1. Introduction

Local government plays a major role in the provision of basic services, as a requirement to maintain a reasonable standard of living. Over the past few years, municipalities have been faced with challenges of providing equitable public service delivery throughout the Country, and as such this led to protests over service delivery. What might have triggered these protests could originate from a variety of reasons ranging from misaligned local governing structures to the lack of public participation by the community members in decision making.

To strengthen democracy, the South African government established the ward committee system in December 2000, with the intention of improving service delivery by bridging the gap between the respective communities and the municipal structures. Among others, ward committees, should be able to enhance participatory government, by collectively organising communities in as far as ward jurisdiction is concerned (Smith, 2008: 13).

Albeit the municipal challenges, ward committees should be able to encourage and formulate programmes that promote public participation, so that the municipal council can be in a better position when making decisions, so as to ensure better service delivery. Public participation is essentially a process where communities are engaged from the planning to the implementation and the evaluation phases of a particular activity or a project (Draai and Taylor, 2009: 114).

From the above, it can be understood that in every municipal development plan, consultation of the community is of importance. As highlighted before, a proper mechanism that has the potential to ensure an effective process of public participation should be in existence. As a result of this, the establishment of ward committees, should enable the communities to take charge of the participation process, and according to Draai and Taylor (2009: 114), this will result in the transfer of skills, knowledge and ownership of the process to the local community. In addition to this, Napier (2008: 163) suggests that, in solving the dilemma of service delivery in municipalities, the ward committees structure, should have the intention of increasing the involvement of people in the making of decisions in the local government sphere.
The paper will analyse the functionality of the ward committees, as well as the composition and duties, thereof. This research paper is driven by the participatory role that the community should play, through the facilitation by ward committees. Furthermore a comparative study in terms of the best functioning municipalities as well as those plagued with elements of dissatisfaction from its residents, and the functionality of their ward committees, is explored. A comparative analysis of ward committees within the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality will be used as a case study. Among a plethora of issues raised, suggestions are further proposed as an attempt to overcome the service delivery challenges.

2. Ward committees in South Africa
A ward committee is an area based committee whose boundaries coincide with ward boundaries. These committees have no original duties, legislative and executive powers; hence they are established as committees that play an advisory role to the council (White Paper on Local Government, 1998: 64).

As a historical background, in South Africa, the notion of ward committees was first introduced in the Cape of Good Hope when the Burghers (ordinary citizens) pressed for a greater share in the government of the Colony in the 18th century. These wards were governed by the Wardmasters, whose responsibilities were to firstly keep a register of persons residing in their areas (wards) and secondly to report to the committee of the high court on particular municipal and criminal matters. However, it later became evident that the role of the Wardmasters evolved into a particular relation, where a contact between the people and the municipal Commissioners was promoted. These Commissioners were members of the committee of the high court where laws were made and executed (Craythorne, 1997: 126-127).

It is evident that ward committees are regarded as the mechanisms through which public participation in local government is made possible. Ward committees should serve the purpose of representation, i.e. promoting local participatory democracy. As a result, the rationale for their establishment is to ensure the necessary contact between the communities and the government institutions, and further provide the support to the elected councillor to represent a specific sector in the municipal council, in terms of Part 4 of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998.

3. The establishment of the ward committees
Local government plays an important role in enforcing municipal, provincial and national government policies within municipalities to ensure effective and accountable service delivery in a relative smaller jurisdiction. It is through this approach that wards are established. A ward committee should comprise the councillor and persons representing women, youth, religious groups, sports
and welfare, environment, education, community-based organisations, ratepayers associations, traditional leaders, the disabled, informal traders’ association, employment agricultural associations and community safety forums. However, the committee must not exceed 10 members (Reddy and Sikhakane, 2008: 681). It is also important to note that only registered voters belonging to a particular ward may be elected to form part of the concerned ward committee. Other qualifications could be made through a municipal by-law, which would describe the criteria to be followed when instituting, functioning and managing the ward committees.

Section 73 of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998: Act 117 of 1998, contends that the councillor of a particular ward, by default, becomes the chairperson of the ward committee concerned. A ward committee is therefore not a political forum, and as such it should not be composed of the members of one interest group or only a political party to which the councillor may be affiliated. This is important because, the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998: Act 117 of 1998 under section 73(3) states that the representation of gender and diversity of interests within a particular ward are compulsory. As a result, public participation stands out to be an important element in local government through which the municipality via a ward committee could be in a better position to deliver the required goods and services, as expected by the municipal community.

Section 72 (1) of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998: Act 117 of 1998 determines that in local government, the sphere closest to the people, ward committees can only be established within the metropolitan and local municipalities of a special type. These are the municipalities in category A as well as the category B (Section 8 and 9 of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998: Act 117 of 1998). Furthermore, Section 72(3) of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998: Act 117 of 1998, declares that the objective of the ward committees is the enhancement of participatory democracy in local government.

Most municipalities have established ward committees in order to comply with the legislation in realising the notion of community participation. Some municipalities have chosen to refer to these community participation structures as development forums, residents associations or ward forums and intend to utilise them for the similar purposes practiced by ward committees (Putu, 2006: 14 and City of Cape Town, 2010).

In 2009, the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) released a report on the State of Local Government. In this report it was established that within the 283 municipalities in South Africa, 3 895 wards were demarcated. In all the wards, except for the Western Cape Province, the ward
committees have been established, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The Establishment of Ward Committees per province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Number of Metropolitan Municipalities</th>
<th>Number of Local Municipalities</th>
<th>Number of Wards</th>
<th>Number of established ward committees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>6 527 747</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>2 773 059</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauteng</td>
<td>10 451 713</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>10 259 230</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limpopo</td>
<td>5 238 286</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>513</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td>3 643 435</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cape</td>
<td>1 058 060</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>3 271 948</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Cape</td>
<td>5 278 585</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48 502 063</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>3 895</td>
<td>3 790</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted: CoGTA (2009: 14)

It has not been clear as to the reason for the Western Cape Province not being able to establish the ward committees in the municipalities. Their failure could range from the perception that ward committees are illegitimate, under-resourced and have no delegated legislative and executive authority to make decisions (Naidu, 2008: 86).

For a municipality, to effectively involve the public in determining the required public need, ward committees should be able to facilitate public participation. This will assist municipalities in identifying the goods and services, required by the municipal communities, as well as to assist in the establishment and the advancement of the integrated development plan (IDP). As such the need for a formulation of an integrated development plan arises, so as to effectively develop a mechanism to identify community needs and priorities, and design administrative and managerial practices to fill the needs.

4. The role of the ward committees in local government: Public Participation as a panacea for a sustainable, effective service delivery

The South African government in a democratic epoch faces a major challenge of ensuring that municipalities provide optimal and professional services to the citizens of heterogeneous cultures (Pretorius and Schurink, 2007: 19). In so
doing it would be imperative for the authorities to receive a mandate from the citizens’ concerned on their collective needs. As a result public participation stands out to be the most effective method to be used in gathering the needs of the said communities, and as legislated (Chapter 4 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000: Act 32 of 2000) community participation, therefore becomes an obligation, within which municipalities must fulfil. As a legitimate right of all the citizens, particularly those who were previously disadvantaged, Pretorius and Schurink (2007: 19) are of the view that access to effective public service can not be an advantage enjoyed by the privileged alone.

Public participation forms the basis for an integrated development plan (IDP). As a result, ward committees serve as a pertinent channel of communication through which communities inform municipal councils about their needs, wants and problems. Naidu (2008: 86) is of the belief that the present structure and form of ward committees in South Africa is dysfunctional and, as such, it has weakened the role that participation plays in the municipal structure. This failure could be ascribed to various reasons including:

- the lack of credibility by ward committee members to influence decision making;
- the lack of commitment by ward committee members in their endeavours. Some ward committee members perceive ward committees as a stepping-stone towards their political ambition; and,
- power relations, i.e. political interference undermine the role of ward committees. A ward councillor is a politically elected representative, and by default is the chairperson of a ward committee. The councillor as a ward representative in a municipal council has the potential to promote partisan interest.

However, in 2003 government made great strides in attempting to augment the functioning of ward committees through the introduction of the Community Development Workers (CDWs). Community Development Workers are public servants who are assigned to municipalities to ensure the delivery of services by government, through the utilisation of the multi-skills they have acquired. The introduction of the CDWs created problems, as ward committee members often perceive the CDWs as a duplicate of what ward committees ought to do, except that the CDWs are provided remuneration and that they are assigned to specific wards by the provincial government. Basically the CDWs assist communities within which they reside, by integrating the entire government departments to accelerate access to those
services by the communities (DPSA, 2007: 14).

It is important to acknowledge that, the system of ward committees operates within the local government sphere; as a result, ward committees would aim at promoting the goals that municipalities seek to achieve. Therefore, the significance of investigating the role of local government, through municipalities, becomes imperative. Municipalities are assigned with the task of ensuring that the administration of services will result in a collective effort to pursue the endeavours as the municipal community deems fit and proper.

4.1 Integrated development planning

Notwithstanding the legacies of apartheid, the disparity in terms of service provision by municipalities is still a major concern. It therefore becomes important for municipalities to integrate their services and development activities with those of the other spheres of government, thus achieving the principles of co-operative government as envisioned by the Constitution, 1996. Hence the emergence of a process within which co-ordinated planning and the management of policies take place and this process is called the integrated development plan (Craythorne, 2003: 149-150). An integrated development plan is a mechanism that involves the entire community in finding the best possible solution to achieve long term development through municipal strategic planning. An integrated development plan helps to (ETU, undated):

- ensure the effective use of scarce resources in municipalities;
- speed up service delivery;
- attract additional funds;
- strengthen democracy;
- overcome the legacy of apartheid;
- promote co-ordination between local, provincial and national government.

It should be noted that the role of ward committees is three-fold, and communities through their ward committees are central to, firstly, the creation of an integrated development plan, secondly, the management of municipal performance and thirdly, the municipal budgeting process. However, all these processes are interrelated, for instance, through an integrated development plan, the municipal budgeting is done in seeking to achieve the identified key development priorities, and performance management is inevitable, because an appropriate system is needed to realise the municipal vision and mission (DPLG and GTZ, 2005: 57). Naidu (2008: 91) alludes to the fact that a clear service delivery plan should be the bottom line for all the integrated development plans. It will therefore be through the priorities made in an integrated development plan that municipalities be held accountable by their constituencies, for the achievement or failure to achieve and the reasons thereof.

In other words, the so called service delivery protests could be traced back to
the participation of the community in the processes of integrated development plan.

The idea of enhancing public participation in municipalities was developed from the view that, through ward-based planning, strategic priorities of municipalities as well as the development of the municipal action plan targets are achieved. Through these ward-based development plans, communities have an opportunity to ensure that the Integrated Development Plan addresses the priorities and the concerns of all sectors within a ward (Institute for Performance Management, 2007).

In a report commissioned by an Ad hoc Committee on service delivery, through the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, it was established that about 25% of the municipalities across the country experienced service delivery protests. Furthermore, these protests did not occur across the entire municipalities, but only in specific wards, moreover within which the disadvantaged resides (CoGTA, 2010: 6).

Public service delivery is defined as the end product of a chain of plans and actions involving municipal and provincial plans as well as the national budget, by a range of stakeholders through local consultations (Kagwanja and Kondlo, 2009: 156). Thus, service delivery can be regarded as the goods and services that the government is expected to provide in ensuring the sustainable livelihoods of its citizens.

As structural as it is, an integrated development plan, aligns the key priorities of a specific ward in accordance with the urgency of the need as expected by the community, i.e. if a community list the need for; (1) access to electricity, (2) access to primary health care, and (3) library facilities, it is the responsibility of the municipality through its budget consultations to ensure the delivery of such public services in that prioritised manner. The achievement of such needs will therefore mean that expected services by the community would have been delivered.

5. The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality ward committees

The involvement of the civil society in government is gaining prominence internationally, hence the need for regulations on the management and administration of structures aiming to enhance such a process. In achieving its aims and objectives, the ward committee system in the City of Tshwane effectively utilises the executive mayor’s office and the office of the speaker for structural support (City of Tshwane, ward committees, undated: 2).

5.1 Executive mayor system in the City of Tshwane

The executive mayoral system can be established in category A, B and C municipalities with a mayoral executive system, which might be combined with
either a sub-council participatory system or a ward participatory system, or both as per Section 54 of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998, Act 117 of 1998. The City of Tshwane is the administrative capital of South Africa and is a Category A municipality. It is located in the north-western corner of Gauteng Province covering an area of 2 198 km$^2$ almost 65 km in length and 50 km in width, which is approximately 13% of the Province's surface. As a background, it is important to note that the City of Tshwane is the second largest municipality in Gauteng, thus identifying it as one of the six metropolitan municipalities in South Africa. The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality consist of 13 municipal areas (CTMM Annual Report, 2008/2009: 8).

The City of Tshwane as a metropolitan municipality has drafted a by-law on ward committees. This draft by-law confirms the municipality’s intention of establishing a policy which gives direction in as far as the enhancement of active public participation by ward committees is concerned (City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, Draft By-law, ). As noted above, the ward committees are established as committees and as such they operate under delegated authority from the metropolitan council.

The City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality has 686 640 households with 28.7% of them being informal dwellings. In terms of basic services, a need arises for an urgent intervention by implementing a strategic plan that attempts to eradicate backlogs. Among others, the municipality has a lot of improvement to be done, i.e. proper sanitation, access to clean water and access to safe and secure electricity (Local Government: Turn Around Strategy, 2009: 71).

6. Common Challenges facing Ward Committees
The common challenges that ward committees are faced with, have a potential to negatively impact on the progress of municipalities, as ward committees serve as a structural communication mechanism of the municipality. This means that through ward committees, the community members have a platform to raise issues that concern government within their jurisdictional boundaries. Since their inception, some ward committees had not been effective, (Reddy and Sikhakane, 2008: 680). Among the challenges that were discovered, the ineffectiveness of participation can be related to illiteracy, ignorance and the lack of interest of the local residents. As a result of illiteracy, an inferiority complex tends to prevail as people generally become afraid to participate in municipal affairs, arguing that they cannot make any worthwhile contribution (Fourie, 2001: 222). The lack of participation by the residents, could lead to an ineffective participatory structure, which then has a great potential of deviating from the integrated development plans’ priorities.
7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Taking into cognisance the socio-political environment within which local government functions in South Africa, it is important to *firstly* emphasise the training and development of the residents on when, how and why they should participate in municipal affairs. Failure to do so, often results in the residents not knowing how their lack of participation can negatively impact on the decision making processes of the municipality. Consequently, the ineffectiveness of such a participatory structure would have direct negative impact on the democratic character of the Republic of South Africa (Reddy and Sikhakane, 2008: 682-683).

*Secondly,* a review of the system of ward committees is needed. Ward committee members do not take the initiations and programmes of the committees serious, this has a significant impact as the committee serve as a communication mechanism between the structures and institutions of government and the people. Perhaps ward committee members, should be remunerated for the work they are doing, as well as be given power to make decisions for their respective wards. It could further be argued that the role of the CDWs be changed to that which will play an oversight and monitory role to the functioning of ward committees. However, this would require that ward committees get remunerated.

*Thirdly,* it is important for the municipality to formalise processes of ward committees, because through a perceived legitimate ward committee, it is inevitable that community members will converse and subsequently participate in their government. Their participation will assist the municipal councils in providing them with the expectation of their respective communities.

In summary, ward committees are still relevant stakeholders in bridging the communication gap between the municipal councils and the communities they govern. As it provides for, a platform for engagement on the issues that concerns the government and its processes, ward committees are in a better position to represent the genuine views of their communities. Interestingly, the Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs through its minister, has made its intentions clear of reforming the system of ward committees in South Africa, and through this, the composition, functions, and term of office are some of the aspects to be reviewed. This has a potential to enable, an effective, efficient and a sustainable delivery of public services.

8. References


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