

FORGING DEMOCRACY FROM BELOW: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Sybert Mutereko, PhD

Department of Public Governance, School of Management, IT and Governance,
University of Kwazulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. Emails: fatilej@ukzn.ac.za; muterekos@ukzn.ac.za

Jacob Olufemi Fatile, PhD

Department of Public Governance, School of Management, IT and Governance,
University of Kwazulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. Email: jacob.fatile@lasu.edu.ng

Korede Ibrahim Hassan

Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences,
Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria. Email: hassankorede00@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that absence of functional structures that can be harbinger of governance and democracy from below have undermined community participation and quality representation at the Ward Committees, local communities, Community Development Associations (CDAs) and Community Development Committees (CDC) in most developing countries. This article examines how community participation and engagement have forged democracy from below with specific references to Lagos State, Nigeria and eThekweni Municipality in South Africa. The article is anchored on democratic governance theory and qualitative combined with a case study approach was used. It utilised descriptive-comparative research method to analyse data collected from secondary sources such as journals, articles, textbooks, newspapers, government publications, and internet materials. The article reveals that community engagement at the local level can foster democracy by enhancing governance through effective public service delivery. It also observes that this can be achieved through deliberative practices that seek citizens' participation in governmental and policy process. It argues that political sensitization is necessary at various levels at the grassroots to increase the awareness of the citizens on local participation and in electing credible candidates to represent them in government. The article concludes that writing and sending bills to the National Parliament, National Assembly, or Provincial or State Houses of Assembly by the local communities, ward committees, CDC, and CDA's will forge democracy from below and this can be achieved through the engagement of politicians who are members of these local communities. The paper suggests that democracy can only be strengthened in Nigeria and South Africa provided the enabling structures like local communities, ward committees, CDC and CDA's are functional and made to be part of the democratic system where their inputs will be considered when it comes to the public policy processes. Also, allocating at least a slot to each of these local committees or bodies will engender equitable legislative process and enhance democracy from below in developing countries.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Forging democracy from below as a concept has gained enormous popularity in academic discourse in recent times. Democracy entails citizen involvement in government affairs. Democracy from below is “an integral part of local democracy as it seeks to deepen local participation by examining the assumptions that generally hinders the realization of a genuine participatory democracy” (Nzimakwe and Reddy 2008:667; Tau, 2013:146). In the view of Tanaka (2007), public participation can be described as an essential element of democracy because it allows citizens to be actively involved government affairs. Hence, “public participation can be regarded as an important component of democracy that involves stakeholders at all levels of the society” (Diedericks, 2013). The essence of public consultation, public engagement, and

public participation in local government affairs and public policy in a democratic system cannot be underestimated (Williamson, 2014).

Forging democracy aims to engage individuals at the grassroots that are outside government through political networks such as election, public hearing and town hall meetings among others. Reddy (2010) states that this “kind of democracy is an opportunity for the marginalized groups to empower themselves and also the privileged groups to act as local “citizen representatives” as they articulate the interests of their people at the grassroots”. Okon (2019) asserts that “democracy from below is a form of citizen participation in the governmental process designed to support and facilitate increased in public access to information about governmental activities and also to allow for public participation on policy issues affecting them”. Jose (2015) argues that there is a “growing recognition that citizen participation should be based on a more elaborate and diverse institutions, principles and methods”. According to Ayilara (2015:118) this form of “democracy propagates fairer allocation of resources, equal distribution of political power, establishment of collaborative partnerships, decentralization of decision-making processes, development of a wide and transparent exchange of knowledge and information, with emphasis on greater accountability and inter-institutional dialogue at the local level”. In his view, all these measures are targeted at creating relationships based much more on trust and reciprocity rather than deceit, advocacy and strategic behavior.

Local government, community participation, citizen engagements, and deliberations are niche factors that are revolutionising participatory government especially during the electioneering process (Fayemi, 2019). The article therefore focuses on how community participation and engagement have forged democracy from below in Nigeria and South Africa. In South Africa, democracy from below agitation is traceable to the period of apartheid up to the early 1990s. Tau (2013:154) asserts that as at 1994 in the country, “the opportunity to vote at elections cemented democratic governance and extended the right to participate in government affairs to the citizens”. Subsequently, Kersting (2012:35) is of the opinion that “public participation was immortalised by the 1996 Constitution, which stipulates that government policies should reflect ‘the will of the people’”. Lane (2005:283) on his part opines that citizen participation which is “an aspect of democracy is now a common feature in public policy making and implementation in South Africa”. According to him, one of the essential feature of modern democracy is citizen participation in the public policy process. Citizens are able to influence the direction of public policy rather than a situation where the elected representatives and policy makers will be the sole decision makers (Lane, 2005:285). It is an indisputable fact that the shift from apartheid government to governance in South Africa most especially at the grassroots has created opportunities for the disadvantaged communities to participate in decisions that affect them (Tshishonga & Mabambo, 2008). It must be noted however that in South Africa, just like in Nigeria, most people have been excluded from participating in decision making. It must be emphasized that only the political bourgeoisie that have the opportunity of participating in decision making as citizens are excluded in most cases. Thus, despite the inroads made following the establishment of democratic government in 1994 in South Africa, majority of the citizens are still trapped in the vicious circle of poverty and are unable to have a voice to impact developmental change.

There is a general agreement among scholars that democracy from below is still not a reality in both Nigeria and South Africa because the two countries have civilian rule rather than democratic system of government (Tshishonga & Mabambo, 2008; Kersting, 2012; Alaba, 2017). The rationale behind this postulation is that there are limitations to rule of law; civil and political liberties, free and fair elections; civic associations and among others ethos of democracy at the national level not to talk of the local government level (Alaba, 2017). Government programmes and policies operate top-down instead of bottom-up which invariably means that most of the policies and programs are enunciated from the government as they are imposed on the citizens with little or no inputs, participation, and engagement from them in Nigeria.

It is a truism that public participation is intertwined with local democracy, grassroots development and good governance. According to White Paper on Local Government (1998a), developmental local government is the government committed, working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their economic, material and social needs and also to improve the quality of their lives. There is no doubt that the developmental local government will encourages municipalities, ward committees, local government areas, CDC, CDAs and communities as we have them in the two countries to work together for the development of the local areas. The central issue being considered in this article therefore is to examine the role and potential of organizations of community participation at the grassroots as effective administrative, participatory and decision-making structures capable of responding to the problems of the various communities and the nation as a whole. What roles were they playing, or might they play in the process of political, economic and social transformation as well as the empowerment of the people at the local level? This discourse is relevant as it seeks to give a comparative perspective on the extent to which democracy below has influenced citizen participation in decision making process in Lagos State, Nigeria and eThekweni municipality in South Africa.

Lagos is a city and one of the 36 states of Nigeria located in the Southwest geo-political zone and the population is estimated at 14,368,000 and the citizens are spread across 377 wards (UN, World Population Prospects, 2020). The local council in each of the 57 Local Government and Local Council Development Area (LCDA) is the legislative body which serves as representative body elected by people. eThekweni Municipality on the other hand is situated in the eastern side of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa covering about 3539 km². eThekweni Municipality is the only metropolitan municipality in the KZN Province and has the highest population in the province. The Municipality has a population of 3.44 million (Statistics

South Africa; National Census, 2020). The municipality's strategic goals include the need to develop the economy and the people, as well as to institutionalize public participation by strengthening democratic governance.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The idea of democracy from below has been in the front burner of debates on local governance for several decades in Africa. "Democratic decentralization entails values related to freedom, safety, tolerance, recognition, and political engagement" (Boudreau, 2003:794). To Adejumobi (2000), decentralization is seen as a sustaining force for political competition at the grassroots that ensures accountability and efficient delivery of local services in both developing and developed societies. Scholars like Yakubu (2016) also observes that absence of democracy at the core in Africa is one of the major factors militating against Africa's development, a continent endowed with abundant human and capital resources. Thus, local democratization is an important factor in democratization at the local level and it does not only entails participation in local elections, but "involvement of the local interests, groups and civil associations in the process of governance" (Adejumobi, 2000:56).

In an effort to promote participatory democracy in South Africa, ward committees were introduced which serves as a link between local municipalities and communities. The laws that back up these structures are contained in Section 72 of the Local Government in South Africa: Municipal Structures Act, 117 of 1998. According to the Municipal Structures Act (1998), the objective of a ward committee is to enhance participatory democracy at the grassroots. Thus, in South Africa, the ward committees play a crucial role of promoting participatory democracy. However, this is far from reality in terms of practice. Tshishonga and Mabambo (2008) argues that available evidence reveals that municipal officials in different parts of the country are more comfortable performing functions the way they used to do before democratic dispensation in the country. Such mindsets, no doubt, serves as a major setback to the attainment of people centered development. In Nigeria, citizens are supposed to be adequately represented in democratic rule as this serves as one of the pivotal roles played by the local communities, CDC and CDA's in forging democracy at the grassroots. These bodies are not meant to discuss the interest of homeowners alone at the community association meetings, but to also discuss on how they can forge and engage their members in civic responsibility, protection from extortion either by the State or Local Governments in terms of levies, dues or taxes imposition (Okon, 2019). It is instructive to note that these bodies also collaborate with security agents in the formulation and implementation of security policies as part of their civic engagement. Besides, "they are involved in the provision of social amenities such as the construction of drainage, building of schools and community library, provision of boreholes water at the local level" (Ayilara, 2015:145). However, there are a lot of uncertainties over the functions of CDAs and CDCs in Nigeria which have made it impossible for them to discharge their developmental mandate of enhancing participatory democracy in local sphere like the ward committees in South Africa.

According to Kersting (2012:7), in South Africa, "Ward forums and Integrated Development Planning (IDP) are some of the platforms that promote democracy in local municipalities". However, the major problem being faced by eThekweni Municipality and most ward committees is lack of capacity building programmes for councillors and ward committee members. Also, members who serve on ward committees are not adequately remunerated and this has discouraged them from performing their mandates. Also, since most members of ward committees are not actively involved in the democratic process because they seem not fully understand the operation of the local government system (Ababio, 2007 & Venter in Van der Walddt, 2014). Thus, there are evidences in the extant literature to show that local participation is still seriously inhibited in the country. The Taung Daily News (2015) reported that "the Ward Committee and South African National Civic Organisation members have complained that public participation is in a dormant state because the councilors have not been holding regular consultations with their wards". Apart from this, ward committees are mere advisory structures and their views are usually disregarded by the municipality. Thus, the relationship between the municipality and ward committees is skewed in a top-down manner such that the ward committees are merely seen as structures useful in disseminating information to the local residents. This explains why some committee members have complained that public participation is not given the deserved attention at the local level (Taung Daily News, 2015).

Apart from lack of financial support for these local committees which limits their participation in public policy making process in Nigeria, the civil society organisations and the press have also failed to strengthen Nigeria democratic process from below because of the absence of autonomy in their agitation and operations as they serve as tools and machinery in the hand of the political gladiators. Similarly, participatory democracy South Africa in the view of Ababio (2007:615) can be described as a conscious move to counter the separatism that existed during apartheid. There is no doubt that these local organizations do not constitute meaningful participatory institutions of empowerment as citizens at the grassroots are unable to influence policy making and implementation processes.

Kaufman (1997:350) opines that "local community represents a potential locus of change that offers the possibility of bringing together individuals in a unitary way that overcomes divisions based on age, sex, political orientation, and sometimes ethnicity or class". However, the local communities which are supposed to be the harbinger of governance and promoter of democracy from below have suffered from absence of non-functional structures at ward committees, local communities, CDC and CDA'S which serve as a major barrier to having elected representatives to represent them in government. This development no doubt has undermined community participation at the grassroots in Nigeria and South Africa.

A review of the extant literature on community participation in Africa such as the works of Kersting (2012), Reddy (2010) Okon (2019), Ayilara (2015), Fayemi (2019), Lane, (2005), Tanaka (2007) and Abati (2018) et al, among others indicate that there is dearth of literature particularly in comparative analysis of citizens' participation through deliberate engagement. Thus, much of the researches on democracy from below have failed to address the problems and imperatives of crafting community participation in Africa and developing countries in general using comparative approach. This is necessary so as to provide a detailed analysis on how the existing structures can effectively be strengthened through Acts of Parliament or appropriate legislative frameworks necessary to promote the participation of local communities, CDAs, CDCs and ward committees in government through their elected representatives at various levels of governance. Consequently, dearth of comprehensive scholarly literature on the comparative analysis of participatory democracy through deliberate engagement in developing countries leave practitioners and policymakers in grassroots democracy and governance with no basis for making evidence-based decisions since our understanding of such is based mainly on speculation or conjecture. Without such understandings, it will be difficult to appreciate the challenges facing community participation in Africa and without community participation, democratic government will cease to exist. Considering the relevance of public participation in the development of local councils and municipalities, this paper seeks to put democracy from below in comparative perspectives with particular reference to Lagos State, Nigeria and eThekweni Municipality in South Africa.

2. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

2.1 The concept of Democracy

The origin of democracy is traceable to the ancient Greece. According to Campbell (2008), Demos refers to 'people' while kratos stands for 'power', 'rule', and 'strength'. In his view, democracy is a Greek term that can be interpreted to mean 'rule by the people' or popular government. Guo (2006) and Liu (2012: 184) describes democracy as a concept that is capable of different interpretations and "has been subject to conflicting interpretations leading to confusion and vagueness" (Guo, 2006; Liu, 2012: 184). Arend Lijphart, an American Political Scientist, in his comparative studies of patterns of democracy, observes that the Westminster model based on the British parliamentary system as possibly the best example of democracy (Lijphart, 2012 & Liu, 2012). Westminster model which is otherwise known as "majoritarian democracy", can be described as government elected by a simple majority of the voters to govern according to their will and interest. However, the fact that the minority are excluded based on the principle of "competition and opposition", the majoritarian system is gradually becoming ineffective in emerging societies where such model is adopted due to conflicts and prolonged chaos associated with it (Liu, 2012). Another type of democracy is the Consensus model is another type of democracy which in the view of Liu (2012:184 -185), "maximizes the opportunity to participate in government decision-making and builds democratic consensus on government policies". The scholar observes that the two features attributable to the above mentioned theoretical and practical models of democracy which originated in Western Europe include, 'government by the people' - governments made up of elected representatives of the people and 'government for the people' - government actions based on the interests and will of the people.

The foregoing discussion reaffirms Abraham Lincoln's definition that democracy is government of the people, by the people and for the people. The implication is that public participation is an important feature of democratic state since "values are sustained by the wishes of the people because government is at the people's service" (Fayemi, 2009:65). Thus, democracy, "serves as a veritable avenue through which the purpose for which the local government is created can be achieved" (Fatile & Okewale, 2013:134). Muronda (2017:35) also opines that "democratic order safeguards the interests of the citizens by giving them the authority to determine who represents them". He argues further that citizens have the opportunity to influence government policies because their representatives are elected based on their ability to represent the interests of the constituencies.

2.2 Conceptualising Democracy From Below

In the view of Reddy (2010:211) democracy from below is "central to the attainment of a local democracy as it ensures that the local government fulfills its developmental obligations" (Reddy, 2010:211). Thus, the scholar observes that the growth of local democracy is "an avenue through which all the citizens, especially the marginalised ones, can seek redress and better their living circumstances by contributing to developmental policies" (Reddy, 2010:312). A government is considered undemocratic whenever community representatives are excluded in policy making process. Hence, a government is said to be transparent, accountable and participatory, if "it relies on direct and continued participation by the public in formulating and implementing government policies" (Camay and Gordon, 2014:17). More so, democracy from below introduces aspects of direct democracy into modern societies and also retains citizens' prerogative to participate in decision-making activities that have a bearing on their daily existence (Nwankwo, 2018). Okon (2019) further asserts that community influence exerted through public participation contributes to sound management practices in local public institutions. There is no doubt that continuous public engagement in public affairs encourages public officials to focus on their mandate which is primarily to satisfy the needs of the people at the grassroots and raising the standard of living of the citizens. Hence, community-based organisations (CBOs) like CDAs, CDCs, ward committees, as well as civil society organisations are some of the structures through which local democracy can be achieved.

It is therefore appropriate to say that democracy from below affords citizens at the grassroots the opportunity of participating in local government affairs, most especially in the decision-making processes. Thus, local democracy puts the community at the epicentre of local democratic processes. Nzimakwe and Reddy (2008:574) opines that “local democracy fills the gaps left behind by elected political representatives and this means that it complements representative democracy”. Amao (2018) argues that direct community participation in local government takes place alongside institutions of representative democracy and thus the two should not be separated or viewed in isolation because they are complementary strategies aimed at achieving maximum and extensive community involvement in local government affairs. Thus, local government legislation should be tilted towards engaging the local people in the various communities in local affairs. Nwankwo (2018) also opines that “community members have a right to be part of the democratic processes in their locality and that CDCs, CDAs and ward committees etc. are readily accessible mechanisms that enable local communities to participate in government affairs”.

The conceptualisation of democracy from below reveals that the local community, ward committees, CDC, and CDA's participation is meant to strengthen the democratic process. In South Africa, Castillo (2013:5) and Tau (2013:130) observes that “democracy from below impacts positively on local democracy as it portrays the people's right to be part of their government's democratic processes”. These scholars emphasized that active public participation assists the growth of local democracy provided it fulfills legal imperatives. In the same vein, Reddy (2010:450) asserts that public participation in local government “ensures that the government is abreast of the challenges, needs, and aspirations of the people, especially those at the grassroots”. It is instructive to note that although democracy dawned South Africa in 1994, majority of the citizens, most especially at the grassroots are still denied the opportunity of participating in government (Tshishonga and Mabambo, 2008:778). It must be pointed out that youth who are under 18 and citizens residing in the peripheries are excluded. Fatile and Okewale (2013:134) also observes that “democracy has not thrived at the grassroots in Nigeria”. Similarly, citizens who are below 18 years of age are disallowed from voting to elect representatives at all levels of governance. The situation is similar to Nigeria citizens who are below 18 years are disallowed from voting to elect representatives at all levels of government. Fatile and Okewale (2013:131) opines that “decentralization is an initiative to support the grassroots development”. Democratic decentralization involves the transfer of powers and resources to local sphere since it can motivates citizens to interact with local government, local community development areas as well as municipalities through community development associations and ward committees in the two countries under review. They are definitely the first point of access to decision makers over policy and resources. Community participation, no doubt, is an important element of local democracy in Lagos, Nigeria and eThekweni, South Africa because it enhances participation which creates room for local communities to have access to local planners and decision-makers. Amao (2018) opines that “community participation is sacrosanct because local communities have first-hand experiences that can influence the nature of local policies and as such, community members are reliable source of information that can be utilised in the formulation of developmental policies”.

2.3 What is Participation and Participatory Democracy?

Lane (1995) asserts that participation is a broad concept. Hussein (1995), Kelly 2001 and Social Capital Research & Training (2018) argues that the concept is capable of different interpretations and meanings. The concept has been defined differently by scholars based on their ideological positions (Nelson and Wright 1995; Social Capital Research & Training, 2018). Thus, a wide range of definitions of the concept are available in the extant literature. A central feature of all definitions is the role of community in decision-making. That is, the “involvement of intended beneficiaries in the planning, design, implementation and subsequent maintenance of the development intervention” (Price and Mylius 1991: 6). Thus, through community participation, citizens can be mobilized to manage their resources and make decisions that affect their communities (Social Capital Research & Training, 2018)

According to DFID (2010), Gaventa and Kvalvaag (2013:6), the “meaning and scope of participation in development discourse has expanded from the discourse of politics and governance; involvement or engagement in community projects to participation in policy; and also encompasses participation in the socio-cultural and economic spheres”. Chamala (1995), Ndekha, Hansen et al (2003); and Social Capital Research & Training (2018) provide good holistic starting points for defining participation:

‘...a social process whereby specific groups with shared needs living in a defined geographic area actively pursue identification of their needs, take decisions and establish mechanisms to meet these needs’ cited in (Ndekha, Hansen et al. 2003:326).

The implication of this is that in true participation, at whatever level of governance, there is usually power sharing among the participants. In the same vein, Tikare, Youssef, Donnelly-Roark and Shah (2001: 3) also expand the scope of decision-making in their own definition. In their view “ participation is the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services”.

In the view of Kaufman (1997), scholars have agreed that ‘participation’ is a broad and vague concept. According to him, the concept ranges from voting at elections, involvement in a neighborhood committee that is saddled with the responsibility of directing a process of local change to participating in a hired gang that beats up those who lead such a local committee. Westergaard (1986) in a study of popular participation argues that it refers to collective efforts to increase and

exercise control over resources and institutions in favour of those who were previously excluded. Kaufman (1997) notes further that participation refers to a means by which majority of the population can be able to identify and express their needs as well as contribute directly in solving existing societal problem.

Participatory democracy also entails the principles of dynamism, reconstructiveness cum constant evolution. Reddy (2010:45) view it as an “elements from both direct and representative democracy as citizens determine policy proposals and the job of representatives is to implement such policies”. According to him, citizens can only influence policies when they are involved in the democratic process. Castillo (2013) also argues that participatory democracy gives room for elected representatives of the people to make policy decisions and such policy choices will then be approved or disapproved by citizens in future elections. Participatory mechanisms are thus conceived and designed as a means for citizens’ input and views to have some influence on the bureaucratic decision-making processes (Bherer, Dufour, & Montambeault, 2016). The people govern through their representatives because sovereignty belongs to the people. The pattern of governance in many African countries including Nigeria and South Africa is antithetical to democracy because sovereignty belongs to the people only in written codes. Participatory mechanisms were thus initially conceived and designed as a way for citizens’ views and input to have some influence on otherwise political and bureaucratic decision-making processes.

2.4 Theoretical Underpinning

The article is anchored on democratic governance theory as it has become widespread and a practical response to a 'new' context of democracy. It is traceable to the Ancient Greece where democracy first emerged. In interpretation of Western democratic theories, the English word “governance” is often translated as “Zhili” which means “to rule and put thing in order”, and sometimes as “Guanzhi” which means “to control and rule”. The theory of “governance” according to Liu (2012) emerged in the 1970s as it was mainly used in reference to reformed political processes which are different from traditional governmental processes and decision-making. In the view of Abizadeh (2008), the theory focuses on popular sovereignty in relation to citizen's satisfaction, participation, and engagement whereby the exercise of political authority is legitimate only when it is justifiable by and to the people on whom it is exercised. Miller (2009:204) opines that “political equality is a fundamental value of the democratic theory and it dictates that citizens have the right to participate in the affairs of government as equal partners without fear, favour or prejudice”. Citizens are allowed to vote and engage in any programmes that enable them to influence the policies adopted by the government.

Mogale (2005) Democratic governance theory is relevant because it enables scholars to know how to efficiently harness public participation in a democratic dispensation to promote local democracy via local government, CDC, CDA'S, and other relevant bodies. Raga and Taylor (2005) assert that the momentous of this theory as regards public participation in South Africa is there are existing structures recognized by law of the land whereas in Nigeria, such never existed. Moreover, there exist various legislations that were backup by relevant structures such as Ward Committees in South Africa. There are also other legislations such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996); White Paper on Local Government (WPLG) (1998a); the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 117 of (1998b) (MSA); the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 32 of (2000) (MSA) and the Municipal Finance Management Act, 56 of (2003) (MFMA). The essence of these legislations is to promote locals to contribute robustly on public policy issues affect them as well as to strengthen and encourage public participation at the grassroots so that the citizens can enjoy dividends of democracy (Khan *et al.*, 2013). It must however be stressed that public participation at the local level in South Africa is a recent phenomenon and there were little opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate in governmental affairs. The establishment of the ward committees has bridged the gap that exists between the municipality and the local communities which also facilitate effective systems of public participation in the policy making processes. In Nigeria, on the other hand, there are no democratic structures at the local level and this has affected all government policies and programmes in terms of coordination, citizen engagements, and participation. Besides, both the Federal and State Government have failed to fully harness the structural opportunities of the bottom-up mechanism in Nigerian democratic governance system.

3. METHODOLOGY

This article examines how community participation and engagement have forged democracy from below. The data for this article are drawn mainly from secondary sources. While the article adopted the comparative approach, it is also qualitative in nature combined with case study. The discourse relied on evidences in the extant literature to compare the role of local communities, ward committees, CDCs, CDAs, and local government in strengthening democracy in terms of engagement and implementation of government policy that can easily translate into effective social service delivery in South Africa and Nigeria. To improve the reliability and validity of the study, multiple secondary sources were used to minimize the risk of error. Thus, the article maintains the qualitative paradigm of social research and descriptive-comparative research method to analyse data gathered from secondary sources such as journals, articles, textbooks, newspapers, government publications, and internet materials.

3.1 Participatory Democracy Through Deliberate Engagements

Participatory democracy through deliberate engagement can only be achieved when the community members participate in government affairs and are able to contribute towards the development of local policies. Ayilara (2015) observes that participatory democracy promotes a citizen-focused service delivery because, through continuous interaction and

engagements with the citizens at the grassroots, the government get to know about the needs and challenges faced in each community. Abizadeh (2008:31) argues that “this engagement fosters a sense of direction for the community and highlights the most pressing community needs”. Okon (2019) also opines that participatory democracy assists in the identification of hidden talents and expertise at the grassroots. Thus, Mogale (2005:124) asserts that “participatory democracy can help in the identification of alternative solutions since the participation process includes a wide range of people with a multiplicity of views, ideas, and skills that the government would not have known had it not engaged the community”. Nwankwo (2018) also contends that participatory democracy improves the government's credibility as it incorporates the views of the communities in terms of policy implementations. It gives the community a better understanding of policy and the policy goals based on their involvement in the planning process. In his own view, Ayilara (2015:45), argues that “participatory democracy adds value to government decisions because through consultation and engagement, skills and wisdom of the grassroots people are utilized in decision making processes”.

Thus, deliberate engagement is the vehicle that drives citizens to participate in policy affairs and as such, it serves as a veritable instrument that government can embrace to bring the greatest succor to the citizens in form of social service delivery. Africa as a continent only practices pseudo-democracy where citizen involvement and engagements in public policy could be mere privilege whereas public policies are imposed on the citizens. There is no doubt that lack of accountability has also become one of the banes of deliberate engagement because the locals are always unaware of government programs and policies as they are imposed on them (Amao, 2018). Unfortunately, there are scanty information in the extant literature on participatory democracy through deliberate engagements and this may be one of the reasons why political leaders and policymakers lack the wherewithal to practice the ethos of democracy.

3.2 Mechanisms and Processes for Community Participation

Community participation according to Smith (2013) can be described as the various methods by which we can consult, inform, and involve the community members so as to be able to have an input in policy-making. Reddy (2010:152) notes that “a variety of community participation methods exist that seeks to involve community members in decision-making processes”. In fact, scholars such as Tau (2013) and Ahmed (2019) have identified a number of methods of community participation which include public hearing, election, focus group, public meeting and open meeting as effective mechanisms of community participation in a democratic system.

Public hearing has been identified as one of the major methods of acquiring community input in public decision making. Olashile (2012:65) affirms that “public hearings are open to all members of the community and they are convened to discuss issues of particular interest”. Public hearings afford the community members the opportunity to discuss issues that affect their well-being with their local representatives in ward committees, CDCs, and CDAs as well as local politicians. Abati (2018) argues that these representatives are important elements of community participation because they facilitate instant interaction between the governed and the governors. In South Africa, citizens are seen as participants in policymaking. Thus, Tau (2013:145) explains that “through different ward committees and stakeholder forums, they are free to express their views before, during, and after the policy development process so as to ensure that policies reflect community preferences as far as possible”. In the view of Ababio (2007), ward committee enhances participatory democracy in the sense that it is an innovative expressive vehicle that facilitates mass representation and deals with matters that affect the localities in relation to policymaking. Thus, in South Africa, the citizens used public hearing to inform the local municipality about their needs in order to get it incorporated in the municipality's Integrated Development Planning (IDP) and budget (Abizadeh, 2008). In Nigeria, public hearing is an avenue for the legislative arm to discuss and debate policy frameworks where citizens and interest groups are expected to express their mind on burning issues in the country. Abiodun (2019) claims that this method has been instituted in Lagos state on matter relating to fiscal issues especially in budget preparation and promised to institute it also in Ogun state, Nigeria.

Focus group is yet another method of community participation. In the view of Olashile (2012) and Jose (2015), a focus group is a reciprocal method of community participation because the information is passed back and forth from the community members to the interviewer and the method is also dependable because participants are given time to highlight how they feel about certain government policies and programs. Election is another method of forging democracy from below. It is a method of participatory democracy where representatives are elected periodically and serve as the mouthpiece of their constituencies (Aminu, 2018 & Fayemi, 2019). In South Africa, Diedericks (2013:95) argues that “eThekwin municipality has to partner with the relevant body to ensure that eligible community members are not disenfranchised in voting process at the ward committees”. Similarly in Nigeria, elections are held every four years, and National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute and array of other civil society groups usually collaborate with INEC at the community level on voters' education, sensitization and creation of more polling units. Public meeting according to Fayemi (2019) is yet another mechanism for effective community participation because residents have the opportunity of articulating their interests and get instant feedback from local leaders. Open meeting has also become a mechanism through which the government at all levels can reach out to citizens in Nigeria (Orji, 2017). Open meetings otherwise called town hall meeting is a rich method of participatory democracy because it has a broad representative and membership that goes beyond voting or payment of taxes. It is mainly convened to discuss policy issues such as social services, developmental issues, proposed budget, and others.

3.3 Community Participation: A Trajectory for Local Governance

According to Tshishonga and Mabambo (2008:771), “participation creates and provides a platform for people as individuals as well as collectives to organize themselves into formidable forces to assume power to influence decisions through their active participation via the democratic structures”. There is no doubt that community participation promotes good governance, a stable and prosperous society, empowerment of the people to have a voice and contribute to development policies at the grassroots. In the opinion of Ahmed (2019), the benefits of community participation include the promotion of a citizen-focused delivery of social services; improvement in government's credibility most especially when government incorporates the community's views in decision making; and adding value to government policies since community members are involved in the identification and planning of such policies. Thus, community participation can deepen democracy in terms of decision-making and accountable leadership practice. As far as Nigeria is concerned, participation of local people in the CDCs and CDAs activities give members of the community the opportunity of making contributions to decisions at the grassroots (Okon, 2019). Ayilara (2015) asserts that people are more likely to be committed to a rural project if they are involved in its planning and implementation. Thus, projects undertaken by CDAs such as building classrooms and libraries for primary and secondary schools in various communities are always successful as most members would not like to be associated with failure. Orji (2017) explains that all these activities are important components of the overall rural development programs of any government. It is in the light of the foregoing that Abiodun (2019) contends that public participation is closely linked to local development and the promotion of grassroots democracy and rural governance. Although the achievements of various committees such as CDCs and CDAs in community participation in Nigeria appear to be impressive, their efforts at developing rural communities through self-help projects are still facing some considerable setbacks. For example in Lagos State, several projects had been abandoned due to improper planning, lack of consultation and funds as well as other relevant resources.

Tshishonga and Mabambo, (2008:772) observes that in South Africa the “transcending trajectory made since independence is evidenced through various macro as well as micro policies and the essence of participation in the country in local government sphere is geared towards building and strengthening local democracy and development”. There are strategic programmes which are established to engender a change in behaviour to a level where both elected representatives and appointed officials would work with communities code named ‘ICICE’, which means ‘inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower’. Meanwhile, ICICE operates to raise awareness on the guiding principles of effective community engagement in local municipalities like eThekweni local municipality otherwise known as structured participation (Diedericks, 2013). eThekweni Municipality (2006) states that the local people can contribute to decision making by developing policies and participating in planning and budgetary processes through a constitutional and legislative framework. Besides, within the legislative framework, eThekweni municipality in 2002 established Community Participation and Action Support Unit (CPASU) to provide services to citizens in order to influence decisions taken by the council and also to improve partnership and cooperation between the council and the grassroots people. The foregoing notwithstanding, it has been argued that for democracy from below to benefit the poor South Africa majority, decentralized governance structures should be accompanied by linking participation activities to development. There is no doubt that community participation is part and parcel of democratic governance. It is one of the cornerstone of effective and accountable governance in any society. This is why it is important for the members of the community to have the right to participate in policies, decisions, and actions that directly affect them. Local citizens should be actively involved throughout the decision making process so as to promote inclusive governance at the grassroots.

3.4 CASE STUDY: Democracy From Below and Community Participation - Lagos State and eThekweni Municipality Context

According to the Community Development Global Guidelines (CDGG) cited in Olufunwa (2019), community participation, engagement, and development are meant to fashion conditions of social and economic growth for the local community with its dynamic involvement as well as total probable dependence upon the community's scheme. The Lagos state government of Nigeria anchors its development drive on community-centered initiatives so as to engender even and accelerated development in different parts of the State. To achieve this, the state government adopted an integrated approach to community development which involves partnership between the people and government across the various local communities in the state. The integrated approach also entails embarking on self-help projects at the community level with administrative, technical and monetary support coming from the government. Ahmed (2019) observes that through this approach, members of the community would have access to health care, technology, security, and education among others.

The partnership between CDAs and the government has been described as a veritable vehicle for communal integration and socio-economic development at the grassroots across the various states Nigeria (Olufunwa, 2019). In Lagos state, conscious efforts is presently being made by the appropriate government agencies to encourage more communal spirit in the various local communities. To this end, the number of CDAs in the state has increased from 2,500 CDAs to 3,935. Government has also started to give the required support in form of grants to the various CDAs and they are also encouraged to supervise government projects as well as other infrastructure within their domains. Ahmed (2019) observes that most communities have embarked on self-help projects ranging from distribution of palliatives during Covid-19 pandemic, to installation of street

lights, transformers, the building of police posts, construction of community halls, drainages and health centres to complement the efforts of Local and State Governments in grassroots development.

Besides, it has become tradition annually, in line with the United Nations Initiative, for the State Government to set aside a day as 'Community Day' to recognize the development contributions of the various Action support groups and CDAs who serve as part of the developmental partners in the state. Hence, Mr. Babajide Olusola Sanwo-Olu, the State Governor, urged communities' leaders to monitor the state and local governments' projects in their localities. According to him:

.... everything the state is putting in place to make Lagos a 21st Century Economy is for the community and that is why communities must monitor state projects around them to ensure that these projects meet the required standards. The CDAs and the CDCs are engines of growth in the communities and they should see community-based government projects as theirs. (Sanwo-Olu, 2019).

Thus, democracy from below in Nigeria can only be enhanced by establishing strong institutions that will not be compromised with accountable leadership. This can only be achieved if the citizens in the local communities have confidence in the system (Aminu, 2018). Also, to promote democratic system at the local level, there should be level playing ground where citizens and communities can actively engage, participate, and contribute robustly in public policy process. In addition, social media usage is a mechanism for local communities, CDA's and CDC's to engage their representative on government policies and programmes and to channel their demands to the government at higher level.

In South Africa, eThekweni Municipality is a category A municipality that combines Executive Committee with ward participatory system. In June 2006, the Long Term Development Framework (LTDF) 2001 was adopted by eThekweni Municipality and it makes provision for mechanisms and processes of community participation. The adoption of this policy is seen as a significant milestone for eThekweni Municipality to honour the Freedom Charter provision which stipulates that: '...The People Shall Govern' (CPP, 2006). In essence, eThekweni Municipality (2006) allows community participation to engage in an open and accountable process through which individuals and groups within selected communities can exchange views and influence decision-making in the municipality. Thus, it is a democratic process where people plan, engage, decide, and take active part in the development of the local areas. Also, the eThekweni Municipality purpose is contained in the Long Term Development Framework (LTDF) 2001 which state that:

"the purpose of eThekweni Municipality is to facilitate and ensure the provision of infrastructures, services and support, thereby creating an environment for all citizens to utilize full potential and access opportunities which enables them to contribute towards a vibrant and sustainable economy with full employment, and thus create better quality of life for all" (LTDF, adopted 2001)

Meanwhile, in the eThekweni municipality, ward committees play an important role in promoting public participation in integrated development planning. Ward committees are also instrumental in the project naming and re-naming streets and buildings. The voices of the citizens are heard. The Speaker's office oversees the functioning of ward committees. Tshishonga and Mabambo (2008:777) explains that "the City Manager's office deals with the training of ward committee members". Diedericks (2013:48) also argues that "successful community involvement in integrated development planning relies on the effectiveness of ward committees because they educate the community about the need to engage in integrated development planning and how best the community can be involved in the process". Thus, scholars (Mulaudzi & Liebenberg, 2013; Madumo, 2011) have argued that ward committee is a vehicle that promote grassroots democracy and participatory governance through active involvement of citizens in matters of decision making process. The eThekweni municipality has introduced several programmes to enhance community participation such as Active citizenship, Communities as owners or shareholders, Citizens as customers or consumers, Communities as policymakers, and issue framers and Vision Builders. The aim of all these programmes is to engender a people-centred development (eThekweni Municipality, 2006; Madumo 2011 & Taung Daily News, 2015).

It is instructive to note that "public participation in decision-making should be treated as a necessity as opposed to a sideshow that is carried out merely to fulfill legal stipulations" (Lindeque and Cloete, 2005:25). Jose (2015:49) claims that "studies conducted on the legality and practicality of giving ward committees more influence" reveals that ward committees are merely advisory structures because their views are not considered by the municipality. This view agrees with Reddy (2010) who asserts that the municipality sees ward committees as structures that are useful in relaying information to the residents. Thus, communication between the municipality and ward committees is skewed in a top-down manner like in Nigeria, where a top-down approach is adopted in public policy making process.

3.5 Challenges

In Nigeria, there are scanty information in the extant literature on community participation via citizenship engagements because there is no adequate provision for community participation in the constitution. The rationale behind the creation of CDAs and CDCs which are self-help innovation is to collaborate with the local, state and federal government in the delivery of public services. These banes have become daunting that accountability, public policy evaluations, and feedback are difficult to achieve from the bottom to the top. Notwithstanding, the media and other interest groups such as civil society organizations have become a herald in agitating and promoting democratic dividends at the grassroots. In the same vein, lack of financial autonomy and legal frameworks have barred this group to operate optimally at the local government level.

Similarly, the eThekweni municipality in South Africa, just like other municipalities in the country there is no coherent and uniform public participation strategy, as such; despite training and induction, it is difficult for ward committees to efficiently promote public participation. Thus, community participation in the country is just a statutory formality. To address these challenges, eThekweni Municipality, like other local municipalities in the country needs to formulate strategic goals for public participation which should include the immediate and long term objectives of involving the community in municipal affairs. In addition, parallel structures should be established to complement ward committees. For instance, some wards in eThekweni and other municipalities are too big to have only 10 member structure to represent the entire ward. This article, therefore, advocates the establishment of ward-based forums consisting of about thirty community members; representing all the sections of the community and which will work closely with community-based planners and ward committees.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Forging democracy from below in Africa and most developing countries is still difficult to achieve most especially in terms of community participation and engagement as demonstrated in the comparative analysis of the situation in Nigeria and South Africa. However, it must be emphasized that without proper community participation, there is no proper democracy. The article is of the view that writing and sending bills to the National Parliament, National Assembly, or Provincial or State Houses of Assembly by the local communities, ward committees, CDCs, and CDAs will forge democracy from below and this can be achieved by engaging all politicians who are members of these local communities. Political sensitization is also necessary at the grassroots to increase the awareness of the citizens on local participation and in electing credible candidates to represent them in government. This articles therefore suggests that:

- Democracy in developing countries like Nigeria and South Africa can only be strengthened if the enabling structures such as local communities, ward committees, CDC and CDA's are functional and made to be part of the democratic system where their inputs will be considered when it comes to the public policy processes.
- Allocating at least a slot to each of these local committees or bodies in the local legislative assemblies will engender inclusive governance and enhance democracy from below in developing countries.
- There should be a locally-led integrated development planning and issue-driven approach to governance as it will strengthen the intrinsic democratic value and people-oriented technique to democratic dividends which is a driver of socio-economic change and a fundamental way to empower the citizens.
- Website or a social survey internet platforms should be set up where residents can interact with local planners since most residents are unable to attend community meetings. This can be a more effective and time-sensitive way of engaging a wider audience. It will enable residents who do not have the time or means to take part in local policy affairs using conventional methods to participate online.

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Disclaimer

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