

Participatory Communication in the IDP (Integrate Development Plan) Context of Local Government: Case Study of Matlosana Municipality, South Africa

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Abstract : Much is written on the importance of participatory communication and its role in uplifting indigent communities. As the closest government sphere to communities, local government is charged with directly improving the lives of the poor and is required by legislation to conduct Integrated Development Planning (IDP). This requires a municipality to utilise participatory communication aspects including dialogue, empowerment, and planning. These are most important pillars of community development. However, many studies have warned that elements such as modernisation, dependency and bureaucracy need to be observed with caution since they have the potential to impede and limit the extent of participatory communication in community development. These concepts serve as the basic points of departure and theoretical background underpinning this study, which is tasked with exploring the extent of participatory communication in the IDP context of Jouberton Township in the Matlosana Local Municipality, South Africa. In her public address on challenges facing South Africa's local municipalities in January 2014, former premier, Thandi Modise, emphasised the need for communities to attend municipal IDP meetings, approve earmarked IDP projects, and learn about municipal budget spending. It is evident from theory and higher echelon of government that participatory communication is seen as cardinal to the existence of municipal government. From this background, this study was carried out under the assumption that the practice of participatory communication in contemporary local government only exists on paper; while in reality the public does not enjoy active participation in municipal IDP consultative frameworks. This is despite much discourse being available in government and in academia around the importance of participatory communication in community development. The study espoused a qualitative research approach to gather data and purposive sampling was used to select respondents linked to two IDP projects in Jouberton Township from the 2012/13 financial year. Its purpose was to explore perceptions among municipal representatives and community members in Jouberton Township on the extent of participatory communication in the IDP context. The empirical part of the study comprised of focus group, unstructured interviews, and participant observation. The study revealed that Jouberton communities are passive participators in municipal IDP consultative frameworks where they participate by just being informed about what is going to happen or has already happened and feedback is minimal. This is opposed to a desired form of empowered participation which is recommended by scholars in development communication where stakeholders granted space to participate in joint analysis and joint decision-making about what should be achieved and how. It has been discovered that there is a lack of active participation in community development in the IDP context of Matlosana Municipality and the study makes recommendations on how transformative participatory communication can be applied to improve current norms and standards in local government.

Keywords : development communication, government communication, integrated development plan, participatory communication

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