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Rethinking public participation at the local level: a comparative analysis of Elias Motswaledi and Steve Tshwete local municipalities

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University of the Witwatersrand

Rethinking Public Participation at Local Level:

A Comparative Analysis of Elias Motswaledi and

Steve Tshwete Local Municipalities

Sebote Thabitha Matladi

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment, School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Science in Development Planning.

Johannesburg, February 2008

DECLARATION

I, Sebote Thabitha Matladi, declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Science in Development Planning at the University of Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Signed by:
Sebote Thabitha Matladi

February , 2008.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Interviewees (government officials at both Municipalities and the focus groups)

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ABSTRACT

This study has assessed the role of public participation in effective and efficient local governance at two local municipalities of Elias Motswaledi and Steve Tshwete in South Africa. Public participation is a pillar of development and therefore important to assess the successes and failures thereof. Government invest huge resources to deliver public service to their citizens and it is through public participation that the beneficiaries of these services can be guaranteed public service' quality and responsiveness. Interviews with key informants in local government and focus groups provided a better understanding of the situation in the two case study areas. Elias Motswaledi has provided a classical challenge of public participation with the reluctance of the community to participate in the development processes and also with projects that do not benefit the majority of the residents; whereas at Steve Tshwete the community is actively engaged in major decision making processes and have also assisted the council in delivering relevant projects and programmes that are responsive to the community needs. The study found that the government has to relook: 1. the relationship between ward committees and community development workers as this was found to be the major contributing factor to poor levels of public participation. 2. There is an urgent need for building capacity for both local communities and ward communities to enable them to effectively participate in developmental processes that affect them. The study also showed how poor public participation initiatives have negatively affected service delivery and development initiatives at local levels in South Africa. This comparative case study maybe useful in shedding some insight in addressing public participation in local government to overcome the relatively weak or low municipal capacity across South Africa.

Key Words: South Africa, capacity, community development workers, development, Integrated Development Planning, Local government, policy, skills, ward committees.

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