobody is eager, but once you mention the issue of employment, it is like this response.

4.3.3.3 Challenges faced by the ward committee

Ward committee members discussed challenges in enhancing community participation and provided detailed responses to the second research question for the study. Participant B reported difficulties in inviting community members to meetings and managing short notice information:

> *Something that becomes a challenge especially when we want to convene a meeting, we have a challenge that sometimes you find that we do not have a loud teller, and we use social networks where it seems to favour the youth and you find out that maybe the meeting affects the whole community.... Sometimes meetings are announced on short notice and we are offered limited time to tell people about things... The community ends up thinking that we are unable to involve them in some of the things because there is no sufficient time to do things.*

Participant C emphasised that the ward committee's effectiveness in engaging the community is hindered by low community expectations and limited information:

> *Maybe to add to the expectations of the community, it becomes a challenge at times where people expect that the road to Ekusulukeleni we can get up and build it. We are not the ones who build the road, through the IDP he mentioned, we make sure that we put in the IDP what they want, then the municipality consolidates it into an IDP.... We have a challenge that though we explain this, it is difficult for the people to understand. Our people are not well vested in this area..."*

Participant D highlighted that the community lacks a clear understanding of procedures which results in them blaming the ward committee for perceived inaction, ultimately leading to street protests:

> *…as the previous respondent said, the community still does not know that government is not a political party, then they use politics where it is not necessary... if there are any complaints in the ward rather than coming to us as the ward committee and asking for a meeting they do not come but resort to protests.*

Participant C also stated that community members often protest instead of arranging a meeting with the ward committee to discuss their concerns:

Wherever these people expect a service to be of a certain standard, if it does not happen, it becomes a challenge because the blame will come to us as the ward committee to say these people are failing us or this government is failing us while this thing goes back and forth, causing protests with you without formal meetings.

In agreement with participant C, participant D noted that the community does not call meetings, but they protest:

Yes, without us knowing or anyone knowing but you will hear slogans whistles without any communication with the ward committee, it is a problem. The community does not call meeting with the ward committee before they can resort to protest.

4.3.3.4 Mechanisms are put in place to monitor the functioning of the ward committee

When asked about the mechanisms that are put in place to monitor the functioning of the ward committee participant B highlighted the following:

There is a mechanism that we have as a ward committee, there is an officer of the speaker that requires monthly reports, but what I think is that on the site of the local councils, they should also attend some of the meetings. … They used to ask the councillor to provide them with the meeting schedules and then they will surprise us by attending one of our meetings unannounced so that they can see if we can form a quorum.

Coinciding with participant B, participant A emphasised the matter of random and unannounced visits and monitoring of deployed municipal officials:

The municipality monitors if the ward committee is functional or not through random and unannounced visits through knowing the programme. … Supervisors should monitor and address issues with deployed officials, ensuring they are working efficiently and within set time frames.

4.3.3 Responses from semi-structured interviews with municipal officials

The researcher interviewed two Nkomazi Local Municipality representatives to discuss the effectiveness of the Mbuzini ward committee, its reports, challenges

faced, possible solutions and mechanisms used to monitor its functioning. The participants consented to be referred to as key informant 1 and key informant 2.

4.3.3.1 Effectiveness of the ward committee

Two municipal officials responded on the effectiveness of the Mbuzini ward committee in promoting public participation in government decision-making. Key informant 1 confirmed that the ward committee effectively addresses challenges through monthly meetings and reports, submitting them to relevant departments for further action:

> *Yes, they are playing a big role because every month we have a monthly ward committee meeting and we compile a report and submit to the report to the office of the speak in order to take that challenges give to the necessary departments who are responsible for the challenges that are facing that ward.*

Key informant 1 was questioned about whether the ward committee represents the community's views or just its own perspectives. The response was that the ward committee assists councillors in addressing community challenges and service delivery through monthly meetings, reports and sectoral meetings, with ward liaison officer support:

> *The ward committee is responsible to assist the ward councillors in terms the challenges and service delivery, so the ward councillor every after three months they have community meetings, community engagement meetings where the community raising challenges, so, it is whereby the report comes from the community and when the ward committee have their meeting is where they compile the report in writing and submit the report to the office of the speaker with the assistance of the ward liaison officer.*

Key informant 2 also agreed that the Mbuzini ward committee is effective:

> *The ward 13 committee which is at Mbuzini, they are 100% effective, they are so vibrant, good in participating, all of them.... They are assisting even if the councillor is not there, they are able to do their duties, because, since they are in different portfolios, everyone participates in his or her portfolio 100%.*

4.3.3.2 Ward committee reports and their importance

Key informant 1 responded to the question about the ward committee reporting to the municipality more regularly and how the reports contribute towards enhancing public participation in the government decision-making process in Mbuzini. They highlighted that the ward committee prepares reports outlining the ward's challenges and functionality, allowing community members to express their concerns:

> *It is where we get the challenges of that ward and the functionality of that ward, that this ward has the function, the community have their have the platform where they can raise their challenges, so it is whereby the ward committee compile that report and submit is to the municipality, as the municipality our responsibility through the ward liaison officer is to submit the report from the office to COGTA, so there are relevant departments who are responsible for the challenges that are raised by that ward.*

In agreement with key informant 1, key informant 2 stated that the ward committee, responsible for monthly and quarterly reports, holds community meetings to address ward challenges, assisting municipalities and councillors, and is crucial in every ward and government sphere:

> *They report monthly and quarterly. In each and every month they have to sit and have their meetings where they can discuss the challenges of the ward. So they submit reports to the office of the speaker in the municipality monthly, then quarterly they should have a community meeting, that is how it works. They assist a lot in the municipality because without them we cannot get the challenges... the ward committee is important in every ward actually in every sphere of government.*

4.3.3.3 Challenges faced by the municipality

The two municipal officials discussed the challenges of ensuring ward committees effectively enhance public participation in government decision-making. One participant noted that there are no challenges regarding the functionality of the ward committee:

> *I cannot say there are challenges because, in all 33 wards in Nkomazi the ward committees are functioning 100%, they have their monthly reports and there are coordinators that are responsible, the ward liaison officers who are responsible to*

make sure that ward committee are fictional and there is assistance in terms of writing their reports.

Key informant 2 revealed challenges in rural municipalities due to limited funding, community confusion about IDP reviews, and councillors' inability to engage, leading to insults and accusations:

The challenges are, since our municipality according to the levels, we receive a grant, so, municipalities are categorised in grades, and due to the grade level of our municipality since it is located in the rural area, the municipality have got too much challenges because the grant and the municipality on its own cannot deliver in all wards according the demands on the community.... Since we are in rural areas we do not pay for services....So in that way we cannot collect revenue. …The community does not understand processes, especially the IDP reviews.... Another challenge that we encounter as the municipality with the councillors, even if they want to convene a community meeting, they people does not have the interest anymore.

4.3.3.4 Mechanisms employed by the municipality to monitor the functioning of the ward committee

The officials discussed the municipality's methods for monitoring ward committees. Key informant 1 highlighted that ward coordinators oversee this process by attending monthly meetings, compiling reports, and signing attendance registers:

There are coordinators that are responsible for the monitoring of the ward committee and every month the ward committee must have the ward committee meeting, that ward committee meeting is where the ward coordinator or the ward liaison officer go and sit with that ward committee and writes the reports and after compiling the reports, there is an attendance register.

Key informant 2 also indicated that the office of ‘the speaker’ monitors the work of the committee members through reports and ward committee verifications:

Firstly, we monitor through reports, if they submit a report it is where we can see that that they are working. Were also go and do ward committee verifications as the office of the speaker since we are responsible for public participation in the office of the

speaker. … If we can find out that there is member that is no longer part of the committee we then go back to the councillor and the councillor communicates with the structure from which the member is from. We have geographical and structural representation, if the member was from the community, even so we go back to the community section for them to forward a name to fill the vacant post.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the study findings, exploring the role of ward committees in promoting public participation in government decision-making in the Mbuzini community of Nkomazi Local Municipality. Using a two-phase, explanatory, sequential mixed methods approach, the research first conducted a quantitative analysis of ward committee effectiveness, followed by qualitative data collection to assess monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. A diverse sample of 250 participants completed questionnaires, while qualitative insights were gathered through semi-structured interviews, focus groups and individual interviews with community members and municipal officials. The subsequent chapter will discuss and analyse these research findings.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed discussion and analysis of the research findings presented in Chapter 4, building on the literature review and theoretical framework established in Chapter 2. It employs two data collection methods: a formal survey for quantitative data and semi-structured interviews for qualitative insights. The chapter is organised into four subsections aligned with the research questions from the introduction. The first section examines the role of ward committees in promoting public participation in government decision-making. The second section assesses the effectiveness of these committees in this regard. The third section discusses the mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating ward committees, while the final section addresses the challenges they face in enhancing public participation.

5.2 The Role of Ward Committees in Enhancing Public Participation in the Government Decision-making Process

The study investigated the effectiveness of the ward committee in promoting public involvement in government decision-making. A survey revealed that 85% of participants were familiar with the committee's roles and responsibilities. A sample of 15 participants was randomly selected and questioned, and the majority agreed that the committee plays a role in ensuring public participation in government decision-making. A focus group interview was conducted to understand the committee's knowledge of their roles and responsibilities. Participants identified various roles and responsibilities of the committee, providing valuable insights into their understanding and effectiveness as discussed below.

5.2.1 Engaging community through regular meetings

According to one of the participants from the community members, the ward committee should actively involve the community through frequent meetings and provide updates on matters like budget and report back to the municipality. This

approach ensures a common understanding before implementing any changes in the ward. Public participation, also known as consultation, includes polls, community meetings and inquiries. Vogel et al. (2014) emphasise the importance of direct engagement with the public to understand their concerns and desired results. Active engagement of the community through regular meetings and feedback provision is crucial for effective communication between the ward committee and the community they represent. It asserts that public participation promotes transparency and enables residents to impact decisions, leading to more responsive and accountable governance. This comprehensive overview of their challenges and opinions is essential for the effective implementation of changes in the ward.

5.2.2 Encourage community members to take part in government processes

One community member highlighted the essential role of ward committees in encouraging community involvement in planning and decision-making processes. Silima and Auriacombe (2013) emphasise that these committees are tasked with promoting active participation among community members, while Duma (2019) also emphasises this by noting that the goal is to enhance community engagement in government decisions, recognising their unique connection with the municipal council. Therefore, legislators should by strengthen ward committees by providing them with training and resources that will enable them to effectively engage residents in decision-making processes.

5.2.3 Identifying and addressing community challenges

A community member indicated that ward committees are responsible for identifying community needs, addressing concerns, providing services and engaging members in tackling challenges. Duma (2019) states that ward committees should initiate projects to improve residents' quality of life and incorporate community perspectives in budget formulation and development plans like the IDP. Sibiya (2011) notes that ward committees help municipal governments recognise community necessities by fostering citizen involvement, which aids in identifying required services and enhancing the IDP.

Ward committees play a crucial role in the implementation of the IDP by promoting community engagement in planning, monitoring municipal performance and participating in budgeting. According to Thornhill and Madumo (2011), these committees are essential for facilitating community involvement, while Selepe (2023) emphasises that active community participation improves service delivery, strengthens democratic processes and enhances government responsiveness, fostering a sense of ownership among community members.

5.2.4 Liaising between the community and government

The study highlights the importance of ward committees in improving communication between communities and municipalities. Participants view these committees as crucial intermediaries that convey community concerns to ward councillors, who subsequently communicate them to the municipality. According to Mnqayi (2021), ward committees are liaison forums that provide guidance on local matters, enhancing government–citizen interactions. Zulu (2020) supports this perspective, highlighting that ward committees are essential for promoting citizen participation and facilitating community engagement with local government on service distribution. Consequently, ward committees, as liaison forums, should provide consistent venues for public involvement to integrate community perspectives into decision-making processes.

5.2.5 Representing the community

The study underscores the essential function of ward committees in voicing community interests within governmental decision-making processes. These committees are responsible for identifying community needs, presenting the challenges and serving as a communication bridge between residents and the municipality via the ward councillor. Sibiya (2011) highlights their role in making recommendations on ward matters, while Zulu (2020) stresses their support for community interests. A focus group participant emphasised the necessity of a nomination process that promotes diverse stakeholder representation, particularly in community-impacting matters, in line with the Municipal Structures Act's emphasis on inclusivity and gender equality (Duma, 2019). In addition, Peter (2017) posits that

local governments need to prioritise community interests that are overlooked by current political avenues. By implementing these strategies, local authorities can strengthen the role of ward committees as vital conduits for community engagement and representation, ultimately leading to more responsive and accountable governance in the Mbuzini community.

5.2.6 Holding the ward councillor accountable

A community member discussed the role of ward committees in community governance, emphasising their responsibility to hold ward councillors accountable for local matters. This references Rooyen and Mokoena (2013), who argue that ward committees should complement, rather than replace, other forms of community engagement and transparency. Zulu (2020) introduces the concept of empowered participatory governance, which aims to improve citizen participation and dialogue, thereby enhancing accountability and reducing political divisions. This approach should improve the effectiveness of ward committees by promoting direct public involvement.

5.2.7 Fair distribution of services in the community

The study’s results indicated the significance of addressing the community's needs and promoting equality. It highlighted the importance of providing unbiased services to the community and prioritising the fulfilment of their needs. According to Sibiya (2011), the ward committee plays a role in the establishment of collaborative relations and a fair and impartial interaction avenue between the local government and communities. Community engagement is crucial for identifying concerns and facilitating cooperation to address challenges, leading to a more equitable distribution of public resources (Petunia & Selepe, 2020). As stated by Thabanchu (2011), it is therefore evident that ward committees are highlighted as vital for enhancing community participation in IDP consultations, allowing citizens to express and prioritise their needs, which should be reflected in budgetary planning. Promoting impartial services and emphasising community needs should be fundamental to local government policies.

Table 5.1: Understanding of the role and responsibilities of the ward committee versus the existence of ward committees

Understanding of the Role and Responsibilities of the Ward Committee	Existence of Ward Committees			
	Neutral	No	Yes	Grand Total
Neutral	0%	0%	2%	2%
No	2%	4%	7%	13%
Yes	7%	6%	72%	85%
Grand Total	**10%**	**10%**	**80%**	**100%**

Gaining an understanding of the respondent's responsibilities and roles aided in the analysis of the ward committee's effectiveness in this regard. The data presented in Table 5.1 above highlights the relationship between participants' understanding of the ward committee's roles and their views on the importance of these committees in decision-making. A significant majority, 85% of the 250 participants, reported being knowledgeable about the duties and responsibilities of the ward committee. In contrast, only 13% felt uninformed and 2% chose a neutral stance. When asked about the significance of ward committees in decision-making, 80% affirmed their essential role, while 10% disagreed and another 10% remained neutral. This suggests a strong correlation between understanding the ward committee's functions and recognising their importance in decision-making processes. Overall, the findings indicate that a well-informed populace is more likely to value the existence of ward committees in governance, indicating a positive perception of these committees' contributions to governance. It was also found in the study that ward committee members, community members and municipal representatives were all familiar with what ward committees do and how they operate. The participants' understanding and perspectives were in line with the expectations outlined in the literature regarding the roles and responsibilities of ward committees in ensuring citizen participation in government decision-making.

5.3 The Effectiveness of Ward Committees in Enhancing Public Participation in the Government Decision-making Processes

This section discusses the role of ward committees in promoting public participation in government decision-making, with a specific focus on the Mbuzini ward committee. Insights from community members and municipal officials indicate a general dissatisfaction with the committee's effectiveness, highlighting concerns such as insufficient community consultations, inadequate feedback mechanisms, unclear roles and responsibilities, lack of training for committee members, and low awareness of committee members among residents.

5.3.1 Community criticism on the effectiveness of ward committees

Community members have expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the ward committee, citing limited participation and several key concerns. These include insufficient community engagement, inadequate feedback mechanisms, lack of clarity regarding members' roles, insufficient training and the anonymity of committee members.

5.3.1.1 Lack of community consultations and involvement

Community members are dissatisfied with the functioning of their ward committee, despite the Local Government: Municipal System Act 32 of 2000 requiring public hearings and community consultations before adopting or modifying projects or by-laws. They believe the committee is not engaging the community in decision-making processes, often making decisions without consulting them. This lack of consultation results in community sentiments of not being represented. The study by Zulu (2020) also highlighted concerns about projects that fail to adhere to the concepts of the IDP and citizen engagement. Local governments are trusted with socioeconomic development projects, so community involvement and communication with citizens about these matters is crucial in empowering residents to take charge of development projects in their communities.

Zulu (2020) emphasises the importance of municipalities involving all residents and interested parties in their decision-making processes. Despite community dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the ward committee, some individuals believe the government is doing an excellent job of engaging the community and providing opportunities for participation. Local governments should enhance community consultation mechanisms, improve transparency and communication, invest in training for ward committee members, and implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess community engagement effectiveness. This will enable ward committee to actively listen to community views, making informed decisions and creating a positive atmosphere.

5.3.1.2 Lack of feedback and information

The results of this study correspond with prior literature, emphasising a continual problem of inadequate response and information about issues expressed during public consultations. When it comes to feedback, the findings of the survey that was conducted indicates that community members do not receive feedback from meetings.

Table 5.2: Ward committee meeting attendance versus ward committee meeting feedback

Ward Committee Meeting Attendance	Ward Committee Meeting Feedback			
	Neutral	No	Yes	Grand Total
No	27%	4%	0%	31%
Yes	2%	24%	43%	69%
Grand Total	**29%**	**28%**	**43%**	**100%**

Table 5.2 presents the cross-tabulation of two variables related to ward committee meeting attendance and ward committee meeting feedback. The premise is that if the participants attend meetings, they will have an idea if there is feedback on the concerns they raised. The analysis of the survey results reveals that a significant majority of participants (69%) have attended a ward committee meeting in their community, indicating a level of engagement with local governance. Conversely, a

notable portion of 31% have never participated in such meetings. Regarding feedback on matters raised during these meetings, only 43% of participants reported receiving feedback, while 28% did not receive any and 29% chose a neutral stance. This highlights a potential deficiency in the responsiveness of ward committees to community concerns, as nearly half of the participants did not feel adequately informed about the outcomes of their contributions. Low participation in ward committee meetings is concerning, with only 43% of participants receiving feedback on their concerns. This emphasises the necessity for effective outreach, education strategies, and establishing open feedback systems to address issues.

A community member raised concerns about the ward committee's failure to provide feedback on important matters such as a learnership that never materialised. The committee did not call a meeting to explain the situation despite people having signed contracts. This sentiment is echoed by research from the uMhlathuze Municipality, which identified a broader concern of inadequate feedback on residents' concerns due to the municipality's shortcomings in service delivery. Academics propose that the lack of feedback is due to the municipality's failure to implement service delivery programmes (Zulu, 2020). Conversely, the feedback regarding the ward committee reveals a disconnect among community members, with some feeling neglected while others valuing the committee's communication efforts. This situation highlights a systemic challenge in municipal governance that extends beyond the Mbuzini community. This gap could undermine community trust and participation, affecting the overall effectiveness of municipal governance.

5.3.1.3 Lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the ward committee

The community's dissatisfaction with the ward committee's performance stems from a perceived lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities among both committee members and community members. This contradicts the results from the survey conducted where 85% of community members claimed to understand these roles. Additionally, a study conducted by Sibiya (2011) indicated that some ward committee members at eThekwini Municipality were unclear about their responsibilities, highlighting the need for capacity building. Duma (2019) emphasises that it is

essential that all parties involved including the community members to understand the responsibilities, authority, and duties of ward committees.

5.3.1.4 Lack of training

A community member revealed that ward members lack proper training, hindering their ability to fulfil their responsibilities and disseminate important information. This matter is exacerbated by inadequate communication between the committee and the community. Legal frameworks like the Municipal Structures Act and the Municipal Systems Act mandate training for community involvement. Capacity development is crucial for successful transformation in local government, promoting community engagement (Sibiya, 2011). This highlights the critical need for structured training programs for ward members to enhance their effectiveness in community engagement and information dissemination.

5.3.1.5 Ward committee members unknown to the community

There are community members who indicated that the ward committee is not effectively engaging the community in government decisions. There is a minority of community members who are not familiar with the ward committee and most of its members are not well known to the community. They also highlighted that individuals who are not involved in politics may not be aware of the ward committee and its members and their roles. According to Sibiya (2011), the ward committee ought to structure itself to ensure that its roles are clearly visible, especially to the community members to whom they are accountable. Table 5.3 below explores the relationship between the awareness of ward committee members and participation in the nominating process. The assumption is that individuals who engage in the nominating process are likely to be familiar with the members of their ward committee. According to the survey results, out of 250 participants, a significant majority (78%) reported being acquainted with their ward committee members, while 22% indicated they were not. In addition, when asked about their involvement in the nomination process, 52% of participants confirmed they had participated, whereas 48% had not. This data suggests a notable level of awareness among participants regarding their ward committees, with a slight majority having engaged in the nomination process. These

findings justify the perceptions of those who claim to be unfamiliar with the ward committee members since almost half of the participants never took part during the nomination process (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Being aware of the ward committee versus participation in the nominating process

Being Aware of the Ward Committee	Participation in the Nominating Process		
	No	**Yes**	**Grand Total**
No	18%	5%	22%
Yes	31%	47%	78%
Grand Total	**48%**	**52%**	**100%**

A study by Khawula (2016) highlights the lack of awareness about ward committees among community members which can erode trust. This dissatisfaction extends beyond the Mbuzini community, as evidenced by a study at the uMhlathuze Municipality. Despite facilitating inclusive participation, many feel that committees are ineffective in representing their interests. This frustration is a trend observed in various studies, suggesting that ward committees often fail to meet their operational goals (Zulu, 2020). However, a minority of community members acknowledged the committee's vital role in distributing government services by identifying community needs and collaborating with the government.

In an interview, two municipal officials praised the Mbuzini ward committee for its effectiveness in promoting public participation in government decision-making. They noted the committee's role in addressing community challenges and service delivery through monthly meetings, reports and sectoral meetings. Duma (2019) states that the effectiveness of the committee is measured by meeting attendance, attendance registers, minutes and convened meetings. They also noted the committee's collaboration with the ward liaison officer for community input and communication. The committee's effectiveness relies on consistent meetings and public feedback (Thabanchu, 2011). The study revealed a significant difference between community members' perceptions of the Mbuzini ward committee's effectiveness and municipal

officials' views, suggesting a potential disconnect between community experiences and officials' perspectives on the committee's functionality and impact.

5.3.2 Community willingness to participate

As highlighted by Phago (2008) there are different individual characteristics that influence community participation in government affairs. The analysis of Table 5.4 below reveals a significant relationship between community understanding of public participation in government decision-making and their willingness to engage in that process. The study indicated that 73% of participants are inclined to participate, suggesting a strong positive attitude towards involvement in decision-making. However, 23% expressed a lack of motivation, highlighting a minority that may need additional encouragement to engage. A small percentage of 4% remained neutral, indicating some uncertainty about their participation. Furthermore, the majority (73%) recognised the importance of participation in contemporary democracy, while 19% considered it insignificant, and 8% were neutral. These findings support the hypothesis that a better understanding of the significance of public participation correlates with a greater willingness to engage, confirming the researcher's expectations regarding the relationship between these two variables.

Table 5.4: Community willingness to participate versus the significance of public participation in the government decision-making processes

Community Willingness to Participate	Significance of Public Participation in the Government Decision-making Processes			
	Neutral	No	Yes	Grand Total
Neutral	4%	0%	1%	5%
No	1%	14%	8%	23%
Yes	3%	5%	64%	73%
Grand Total	**8%**	**19%**	**73%**	**100 %**

The results from the interviews conducted with selected community showed a strong desire among community members to participate in government decision-making processes, primarily for community improvement and expressing opinions. Most

expressed enthusiasm for participation, highlighting the need for representation and marginalised voices. Some believed their participation could influence decisions and hold the government accountable, especially in corruption cases. However, barriers such as a lack of communication platforms and ineffective ward committees hinder active involvement, as reported by Zulu (2020).

In addition, some individuals often feel constrained by their affiliations with organisations, limiting their ability to express personal views. Political dynamics, particularly conflicts between ward councillors and municipal leadership, can hinder support for community initiatives. Agreeing with this finding, Sibiya (2011) argues that the ward committee composition is often determined by political affiliations, leading to claims that councillors do not truly represent the community. Many councillors prioritise their party affiliations and political ambitions over constituent needs (Zulu, 2020). Despite a strong interest in participation, systemic matters and personal constraints pose significant obstacles. The study found a significant disconnect between public sentiment and the concerns of a minority who feel discouraged from participating in the democratic process, indicating a broader dissatisfaction with the government's response to community concerns and the lack of public involvement.

5.4 The Mechanisms Put in Place to Monitor and Evaluate Ward Committees

The mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating ward committees are essential for local governments to gauge citizen participation in municipal affairs. Key components include the use of monthly and quarterly reports, coordinators monitoring ward committees, random visits by the office of the speaker and verifications conducted by the office of the speaker as discussed below.

5.4.1 Monthly and quarterly reports

The municipality uses monthly reports to assess the effectiveness of ward committees. The reports are reviewed by the office of the speaker and portfolios, which provide detailed accounts of activities. Peter (2017) suggests that the ward committee convenes quarterly, but an increased frequency could be scheduled monthly for better planning and to address pressing matters. Monthly reports from

councillors and committee members are submitted to a liaison expert within the municipality, evaluating aspects such as meeting regularity, relationships, projects, superficial concerns and non-categorical accomplishments. The aggregated report is then forwarded to the office of the speaker for further evaluation (Madumo, 2011).

- **Importance of monthly and quarterly reports**

The municipal officials highlighted that ward committee reports are crucial in municipal administration for diagnosing concerns and addressing community matters. They provide insights into ward challenges and functionality, allowing community involvement (Mhlari, 2014). Peter (2017) states that meetings allow municipal representatives to interact with the public and address local concerns. Regular meetings and discussions help resolve dissatisfaction and improve service provision and enhancing ward committees in municipal programmes can enhance governance and improve communication (Sigenene, 2024). This study emphasise that these practices enable direct interaction between municipal representatives and the community, thereby addressing local concerns and improving governance and service delivery.

5.4.2 Coordinators monitor ward committees

A municipal official during the interview stated that coordinators monitor ward committees' functioning, hold monthly meetings, compile reports and register attendance. They ensure committees are functional, attend meetings and maintain an attendance register. Thornhill and Madumo (2011) discussed the IDP process in Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, where wards are divided into zones based on jurisdiction. Each zone forms a sub-region overseen by coordinators responsible for development and consultation with the municipality. However, a ward committee member in Mbuzini expressed concern about the lack of representation from the Nkomazi Local Municipality's office in committee meetings since 2021, highlighting potential communication and support gaps at the local level. This study identifies a potential disconnect between local governance structures and municipal support, as evidenced by the concerns raised by a ward committee member regarding the absence of representation from the Nkomazi Local Municipality. Therefore is

suggests a need for further exploration into the effectiveness of communication channels and support mechanisms in local governance, particularly in how they impact community engagement and development outcomes.

5.4.3 Random visits by the office of the speaker

A ward committee member emphasised the importance of regular visits by the municipality to evaluate the committee and the role of supervisors in monitoring officials. Mhlari (2014) suggests that the office of the speaker should establish a monitoring system to assess the committee's strengths and weaknesses and implement appropriate actions when necessary. Madumo (2011) states that monitoring systems also provide structural support and citizen involvement. The analysis highlights the necessity of effective monitoring and evaluation systems for ward committees, as emphasised by a respondent from the committee. Random and unannounced visits by the municipality are deemed crucial for assessing the performance of these committees. This contribution aligns with the notion that effective oversight not only fosters accountability but also encourages citizen engagement, thereby reinforcing the democratic process at the local level.

5.4.4 Verifications conducted by the office of the speaker

The speaker's office is responsible for verifying ward committee membership to improve public involvement. If a member is removed, the councillor is notified and the relevant structure is contacted to address the vacancy. The community section recommends a replacement if the member is from the community. The speaker also monitors the functioning of ward committees and ensures compliance with regulations (Zulu, 2020). As a monitoring mechanism the establishing a systematic process for notifying councillors and addressing vacancies, the office fosters accountability and responsiveness within local governance structures.

5.5 The Challenges Faced by Ward Committees and the Municipality in Enhancing Public Participation

Ward committee members and municipal officials were questioned about the challenges they face in promoting public involvement in government decision-making, highlighting several key concerns that need to be addressed.

5.5.1 The challenges faced by ward committees

Ward committees face challenges in engaging with the community, including community expectations, misunderstandings, compliance with regulations and lack of understanding of municipal processes. They struggle with monitoring concerns, convening meetings and communication, leading to protests. These challenges are further discussed below.

5.5.1.1 Community expectations

A participant from the ward committee highlighted that community expectations can be challenging, particularly when residents mistakenly believe the committee is responsible for directly building infrastructure such as a roads. The participant clarified that their role involves gathering knowledge about community needs and incorporating them into the IDP, which is then processed by the municipality for implementation. Consistent with this, Khawula (2016) also stated that a prevalent problem in projects for community development is when the results fail to meet community expectations. There is a notable gap between what communities expect from these committees and their actual duties which often results in community discontent and strife with municipal authorities. Furthermore, the sluggish rate of progress triggers a sense of despair in communities and broader society.

5.5.1.2 Compliance-driven decision-making

According to the ward committee, municipalities often prioritise compliance with municipal expectations over genuine community needs. Validating this, Peter (2017) stated that municipalities are establishing ward committees to comply with regulations concerning public participation. Werner (2012) also stressed that in South

Africa, there is a focus on compliance-oriented administrative strategies, with residents viewing their contributions as undervalued. A study by Maphazi et al. (2013) highlights the constitutional responsibility of the state to create forums and processes that encourage public participation, prioritising citizen engagement for effective governance and societal advancement, rather than solely focusing on legal compliance. The findings of the study indicate that municipalities often prioritise regulatory compliance over genuine community engagement, leading to undervaluation of residents' input. As literature posits, fostering genuine public participation, aligning with constitutional duty for better governance and societal progress, rather than just fulfilling legal obligations is of outmost importance. This focus hinders effective governance and social progress, casting doubt on the effectiveness of ward committees in promoting public involvement.

5.5.1.3 Ignorance

The ward committee expressed the desire to educate the community members, however, the challenge posed by widespread ignorance was noted. A participant emphasised the distinction between people possessing knowledge and those lacking it, indicating that individuals with limited knowledge might demonstrate confrontational and argumentative behaviour, whereas those with greater knowledge are generally more reserved and articulate. Duma (2019) argues that public involvement in municipal processes is notably shaped by elements like a lack of education, ignorance and general disinterest among community members. Illiteracy frequently results in a sense of inferiority, resulting in citizens becoming intimidated and reluctant to participate in municipal affairs. This hesitation arises from the conviction that they are unable to provide significant input.

Another participant expressed concern about the lack of awareness and participation among the people in Mbuzini, suggesting that ignorance plays a significant role in their failure to attend meetings. The participant also acknowledged that being part of the ward committee helps them stay informed, implying that without this connection, they too might be uninformed and disengaged like the rest of the community. It is therefore evident that this misinformation undermines civic engagement and fosters adversarial behaviour, leading to feelings of inadequacy among individuals

5.5.1.4 Lack of monitoring

One participant from the ward committee highlighted that there is a challenge in monitoring reported matters, particularly regarding disaster management. The participant indicated that despite having permanent employees responsible for addressing these matters and providing feedback to affected individuals, the current system is not functioning effectively and there is a need to improve the handling of these situations. Khawula (2016) encouraged the Umzumbe Local Municipality to implement a system of monitoring and evaluation that measures citizen involvement in the IDP process, to determine and analyse problems that impede active involvement for enhanced understanding. Setting priorities for providing services and development viability is essential for the municipality's constitutional goals. A functioning system must be established to evaluate the productivity and outcome of municipalities.

In light of budgetary difficulties, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and the South African Local Government Association need to cooperate in developing a comprehensive national mechanism for tracking and evaluating progress (Raga et al., 2011). This situation hampers the municipality's capability to achieve constitutional objective regarding citizen participation in the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) process, therefore, mechanisms are urgently needed to monitor progress and foster positive community relations within ward committees.

5.5.1.5 Lack of understanding of government processes

The ward committee faced two main challenges in understanding municipal processes: a lack of knowledge about project funding and procurement processes and a lack of understanding of municipal policy. According to Matyana and Mthethwa, (2020), municipal authorities often disregard their citizens due to a lack of knowledge of authorities and a lack of awareness of their involvement in the IDP process. Pule (2009) also indicates that the absence of knowledge of municipal policy also hinders the ward committee's effectiveness, as community members often view projects as simple transactions without understanding the complexities of supply chains and

tendering procedures. Community engagement is impeded by lack of information and ineffective communication techniques (Khawula, 2016).

Secondly, the confusion between government functions and political party roles in local matters leads to politicisation, causing community members to protest rather than engage constructively with the ward committee. This hinders effective communication and collaboration between the municipality and the community. Zulu (2020) highlighted the challenges of maintaining positive community connections in ward committees, as some members prioritise political motives over citizens' interests. This knowledge gap not only results in citizens feeling disregarded but also fosters a politicised environment where community members resort to protests instead of constructive engagement.

5.5.1.6 Convening meetings

A ward committee respondent highlighted that there is a challenge in convening community meetings, particularly because of the lack of effective communication tools such as a loudspeaker. It was also pointed out that social networks are normally used, which tend to engage a younger demographic and do not adequately represent or involve the entire community. Jikeka (2014) also stresses the challenge of inadequate communication instruments for citizen involvement in public meetings, including loudspeakers and public address systems. This disconnect leads to complaints from community members about their inclusivity and effectiveness. The ward committee indicated the challenges they face in adhering to the Municipal Structures Act which mandates monthly meetings. Despite the intention to meet regularly, urgent commitments often disrupt the process, leading to instances where meetings only occur two or three times a year. This inconsistency highlights the difficulties in maintaining a regular meeting schedule while managing other pressing project-related obligations.

According to Khawula (2016), one major concern facing ward committee members is the inability to have regular monthly meetings, which results in delayed provision of essential amenities and residents being uninformed about government programmes. The findings reveals that reliance on insufficient communication tools and the

irregularity of meetings not only alienate older residents but also hinder the overall effectiveness of ward committees in addressing community needs and delivering essential services.

5.5.1.7 Protests without formal meetings

Ward committees face challenges involving community members in municipal activities, as they often blame them for problems instead of engaging in constructive dialogue. Limited understanding among community members contributes to frustration and misguided actions such as road blockages. Masiya et al. (2019) argue that the absence of service delivery procedures can lead to passive engagement, potentially causing public dissatisfaction and demonstrations against state decisions. Selepe (2023) advocates that municipalities should establish systems promoting citizen participation for participatory governance. A significant communication gap exists between the community and ward committees, indicating the need for improved engagement and communication strategies.

5.5.1.8 Short notice meetings

The ward committee reported that meetings are often announced on short notice, limiting community involvement. This can result in missed opportunities for consultations and loudspeaker notifications. Phone calls are used to spread the message, reducing consultation time. The municipality has sufficient time for tasks, but late submissions demand immediate action from the ward committee, leading to the community feeling excluded from some tasks due to insufficient time. According to Khawula (2016), municipalities should prioritise timely communication of scheduled meetings including significant policy decisions with the appropriate stakeholders. The ward committee's short-notice meeting announcements are reducing community participation and fostering exclusion among residents, hence it is necessary for the municipality to enhance its communication strategies, focusing on timely notifications and diverse media engagement to involve citizens in municipal matters. The municipal council needs to minimise dependence on citizens and official communication by councillors regarding citizen participation in municipal matters; alternatively, the municipality needs to use media for communication and encourage

public attendance at meetings, since this falls within the purview of councillors in their capacity as chairman.

5.5.2 The challenges faced by the municipality

The study revealed contrasting views on the functionality of ward committees in Nkomazi. One official claimed all 33 wards are functioning effectively, with dedicated coordinators and liaison officers. Another participant identified challenges in some aspects of the committees' operations.

5.5.2.1 Low attendance and lack of interest in community meetings

Municipal officials in Mbuzini face challenges with community engagement, with residents showing a lack of interest in attending councillor meetings. Low turnout in public gatherings is a concern, as citizens may believe elected officials are not efficient in carrying out programmes. Despite dissatisfaction with councillors, the community fails to participate in discussions that could provide valuable feedback. Zulu (2020) and Molale (2019) also note disappointment in ward committees and the municipality as a whole due to their unresponsiveness to local matters. This disconnect necessitates improved communication and encouragement for community involvement to foster a more collaborative relationship between residents. There is a clear concern that low attendance and limited community participation in IDP consultative sessions may hinder effective collaboration and understanding among stakeholders. Therefore, enhancing public knowledge about the significance of participating in IDP consultative sessions is also necessary.

5.5.2.2 Poor community understanding of IDP reviews and budget adjustments

A municipal official revealed that the community is struggling to understand IDP reviews and accused officials of dishonesty regarding budget promises. This lack of knowledge about budget reallocations for urgent matters like road damage exacerbates tensions between citizens and officials. Khawula (2016) emphasises the importance of IDP in citizen involvement, urging municipalities to engage with communities and ensure active participation in planning, implementing and reviewing the IDP. The study highlights a significant gap in the community's understanding of

budget reallocation processes, indicating a need for targeted strategic interventions to enhance awareness and comprehension.

5.5.2.3 Rural municipality grants and revenue collection

The financial viability of municipalities is heavily influenced by the economic activities within their communities, as highlighted by Moloto (2018). Affluent municipalities benefit from property taxes and service fees, while economically disadvantaged ones rely on government grants. Rural municipalities, like the Nkomazi Local Municipality, face significant challenges due to their classification, which limits their grant funding and financial capacity. Many residents do not pay for services, leading to a lack of revenue generation, particularly in areas like Komatipoort, Hectospruit and Malelane. This financial strain hampers the municipality's ability to provide adequate services, resulting in community dissatisfaction and service delivery protests.

Ramphele (2008) emphasises the importance of a strong economic base for municipalities to fulfil their constitutional obligations effectively. This highlights the financial challenges faced by rural municipalities, exemplified by Nkomazi Local Municipality, which stem from limited economic activities and reliance on government grants. It further emphasise the importance of establishing a strong economic foundation to enhance revenue generation, improve service delivery, and fulfil constitutional mandate.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter offered a thorough analysis of research findings collected from both quantitative and qualitative methods, including a survey and interviews. It highlighted the role and effectiveness of ward committees in promoting public participation in government decision-making. It collectively emphasised the vital role of ward committees in promoting public participation in local governance, while also highlighting significant challenges that hinder their effectiveness. While many community members recognised the importance of these committees, concerns such as insufficient consultations, lack of feedback and inadequate training contribute to feelings of exclusion and dissatisfaction. There is a notable disconnect between community perceptions and municipal officials' views on the committees'

effectiveness. Overall, fostering genuine community involvement and addressing systemic barriers are essential for restoring trust in local governance and improving decision-making processes. The next chapter will conclude the study and offer recommendations stemming from the research results of this study.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the research study that aimed to investigate the effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation in government decision-making in the Mbuzini community of Nkomazi Local Municipality. The study used a mixed method approach, involving quantitative data through a survey questionnaire and qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. The quantitative phase involved a quantitative investigation of ward committees' effectiveness in improving public participation, followed by qualitative data collection to identify mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating them. The qualitative follow up to the quantitative data collected explained the effectiveness of ward committees in improving public participation in government decision-making.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation in the government decision-making processes within the Mbuzini community in Nkomazi Local Municipality in response to the following research objectives as outlined in the first chapter:

- identifying the role of ward committees in enhancing public participation in the government decision-making processes;
- mechanisms put in place to monitor and evaluate ward committees; and
- challenges faced by ward committees in enhancing public participation.

To achieve the abovementioned objectives, an extensive review of the literature was conducted for background information. Thereafter, a mixed methods approach was employed, incorporating quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

6.2.1 Role of ward committees in enhancing public participation

The analysis of the role of ward committees in enhancing public participation in government decision-making reveals several key findings. A survey indicated that 85% of participants were familiar with the roles and responsibilities of ward committees, suggesting a strong awareness among the community. Focus group interviews further confirmed that both community and ward committee members recognise the importance of these committees in facilitating public involvement in governance.

6.2.2 The effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation

The analysis of the effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation in government decision-making, particularly in the Mbuzini ward, reveals significant community dissatisfaction. Key criticisms from residents include:

- inadequate community consultations;
- poor feedback mechanisms;
- lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities;
- insufficient training for committee members; and
- a general anonymity of committee members among the community.

6.2.3 Challenges faced by ward committees and the municipality in enhancing public participation

The ward committee indicated the following challenges in engaging with their communities, hindering their ability to foster active public participation.

Community expectations. Residents often misinterpret the role of ward committees, expecting them to manage infrastructure projects, leading to discontent and tension between the community and municipal authorities.

Compliance-driven decision-making. The municipality's decision-making prioritises compliance with municipal regulations over addressing genuine community needs, leading to a perception that residents' contributions are undervalued.

Ignorance. Ignorance among community members about municipal processes leads to disengagement and confrontational behaviour, discouraging active participation.

Lack of monitoring. Monitoring concerns, particularly in disaster management, is ineffective, necessitating improvements to ensure accountability and responsiveness.

Lack of understanding of government processes. Community members lack awareness of municipal funding and procurement processes, diminishing their ability to engage meaningfully in the IDP.

Convening meetings. The challenges identified include inadequate communication tools and reliance on social networks which hinder participation.

Protests without formal meetings. Protests without formal meetings indicate a significant communication gap.

Short notice meetings. Short notice meetings limit community involvement and lead to feelings of exclusion.

The study also revealed significant challenges faced by the municipality. Key concerns include the following:

- low community engagement;
- confusion about governance processes; and
- financial constraints.

6.2.4 Mechanisms put in place to monitor and evaluate ward committees

Effective monitoring and evaluation of ward committees in local governments are crucial for enhancing citizen participation in municipal affairs. The Nkomazi Local Municipality has the following mechanisms in place.

Monthly and quarterly reports. Monthly and quarterly reports are essential tools for this evaluation as they provide insights into the activities and challenges faced by the committees. Municipal officials emphasised the importance of these reports for

diagnosing community concerns and facilitating communication between municipal representatives and the public.

Coordinators monitor ward committees. Ward coordinators play a key role in monitoring committee functionality, ensuring attendance and compiling reports.

Random visits by the office of the speaker. Random visits by the office of the speaker are highlighted as a method for evaluating committee performance.

Verifications conducted by the office of the speaker. Verifications are conducted to maintain current membership and representation within the committees. Overall, these mechanisms aim to enhance public involvement and ensure the effectiveness of ward committees.

6.3 General Conclusions

In response to the research questions of this study, the general conclusions are as follows.

The high level of awareness among community members regarding the roles of ward committees correlates with their recognition of their importance in governance. This suggests a strong correlation between understanding the roles of ward committees and recognising their importance in governance, indicating that informed citizens are more likely to value these committees, ultimately enhancing democratic processes at the local level.

While there is a strong desire for public participation in decision-making processes, the ward committees in the Mbuzini ward are failing to effectively enhance public participation in government decision-making, as evidenced by significant community dissatisfaction stemming from inadequate consultations, poor feedback mechanisms, unclear roles, insufficient training and a lack of visibility of committee members which significantly impede their effectiveness. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering meaningful community engagement and enhancing the overall effectiveness of local governance.

The ward committee claims that they are willing to consult and give feedback to the community, however, they have inadequate communication tools like loudhailers and rely on social networks that only cater for the youth. In addition, the community's ignorance and lack of interest lead to them having impractical expectations or even protesting without formal meetings.

The ward committee further indicated that the municipality uses a compliance-driven approach that prioritises adherence to regulations over the actual needs of the community, resulting in residents feeling undervalued. This manifests in short notice meetings and hinders community participation in meetings since the ward committee is not informed on time. In addition, there is a lack of effective monitoring, especially regarding disaster management, which leads to the community feeling neglected. However, the municipality claims that there are measures in place for monitoring ward committees.

The Nkomazi municipality officials also claimed that they face challenges in ensuring community engagement due to the community's low attendance and lack of interest in meetings, particularly in Mbuzini. They also reported that community members have a poor understanding of IDP reviews and budget adjustments, causing distrust towards officials. The Nkomazi Local Municipality also faces financial strain due to their classification, limiting grant funding and capacity, resulting in dissatisfaction with service delivery and subsequent protests.

6.4 Implications of the Study

The implications of the situation in the Mbuzini ward suggest a significant disconnect between community members and the ward committee, leading to dissatisfaction and protests. The ward committee expressed a willingness to engage but is hindered by inadequate communication tools, particularly affecting older residents. This lack of effective communication, combined with community ignorance and disinterest, results in unrealistic expectations and uncoordinated protests. In addition, the municipality's compliance-driven approach prioritises regulations over genuine community needs, further alienating residents and fostering feelings of neglect. Despite the municipality claiming that monitoring mechanisms are in place, the ward

committee asserted that such measures are ineffective. Furthermore, the financial strain on the Nkomazi Local Municipality, stemming from its classification, restricts grant funding and capacity, leading to dissatisfaction with service delivery and triggering protests.

6.5 Recommendations

Drawing on the findings of the research results, the researcher suggests the subsequent recommendations:

- Regular participation in training programmes is recommended for ward councillors and committee members to enhance their efficiency in performing their duties and responsibilities.
- The Nkomazi Local Municipality needs to use established platforms such as Izimbizo to inform and promote citizen involvement in local government matters.
- The municipality and ward committee should develop innovative community engagement strategies, driven by the ward committee, as they operate within the communities.
- The Nkomazi Local Municipality must efficiently use its monitoring mechanism to enhance the efficacy of ward committees, henceforth fostering more community participation and cooperation.
- Increasing funds for municipalities with limited resources should be considered in order to strengthen their capacity to handle pressing matters, advance infrastructure and tackle the provision of services shortcomings.

6.6 Suggestions for Future Research

The researcher suggests that further studies should be conducted on the effectiveness of ward committees in promoting public participation in government decision-making across various communities in the Nkomazi Local Municipality. This recommendation arises from the limitations of the current study, which is only applicable to the Mbuzini community and cannot be generalised to a broader South African municipality population.

6.7 Final Conclusion

In conclusion, this study explored the role of ward committees in promoting public participation in government decision-making within the Mbuzini community of Nkomazi Local Municipality. Using a mixed methods approach, the study combined quantitative data from surveys with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. The quantitative phase assessed the effectiveness of ward committees, while the qualitative phase aimed to uncover mechanisms for their monitoring and evaluation. The overall findings of the study revealed significant challenges in enhancing public participation in government decision-making. Despite high awareness of the committee's roles, residents expressed dissatisfaction due to inadequate consultations, poor feedback, unclear roles and insufficient training. These concerns, compounded by misinterpretation of roles, compliance-driven decisions and low community engagement, hinder effective participation. The study recommends regular training for committee members, innovative engagement strategies and increased funding for municipalities. Future research is encouraged to assess the effectiveness of ward committees in other areas, emphasising the need for improved communication and responsiveness to community needs to strengthen local democratic processes.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: DATA GATHERING TOOLS

Demographic information

Gender

Male	Female

Race/Ethnicity

African	Indian	Coloured	White

Age

18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66+

Education Level

Survey questionnaire

	YES	NO
1. Are you aware of the ward committee in your community?		
2. Are you familiar with a ward committee member in your ward?		
3. Are you aware of the nomination process of ward committees?		
4. Did you take part in the process for nominating the ward committee in your community?		
5. Do you regard the process free and fair?		
6. Are you satisfied with the ward committee in your area?		
7. Do you understand the role and responsibilities of the ward committee?		
8. Have you ever attended a ward committee meeting in your community?		
9. Do you find meetings conducted by the ward committee productive?		
10. Do you receive feedback on issues raised in the meeting?		
11. Do you regard participation in decision-making process significant in the contemporary democracy?		

12. Are you encouraged to participate in decision-making process?		
13. In general, do you regard the existence of ward committees essential to the process of making decision?		

Interview schedule for participants from quantitative sample

1. What is your understanding about the roles and responsibilities of ward committees?

_____

_____

2. Does the ward committee play a role in ensuring that the public take part in the government decision-making process?

_____

_____

_____

3. In your opinion do you think the ward committee is doing enough in ensuring that you are involved in the government decision-making process?

_____

_____

_____

4. Are you encouraged to take part in the government decision-making process? Elaborate on perception towards participating in take part in the government decision-making process, why would you want or not want to participate.

_____

_____

_____

5. What do you think can be done by your ward committee to enhance community involvement in the government decision-making process?

_____

_____

_____

Interview schedule for key informants (ward committee)

1. How the nomination was process and was the community members eager to form part of the ward committee? Elaborate on response of the community members towards participating in ward committees as an institution.

_____

_____

_____

2. How often does the committee meet with the community and why do you believe that including community members in the committee meetings is important?

_____

_____

_____

3. What role do you play as the ward committee to ensure that the community take part in the government decision-making process?

_____

_____

_____

4. What are the challenges faced by the ward committee in enhancing public participation in the community? Further elaborate on how you deal with those challenges.

_____

_____

_____

5. What support do the ward committee receive from the municipality?

_____

_____

6. From your experience, what do you think can be done to enhance the functionality of the ward committee in enhance public involvement in the government decision-making process?

_____

_____

_____

7. What mechanisms are put in place to monitor the functioning of the ward committee? Elaborate on how the municipality monitors the functioning of ward committees.

_____

_____

Interview schedule for municipal officials

1. How effective is the ward committee of Mbuzini towards enhancing public participation in government decision-making process? Please elaborate.

_____

_____

_____

2. What are the challenges faced by the municipality in ensuring the effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation in government decision-making process?

_____

_____

_____

4. What are the mechanisms employed by the municipality to monitor the functioning of the ward committee? Elaborate on how the municipality monitors the functioning of ward committees.

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Consent form for a survey

The effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation at Mbuzini, Nkomazi Local Municipality

Researcher's Name: Cynthia Philile Mahlalela

I, _____ agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from the survey may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous, my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

_____
NAME OF PARTICIPANT

_____ _____
SIGNATURE DATE

Consent form for an interview

The effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation at Mbuzini, Nkomazi Local Municipality

Researcher's Name: Cynthia Philile Mahlalela

I, _____ agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous, my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview, but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

_____
NAME OF PARTICIPANT

_____ _____
SIGNATURE DATE

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEETS



Participant Information Sheet for a survey

Dear Sir Participant

My name is Cynthia Phililе Mahlalela. I am a master's student in Management and Governance at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Sindi Msimango. I am conducting a research study on the effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation at Mbuzini, Nkomazi Local Municipality.

I am inviting you to take part in answering survey questionnaires. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 5 minutes. The survey will take place at Mbuzini community.

With your permission, I would like to store data collected for future secondary analysis. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including gender, race/ethnicity, age, education level.

The survey will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life / some of the questions asked may make you feel uncomfortable. If this happens, you are welcome not to answer. This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Cynthia

Researcher:

Cynthia Philile Mahlalela, 2626389@Students.wits.ac.za, 079 048 8268

Supervisor:

Dr Sindi Msimango, sindi.msimango@wits.ac.za, 011 717-3519

Prof Kwandiwe Kondlo, kwandiwe.kondlo@wits.ac.za

WITS SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE

Participant Information Sheet for an interview

Dear Sir Participant

My name is Cynthia Philile Mahlalela. I am a master's student in Management and Governance at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Sindi Msimango. I am conducting a research study on the effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation at Mbuzini, Nkomazi Local Municipality.

I am inviting you to take part in an interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 15 minutes. The interview will take place at Nkomazi Local Municipality.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview and to store data collected for future secondary analysis. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including gender, race/ethnicity, age, education level.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services,

benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life / some of the questions asked may make you feel uncomfortable. If this happens, you are welcome not to answer.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Cynthia

Researcher:

Cynthia Philile Mahlalela, 2626389@Students.wits.ac.za, 079 048 8268

Supervisor:

Dr Sindi Msimango, sindi.msimango@wits.ac.za, 011 717-3519

Prof Kwandiwe Kondlo, kwandiwe.kondlo@wits.ac.za

Participant Information Sheet for a focus group discussion

Dear Sir Participant

My name is Cynthia Philile Mahlalela. I am a master's student in Management and Governance at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Dr Sindi Msimango. I am conducting a research study on the effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation at Mbuzini, Nkomazi Local Municipality.

I am inviting you to take part in a focus group discussion. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about 45 minutes. The focus group discussion will take place at Mbuzini community.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the focus group discussion and to store data collected for future secondary analysis. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including gender, race/ethnicity, age, education level.

The focus group discussion will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services,

benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life / some of the questions asked may make you feel uncomfortable. If this happens, you are welcome not to answer.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Cynthia

Researcher:

Cynthia Philile Mahlalela, 2626389@Students.wits.ac.za, 079 048 8268

Supervisor:

Dr Sindi Msimango, sindi.msimango@wits.ac.za, 011 717-3519

Prof Kwandiwe Kondlo, kwandiwe.kondlo@wits.ac.za

APPENDIX D: PERMISSION LETTER

Nkomazi Local Municipality

9Park Street- Malalane
Private Bag X101
Malalane
1320
Tel: 013 7900245/6/7
Fax: 013 7900886
Customer care no: 013900990
Email:gabby.nkosi@nkomazi.gov.za

OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL MANAGER

Enq: Mr AR Rana
Cell: 083 268 4457

To : The Research Department
WITS School of Governance
Parktown Management Campus
2st David's Place, Parktown
JOHANNESBURG

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: LETTER OF APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT NKOMAZI LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

The above matter refers

1. This letter serves to confirm that **Ms. Mahlalela Cynthia Phillile** who is currently studying towards her **Master of Management and Government** and conducting research towards completion of her thesis titled "*The effectiveness of ward committee in enhancing participation at Mbuzini in the Nkomazi Local Municipality*.
2. The Office of the Municipal Manager hereby commit to assist **Ms. CP Mahlalela** with any information that she may require and also avail officials assigned with Training and Skills Development to work with her as and when need arises.
3. We hope after completing the research she will be equally so to graduate towards her Master Degree and the research findings and recommendations be of benefit to the Nkomazi Local municipality.

We hope this letter will serve the purpose as requirements by the University of the Witwatersrand and please do not hesitate to contact our office should there be any further information needed as a requirement by the University.

Our office wishes Ms Mahlalela all the best in her academic studies.

Yours in good governance

Mr XT Mabila

Municipal Manager

Date: 29 / 07 **/2024**

APPENDIX E: ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE: WSG-2024-02

PROJECT TITLE: The effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation at Mbuzini, Nkomazi local municipality

INVESTIGATOR	Cynthia Philile Mahlalela
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	School of Governance
DATE CONSIDERED	30 January 2024
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal Risk
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the Research Report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 25 February 2024

CHAIRPERSON Rekgotsofetse Chikane
Rekgotsofetse Chikane

cc: Supervisor: Dr Sindi Msimango

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

Date 26/02/2024

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

APPENDIX F: EDITOR'S LETTER

Nikki Watkins
Editing/proofreading services
Cell: 072 060 2354 E-mail: nikki.watkins.pe@gmail.com

15 January 2025

To whom it may concern

This letter confirms that I have copy-edited and proofread the master's thesis

The effectiveness of ward committees in enhancing public participation at Mbuzini, Nkomazi Local Municipality

by

Cynthia Philile Mahlalela

Accredited Text Editor

Professional EDITORS Guild 30 1993–2023
Promoting excellence in editing

Nikki Watkins
Associate Member

Membership number: WAT003
Membership year: March 2023 to February 2024

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nikki.watkins.pe@gmail.com

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