

Participatory Approach and Good Governance: the Alpha and Omega of Sustainable Local Development in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the significance for good governance of inclusiveness through participatory processes in rural communities. It describes the importance of a participatory approach as a means for sustainable development, an approach that has exerted an increasing influence upon the conduct of local, national and international public administration. Similarly, sustainable development exhibits a fundamental contemporary expression of the commitment towards humankind, enabling them to develop economically while improving or maintaining their wellbeing. Over time, it has as its principal objective the integration of social considerations in economic development. The constructs for a participatory approach and sustainable development are discussed in this paper. These constructs are considered as essential considerations for rural development in South Africa.

Rural communities are said to be unproductive and passive, hence the level of underdevelopment. Their contribution does not have an economic value and cannot be counted in hard currency. Resources developed through rural initiatives are not utilised for the betterment of the rural communities. Hence, there is a gap between what the rural communities understand as development compared with those who facilitate the development process.

Keywords: – good governance, local autonomy, indigenous knowledge, participatory approach, rural areas, South Africa, sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

The African Charter for Popular Participation and Development emphasises the significance of development (Fadara (2010), indicating that participation provides the driving force for collective commitment for the determination of people-based development processes and willingness by the people to undertake sacrifices (Amba, 2010). It requires people to use their social energies for its execution. The Charter explains that popular participation is the fundamental right of the people to fully and effectively participate in the determination of decisions that affect their lives at all levels and at all times (Fukuyama, 2013). Participation involves democracy and accountability as a requirement for development (Staley, 2006). It is the involvement of people in activities and decisions regarding the designing and implementation of social, economic, political and other strategies, as well as policies and processes that affect their lives and development (Makura, 2015). An approach to increase

participation is one variable of avoiding the under-representation and marginalisation of people including women, men, children and illiterates, thus preventing them being part of their own wealth and development. In the recent past the notion of community participation has emerged as a major force in wider policy-making and political philosophy (Amba, 2010). Note that the terms participation, participatory approach or participatory development will be used, interchangeably, in this paper.

It must be noted that participatory approaches that relate to advocacy planning are put into practice in order to create more equitable power relations and inclusive citizenship (Amba, 2010). They are built within organisational networks in order to strengthen decision-making, leadership and communication amongst their organisations. A participatory approach also promotes political education when it involves new knowledge about local power, politics and experiences that develop a stronger citizenship (Subban, 2009). True participation strengthens the negotiation process in the interests of various regional stakeholders affected by human rights violations or difficult resettlements (Amba, 2010). However, this paper assesses a participatory approach for good governance in South Africa.

A participatory approach and good governance are interrelated as the ideal orientation of the state, as well as the ideal functioning of government (Staley, 2006). Good governance implies, among other things, a smaller central government, greater devolution of power to local regional entities, as well as more rights to individuals, local and regional communities in deciding on resource utilisation and allocation, and is recognised in many emerging market economies of Africa (Botkin & Chuck, 2015). Many African countries are finding it hard to build a new democratic society and bring about sustainable development in local communities (Botkin & Chuck, 2015). However, in order to make the struggle both a worthwhile endeavour and a sustainable one, African countries should design comprehensive development strategies that take into account the socio-political, as well as economic aspects of development. Hence, this study focuses on the self-organising capability of local communities through a participatory approach for good governance, with an ultimate objective of achieving local autonomy and sustainable development.

PROBLEM STATEMENT: POOR GOVERNANCE AS A TRAVESTY OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Incompetent governance is the root cause of the loss of value in local communities. The weakening in governance is fast becoming the biggest risk facing the economy (Katsamunski, 2016). According to Fukuyama (2013), the characteristics of bad governance are corruption, poor decision-making, short-sightedness and disregard for the concern of local communities. This has a replicate effect on community participation in all areas of development. Hence, Kioe-Sheng (2007) concurs that poor governance is increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of evil within societies. Rural communities are losing value through incompetent governance and this affects sustainable development. At an international level, Fukuyama (2013) adds that poor governance is the root cause of the recent downgrades to South Africa by international rating agencies. This affects sustainable development and the functioning of rural institutions in rural communities. Hence, this paper

assesses a participatory approach for good governance in South Africa. It examines whether a participatory approach results in sustainable development in local communities of South Africa.

The remainder of this paper discusses the framework for rural institutions in South Africa and governance. It elaborates on the participatory approach for local autonomy. Good governance and local development, as well as indigenous knowledge and rural development conclude the theoretical discussion of this paper.

FRAMEWORK FOR RURAL INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND RELATED GOVERNANCE

This section discusses different methods in which rural institutions are classified. Adapting from North's classification of rules of the game as expressed by Makura (2015), the two types of rural institutions can be defined in terms of their formalities. The formal rules are the constitutional rules, property rights and contracts. Informal rules include norms of behaviour, customs and self-imposed codes of conduct. The following sub-sections explain these two rules in detail. In addition, the third sub-section discusses the types of institutions within the functional rural institutions.

Formal rural institutions

South Africa determines the constitutional provision framework for rural participants (Staley, 2006). As a result, most constitutional rules apply across all citizenry, particularly "The Bill of Rights." A more direct constitutional rule pertaining to rural institutions is the acknowledgement of traditional leaders (Makura, 2015). The institution of traditional leadership is the most prevalent in governance of rural South Africans. The other constitutional provision impacting rural institutions is the establishment of a local government sphere (Subban, 2009). It establishes the functions of municipalities which, if serving rural areas and communities, have to ensure rural economic and social development, provide services, democratise governance and encourage community participation (Morolo, 2014). Although there has been conflict with traditional leadership, the local governance (through the South African constitution) has animated rural participants and is resetting rules of rural behaviour.

The other instance of formal institutions is that of property rights (Subban, 2009). It identifies rural property or property owned by rural people. The five types of rural property include fixed or immovable property, movable property, liquid property, local or indigenous knowledge, and social capital. The rights around fixed property such as land have been contentious not only in South Africa, but throughout the developing world (Makura (2015). Somehow, the rights are inequitable on one hand, but also show a lack of protection of land rights on the other. Most poor rural communities have the rights to use land rather than ownership rights (Choudhury & Harahap, 2015). The predicament around land has implications for other fixed assets such as the improvement of, amongst others, houses, dams and fences; as well as natural resources such as water, minerals, and forests. The rights

around movable property (such as tractors and livestock) and liquid assets (such as cash and credits) are less contentious.

Informal rural institutions

The informal institutions emanate endogenously from within (Makura (2015)). They develop into norms and customs that shape the society. Most of the informal institutions are localised, where each locality tends to have a unique set of institutions. Informal institutions imply the habitual ways in which a society manages its everyday affairs (Morolo, 2014). Examples include customs relating to chieftaincy or kingship, marriages, rituals of passage of life stages, beliefs, succession procedures and the way these institutions affect access and use of resources such as land and labour in a specific local setting. In most parts of rural South Africa, informal institutions are still pertinent.

Functional Rural Institutions

Makura (2015) identifies four main types of institutions that can contribute to well-functioning markets in rural areas:

- Marketing institutions such as cooperatives, farmers' and traders' associations, credit clubs, commodity exchanges and contract farming.
- Infrastructural institutions such as those regulating or maintaining public goods, including roads, communication networks, extension services, storage facilities, and market information service.
- Regulatory institutions such as laws relating to market conduct and enforcement of contracts, ownership rules and property rights.
- Government and political institutions that have the capacity to monitor the emergence of markets and support their development.

Having discussed the framework relating to the rural structural makeup in South Africa, the next section elaborates on the participatory approach encountered in those institutions. Common concepts like local societies, local development and rural communities are used interchangeably.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH FOR LOCAL AUTONOMY

The goal of economic and social development in developing countries is to set in motion a process of self-reliant and sustainable development through which social justice will be realised. Following the above expression, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) (2005) defines the following concepts that relate to community sustainability and local autonomy.

- *"Self-reliant" development*:- building the endogenous mechanisms of society that will enable developing nations ultimately to achieve growth without aid.

- *"Sustainable" development*: continuing a stable growth pattern in such a way that economic development is in harmony with the environment.
- *The realisation of "social justice"*: equalising and ensuring opportunities for people to participate in order to rectify disparities between regions, income levels and gender.

Hence, participatory development is a form of development that heightens sustainability and self-reliance (Curtis, 2012). It aims for the realisation of social justice by improving the quality of people's participation. It exists on a diversity of levels ranging from the microcosmic level of individual organisations' aid projects to the communities and local societies that surround them, up to and including the national level (Estrella & Iszatt, 2014). It is in the levels of rural communities, local societies and the state that all of the aspects of participation in the economy, society and politics overlap.

The quality of community participation is enhanced as the basic human needs of regional inhabitants are met, as people's awareness and the organisation of people's groups in local societies are promoted (Ekundayo, 2017). This includes the capability to manage resources, to govern themselves autonomously, and to negotiate with representatives from outside the community (Rowden & Irama, 2004). A series of processes through which peoples' awareness, organisation and capabilities are continuously developed is collectively termed "the process of participation in local society" (Ekundayo, 2017). Many forms of participation in this process exist. However, Ekundayo (2017) indicates that the people and local organisations, the formal and informal institutions such as laws, administrative systems, or behavioural norms that determine the participating entity's opportunities for participation and behavioural models, as well as the national structures of state and government that are guarantors of the effectiveness of these institutions can improve through policy support, as they are the elements for community participation.

In essence, Estrella and Iszatt (2014) claim that the quality of participation varies depending on the kind of participating entities and the opportunities for participation; the extent to which the government provides appropriate policy support; and the degree to which participating entities are able to respond appropriately to opportunities to participate. Participatory approaches, for instance, to agriculture and forestry development have been advocated as means of supporting sustainable resource use (Manley, 2007). The drivers of these approaches are food security and sustainable land use development, globalisation and environmental concerns. As a result, participatory development is one of the most important approaches for realising self-reliant, sustainable development and social justice (JICA, 2005). It is an attempt to compensate for or overcome the limitations of the top-down development approach by adopting a bottom-up development approach (Anderson, 2013). This approach involves taking the needs and opinions of local residents into account as much as possible in the formulation and implementation of development project policy. It enables people to acquire the skills needed to implement and coordinate the management of development projects themselves and thus reap more of the development's returns. Hence, the next section discusses the influence of good governance on the achievement of local development.

GOOD GOVERNANCE FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

Good governance is the governing function that a government should possess in order to work towards such goals as maintaining a unified state, defending its territory, or developing its economy (JICA, 2005). However, good governance, in this case, is defined in terms of the functions needed to achieve the objectives of self-reliant and sustainable development and social justice.

The meaning of "good" in good governance is two-fold: the values of respect for the will of the people and the promotion of the people's capabilities that signify the goal of achieving self-reliant, sustainable development and social justice; as well as the functional aspect of effectiveness and an efficient government working to achieve these goals. JICA (2005) divides the concept of good governance into two parts. These include the ideal orientation of the state directed at achieving the above-stated goals; and the ideal functioning of government such that it works effectively and efficiently to achieve the above-stated goals (of self-reliance, sustainable development and social justice).

The former (that is, the ideal orientation of the state) refers to whether or not the basic stance of the state is to aspire toward greater democracy (Ekundayo, 2017). The government's legitimacy, accountability, securing of human rights and local autonomy may be cited as constituent elements (Husain, 2004). However, JICA (2005) emphasises that the basic concepts indicating the state's institutional orientation include, among others, whether the government is elected and has the people's confidence (legitimacy), whether the state is organised so as to be held accountable so that arbitrariness is excluded from the exercise of state power (accountability), whether basic human rights are respected and efforts are being made to improve people's well-being (securing of human rights), and whether local autonomy and communities' right of self-government are respected (autonomy and devolution of power).

The latter (that is, the ideal functioning of government) depends on whether the government has the competence and/or the political and administrative structures and mechanisms to function effectively and efficiently. As elements composing this 'ideal functioning', The International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2005) cites the basic legislations and institutions of the state, its administrative ability and transparency, decentralisation, and the creation of an environment in which market economy works properly as aspects that provide support for people's participation in the political, economic, and social realms. In other words, these elements intend to meet the basic needs of the people and indirectly support the people's freedom of activity and the functioning of market mechanisms and thereby promote the process of participation. They are the ideal functioning of government that serve as the foundation for participatory development.

Seen in this way, the former (that is, how the state ought to be) takes shape by means of the latter (that is, how the government functions ought to be) in terms of specific policies, mechanisms, and measures of which the latter good governance is composed. In other words, good governance as an ideal orientation of the state does not have a direct cause-and-effect

relationship with participatory development, but the government should assume the role of a provider as a proper environment for market economy, the extensive promoter of people's capabilities, the builder of efficient administrative structures, and the reflector of the popular will (JICA, 2005). As an ideal orientation, it can be understood as a conceptual component of a state striving toward greater democracy that is embodied by the effective and efficient functioning of the government that assumes the aforementioned responsibilities. Having discussed the importance and various elements of good governance for local development, it is prudent to elaborate on the influence of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development.

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AS A MODE FOR A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

There has been an emphasis on a rural knowledge system being a driver for community participation and sustainable development. Rural knowledge comprises both the locally stored experience handed down and adapted from generation to generation, as well as knowledge acquired from external sources and transformed into locally meaningful bits of information (Chaminuka, Belete & Moholwa, 2004). This transformation process is determined by special codes and categories, constituting a unique local 'reality' that may differ widely from the 'reality' of the original knowledge provider (Fremerey, 2016). However, Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) has become a fashionable phrase for discussion in the 21st century, especially in South Africa post-1994 (Morolo, 2014). Indigenous Knowledge, like other knowledge systems, is a body of knowledge that is built up through generations and is the custody of the elders of communities. Acquisition of indigenous knowledge is affected by circumstances within which it operates or is used, such as age, gender or social standing (Botkin & Chuck, 2015). It builds upon the historic experiences of communities and is confined within their borders. According to scientific norms and standards, the IKS is an underdeveloped system (Ricipero, 2011). It is a system that is not fully utilised for development purposes, so as to bring transformational change to communities that use it. Hence, this paper establishes a link between IKS to local community participation and development.

The underutilisation of African indigenous knowledge led to the loss of valuable information that today could be used for development purposes (Morolo, 2014). One wonders whether there would still be talks about the development of rural areas had this knowledge system been preserved and used. Development in most African countries has been severely affected due to loss of the IKS that defined communities and the environment in which they lived (Morolo, 2014). With the advent of the African Renaissance, there is a renewed realisation of the power of indigenous/traditional knowledge systems.

African communities in rural areas are seen to be the ones utilising indigenous knowledge for their survival (Chaminuka, *et al.* 2004). It is however noted that they are fast losing their hold on the knowledge system. This is seen by the changes in their lifestyles. There is a dependency on 'modern science' for problem solving for a number of issues such as health and conservation (Amba, 2010). Thus, communities are no longer in line with their

environment and cycles of dependency are created. In addition, they have no control over decisions made on their behalf and become overwhelmed with developments that are not in tune with their environment and philosophy of life. Hence, there is a lack of ownership of developments in their areas and this leads to a dependency syndrome. Therefore, indigenous knowledge should be used for nation-building purposes and this can only happen if communities take ownership of developmental programmes (Ekundayo, 2017).

For rural development to be effective, rural areas should create an environment that will improve the communities' quality of life (Munnich Jr, Schock & Cook, 2005). This does not just refer to economic initiatives but also to social networks and other activities that enable them to feel good about themselves. The uniqueness of rural communities lies in their ability to survive amidst dire constraints and circumstances (Morolo, 2014). In terms of coming up with appropriate strategies for rural development, it is important to identify things that makes rural communities tick. The causes of underdevelopment in these areas arise from the fact that rural communities have been disempowered (Botkin & Chuck, 2015). However, the following two broad factors in rural development, as discussed by Fremerey (2016), indicate the necessity to find such processes in reliable and sustainable organisational structures.

- ***Identifying and solving complex and interrelated problems:*** Rural development and the management of natural resources are processes that affect larger groups of people or whole communities. Efforts to identify and solve complex problems demand the strength, effectiveness and multiple competences contained in concerted rural development planning.

- ***Safeguarding local autonomy and participation:*** Failures in rural development are often conditioned by the lack of autonomy granted to the local communities in the process of decision-making and implementation. Innovations are imposed on the communities from outside, and thus fail to attain legitimacy in the eyes of the local population (Braun & Fremerey, 2010). Under such conditions, acceptance is jeopardised and genuine participation prevented. To counteract such a common 'disease' in rural development efforts, the strengthening (or acknowledgement) of local organisations is encouraged, such as those which:-

- are based on the principle of legitimate representation;
- are in a position to identify local objectives;
- generate the knowledge required to define local development problems; and
- have the legitimacy, competence and power to set binding norms and enforce corresponding sanctions.

People in rural areas have long-standing traditions in collective planning and action to improve their social and economic existence (Subban, 2009). Organisations in rural communities represent such fundamental issues for identity and socio-cultural cohesiveness. Irrespective of this, the notion of organisation in rural development has become remarkably narrow and utilitarian in the process of planned and centralised efforts of socio-economic change.

DISCUSSION

This study focuses on a participatory approach and good governance for advancing local autonomy and sustainable development in local (predominantly rural) areas of South Africa. This research established that the weakening in governance is becoming the biggest risk facing the economy (Katsamunskaja, 2016). This is characterised by corruption, poor decision-making, short-sightedness and a disregard for the concern of local communities. It has a replicable effect on community participation in all areas of development. 'Good governance' has been defined as a strategic governance paradigm that creates value in organisations and communities. This concept of good governance first appeared in the documents of United Nations' development activities, the World Bank (WB) in 1992 and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1996 (Katsamunskaja, 2016). While this study focuses on local communities residing in rural areas, governance does influence the drive towards self-reliance. Communities that facilitate self-reliance stress trust in their present thoughts, skills, originality and belief in their capabilities in areas where they are located. If poorly governed, community participation for sustainable development is affected. Dawkins (2006) indicates that sustainability is represented by reproduction of resources in agricultural lands, given their due linkages with agro-based industries and service outlets. The whole process of development is made possible by indigenous knowledge of local communities. Consequently, it is important to incorporate an indigenous knowledge system during the process of development in local communities of South Africa for an effective participatory approach and good governance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The notion of sustainable development bears close relevance to and partly overlaps with that of 'good governance' in the sense of a transparent and participatory management of public affairs or participatory governance (Choudhury & Harahap, 2015). Participatory governance is a central element of socially sustainable development because it constitutes the primary means through which socially sustainable development takes concrete form. In other words, it is the means through which it may be decided which 'mix' of antithetical objectives and policies may be seen as acceptable by all who might be affected by a development issue. Thus, participatory governance is the 'vector' through which socially sustainable development may be put to effect in practice. Following the discussion as presented in this paper, it is important for the rural institutions of South Africa to increase the capacity of rural populations to participate in their local economy. This is made possible through a proper process of decision-making by local authorities, transparency, accountability, responsiveness, equitableness and inclusiveness as well as compliance with the rule of law.

On areas of sustainable development, Morolo (2014) indicates that human movement between the rural and urban areas should be seen as a positive influence. Properly managed, the movement should be seen as a means towards cross-pollination of ideas for the good of both the rural and urban communities. However, the uniqueness of rural communities lies in their ability to survive amidst dire constraints and circumstances (Amba, 2010). Underdevelopment in rural communities in South Africa results in them being disempowered.

Community developers have denied rural communities the power and the will to improve their lives. This has resulted in the geographical mobility of local communities from rural to urban areas, which move has had many negative effects on development of rural areas in South Africa. It reinforces the aspect of exposure of rural people to foreign systems. It is imperative to involve rural people in sustainable development programmes. Thus, the success of rural development programmes will be sustained through the use of indigenous knowledge in order to facilitate societal transformation. The IKS defines communities as people who have a unique way of living. For effective development in rural areas, the South African government should allow communities to participate in the recognised interventions. It should identify things that improve their way of living.

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