

# COMMUNITY NEWS

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[E-mail:reception@tcoect.org.za](mailto:reception@tcoect.org.za)

PO Box 323

Athlone

7760

Telephone: 021 685 3033/4

Facsimile: 021 685 3087

## WARD COMMITTEES AND SUB-COUNCILS

**BY:**

Dr John J Williams (PH. D., M.U.P. [Illinois, USA];

H.E.D., M.A., B.A.HONS., B.A. [UWC]);

Life member of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

E-MAIL: [jayjayconst@telkomsa.net](mailto:jayjayconst@telkomsa.net) [Home]

E-MAIL: [JohnJ.williams@Capetown.gov.za](mailto:JohnJ.williams@Capetown.gov.za) [Work]

Lecturer: School of Government, University of the Western Cape

**PRINT MAIL:**

89 PLATTEKLOOF ROAD

MONTE VISTA 7460

CAPE TOWN

SOUTH AFRICA

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### **General Introduction**

A ward committee is an example of a specialised participatory structure. It aims to improve participatory democracy in local government. It provides a structured channel of communication between the community and the political representatives at ward and council level. These committees function as a critical structure in such processes as integrated development planning. They enable local needs and priorities to be identified and they act as advisory bodies on policies affecting the ward.

A good example of how a ward committee works, is Ward 16 in Tembisa, Gauteng.

### **How a ward committee works in Tembisa**

The committee of Ward 16 in Tembisa meets every Wednesday evening at a venue provided by the Kempton Park Tembisa Metropolitan Local Council. The committee comprises elected representatives from the seven sections in the ward as well as from interest groups. The meetings run strictly to an agenda and are facilitated by a chairperson.

The main item under the agenda is that of "reports". These reports are given by the ward councillor and by the different section representatives. Under this item, problems are highlighted (such as broken street lights, problems with electricity and water, queries on bills etc.) and progress in dealing with past complaints reported on. Progress on specific tasks such as the registration of indigents and issues around voter registration is also reported on.

The committee meetings also serve as:

- A A forum to organise and discuss labour issues for capital projects in the ward;
- A A opportunity for the ward councillor to distribute information to the section leaders, who then distribute them in their sections;
- A A platform to share information and strategies among the different section leaders; and
- A A forum to highlight other projects and programmes in the broader area

### **Other committees include:**

Residents who organise themselves according to particular interest groups can give input to the council through committees formed to represent their interest. These include those relating to the consumption of services and stakeholder groups.

Municipalities too can establish committees (which may include the above committees) to assist them in certain areas.

**Strategic Questions that must be asked include:**

- ! Will the council appoint these ward committees in an unbiased manner? Does the formalisation of a community structure alienate it from the very community it has been elected to serve?
- ! Category B municipalities, particularly those where councils from previous TLC's have amalgamated, may be concerned about the representation of members serving on a ward committee. What criteria will be used to determine how many members come from each town? Will the council subsidise the travel costs of ward committee members from outlying areas?
- ! What about small towns that have no ward councillor? Who will give feedback about their needs at council meetings?

**Sub-councils**

The Uni-city of Cape Town opted for Sub-councils to “bring government closer to people”. All sub-council members are also members of council representing council at neighbourhood level. They are supposed to prioritize the needs of the community. They represent the interests of the sub-council and the community in council. They supervise the effectiveness and fairness of council’s service systems.

Sub-councils, however, seem to have severe shortcomings [these shortcomings to a lesser or greater extent also apply to ward committees]. First, sub-councils have no taxing powers. Council policies, guidelines and budget determine the extent to which sub-councils can be effective in their role of ‘listening’ to the communities they are supposed to serve. Here obvious questions arise: If sub-councils and ward committees have limited or no power in certain or all matters would they indeed be able to be the effective voices of the people on the ground? Would they be able to address and solve the problems of the community if they have no or limited executive power? What about

the direct participation of people from communities on such sub-councils? Wouldn't this be a more in line with participatory democracy where ordinary people directly participate in these councils on behalf of their specific communities [as suggested in the Constitution, the Structures Act and the Municipal Systems Act]?

In the City of Cape Town it would appear the aforementioned shortcomings of sub-councils are even made worse by additional weaknesses. Sub-councils are based on the boundaries of apartheid South Africa. For example, Black areas such as Guguletu, Khayelitsha, Athlone, Mitchell's Plain are on their own. They are isolated from the rich white areas of the Southern Suburbs such as Camps Bay, Simonstown. This means rich white areas still have their own sub-councils and do not need to share their resources which they got from Apartheid South Africa with the poor black communities in Cape Town [cf Uni-city of Cape Town, Sub-councils Ad-hoc Committee, Agenda, 06 June 2001; Exo Agenda for 21 August 2001, Volume 3].

### **Community participation**

Three very important laws that encourage community participation in local government the Constitution, Act 108 of 1996 and The Municipal Structures Act of 1998 and the Municipal Systems Act of 2000, Act 32. All these Acts require municipalities to develop mechanisms to consult the community and community organisations in performing its functions and exercising its powers. In other words, there is a need for each municipality to develop a system of participation. Though there are many approaches to developing and implementing a programme for participation, there are usually three steps that local government takes to encourage community participation, namely::

- ! Step 1: Initial outreach where local government builds a relationship with stakeholders in the community and works to establish a shared vision for development;
- ! Step 2: Internal adjustment of local authority practices to ensure that they become more developmental and facilitate communication and participation; and

! Steep 3: The establishment of a permanent and flexible system that allows for ongoing community participation.

Community participation in local government affairs is often characterized by tension and conflict. Even so, there are many decisions that affect people directly and deeply. It is therefore important that they do participate in such decisions regularly and meaningfully. Their ideas, opinions and suggestions must be taken seriously and be seen to make a difference in their lives. They must not merely participate for the sake of participating or because the law, such as the Municipal Systems Act of 2000 (Act No 32) requires it.

Fair Share at the School of Government, University of the Western Cape, through their extensive training programmes in especially rural South Africa, provides useful suggestions as to how ordinary people can participate in the construction of a budget for a particular municipality/local authority. Fair Share's experiences indicate that community participation in the affairs of a municipality is often problematic. Problems and conflicts arise for various reasons. At a practical level, for example, in terms of joint decision-making with local government, it is neither possible nor desirable to involve everybody in every decision. One of the main skills of democratic leadership is deciding who should be involved in making which decisions. The basic rule is that the more deeply people are affected by a decision, the more important it is they should share in making it.

When a delegation of representatives from various organisations are mandated to engage with local government, some of the difficulties in making decisions on behalf of a constituency, network or group centre around one or another of the following factors: There are several factors which influence community participation in the affairs of a particular Municipal Council, such as:

**Fear of consequences** e.g. if my councillor knows that I am in this group challenging corruption, will I be asked to step down from the ward committee?

**Conflicting loyalties** e.g. I'd like to help with this community project, but I hardly get any time to spend with my family these days

**Interpersonal conflict** . Power struggles when two different people are each trying to get their own way are common. Often another member who is not involved in the interpersonal conflict can bring the real problem into the open.

**Hidden agenda.** One person may try to get the group to make a certain decision, which (s)he wants for reasons that (s)he will not share with the group.

**Blundering methods** . A group may be so bound by rigid procedures that there is little chance for free expression of differences.

**Inadequate leadership.** A leader may hinder good decision-making if (s)he restricts the expression of opinion or discussion on issues too soon.

**Clash of interests.** e.g. municipal workers want higher wages, but community leaders demand better service provision first.

### **Be informed before acting**

It may be useful when planning activities in order to interact and engage local government in partnerships, consultation, advocacy and lobbying work.

### **Step 1 "Insertion" :**

Using the increase in the cost of water supply as an example, gather as much information about its cost in the past, compared to what its current costs are. What motivated the increase in cost, by the municipality? Who serves on the committee dealing with water pricing? Is the reason given by the Council for the increase, the real reason for the increase? What recent studies have been done to compare pricing of water service delivery? Which organisations exist in your area that can help clarify some issues regarding the pricing of water? How many people in the community are now unable to pay the increased costs and why? Where are the minutes of the Council meeting that introduced these new costs?

### **Step 2 " Social Analysis"Time**

E.g. the past history, or what led up to the problem. Who were the water providers up until now. Who were the main beneficiaries of the water that was provided? Who took care of the maintenance of the machinery and pipes? When did the new tariffs come into effect? Who was responsible for the drafting of new legislation? Who was involved in decision-making at the various levels of governance? Who was and wasn't consulted? Who were the main characters involved at various times etc?

The present (that we know right now) e.g. the tariffs that are in effect at present. The effect it appears to have on people's lives. The groups of people that are most negatively affected by the price increases. The secondary problems with that are manifesting itself. The effect on the health of people living in informal housing who have to use stand-pipes for accessing water (if this is the case). The ripple effect of lack of access to this basic right (e.g. increase in water borne diseases, according to the local clinic reports, the increasing absenteeism from places of work etc).

Urban areas seem to get water cheaper and more easily than rural areas. Is this true? Did privatisation of water in the province, that caused many municipal workers to be retrenched, affect all the municipalities, or is the local situation unique? Is the "user-pay" system that the municipality introduced a fair system. Is the revenue collected adequate? Are there ways for cross-subsidisation to occur in order to render water to the poor? Are the allegations that councillors were bribed in order to pass the municipal ordinance/policy true?

The future - if this situation continues, what will we have to deal with in 1, 5 or 10 years from now? How will future generations have to deal with this problem? What alternatives are there for them to either, find new ways to acquire water, prevent the pollution and exploitation of our rivers and water catchment areas? What legislation is necessary to prevent this scenario, improve the lot of the poor? The same questions could be asked with regard to the provision of electricity, roads, housing, health care, education and related services as illustrated here below with regard to the provision of service delivery in a particular local authority/municipality:

## **Community Participation in relation to service delivery**

It is only when people are informed when they can change their conditions as they will be asking their councillors and officials questions about issues that matter in their daily lives, for example in relation to:

### **Substantive factors of production, that influence service delivery, viz:**

- ! land, ie space eg to provide housing and related services;
- ! labour, ie skills, abilities available to provide specific services;
- ! capital, ie money to provide, buy and pay for services
- ! information, ie knowledge: is it up-to-date, reliable, accurate?
- ! technology, ie how we do things: do we use machinery or our hands to provide services and why? Think about the opportunity to provide jobs as opposed to simply limit expenses and to make a profit. What choices are possible, necessary under the circumstances? And why?

Ideally, appropriate services should be delivered to eliminate uneven levels of development appear at different scales: street level, ward, neighbourhood, local, urban, metropolitan, regional, national, continental, inter-continental and international level

### **Overview of the resources available for effective service delivery**

- ! Agencies and agents: Public/private/individual: in different fields their histories, present activities, future visions, ie what is the role of bureaucracy (public/private/individual) who does what, where and how often?

### **Present infrastructure:**

- ! The physical condition of facilities, resources and opportunities
- ! Structures (heritage) movable and immovable (eg art work and museums)
- ! Documented and printed materials [for informational/training and educational purposes]
- ! communication channels (publicity, the media, etc)

### **Systematic, structured, coherent service delivery framework with regard to:**

- ! Provision of infrastructural services
  - ! Facility management
  - ! Community planning (programmes and projects)
  - ! The availability of grants, subsidies, funds raised by individual communities

### **Understand the dimensions of service delivery vis-à-vis development programmes and projects:**

- ! The planning concept of specific development projects and programmes (philosophy and vision)
- ! An indication of what an area, town or city needs in terms of development programmes and projects (ie short, medium term and long term programmes) with specific reference to how such programmes and projects can contribute towards, ie reinforce, the Reconstruction and Development Programme

### **Service Delivery Framework: Design**

- ! Design service delivery framework in consultation with different sections of the public, eg: business community, religious bodies, academic institutions, and so forth
- ! Type of benefits, eg: public co-operation, community integration, identification with the programmes of local authority
- ! Extent of change foreseen, eg: transparency, accountability, increased responsiveness to public issues

### **Service Delivery Framework: Implementation**

- ! Level of decision-making, eg: at senior/middle management level, administrative, clerical staff, etc

### **Service Delivery Framework**

- ! Programme implementors, eg: administrative/executive members, etc.
- ! Resources committed to implementation, eg: human, fiscal etc.

### **Service Delivery Monitoring**

- ! Tactics, strategies, eg: through co-operation, persuasion, and so forth
- ! Characteristics of institutions, eg: public/private
- ! Contact/liasing with key implementors, eg: regular/intermittent
- ! Co-operation and responsiveness, eg: excellent/modest

### **Service Delivery Effects**

- ! Impact on society, individuals and groups, eg: co-operation, support, loyalty of public towards development programmes of local authority

! Change and its acceptance, eg: significant or minor

### **Service Delivery Evaluation (Measuring Success)**

- ! Goals achieved, eg: substantially or insignificant
- ! Action programmes and individual projects, eg: effective or insignificant
- ! Unintended consequences, eg protest and resistance from specific interest groups
- ! Continuation or Revision of Service Delivery Frameworks?

### **Conclusion**

Ward committees or sub-councils are only useful to the extent that they give a genuine voice to ordinary people. They should not be used to manipulate ordinary people. It is therefore important that communities make sure that ward committees do have the ability and power to “create a better life for all”, the much-referred-to objective of the present South African government.

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