

**THE MERITS OF DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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Global Action for Africa's Development (*South Africa*) 2009

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Abstract

The reorientation of the local government system towards decentralisation has been at the centre stage in most developing countries, including South Africa. The justification for the adoption of some form of decentralisation is to promote democratic governance and participatory approaches in development. The promotion of citizen participation in development is the key role of the South Africa's local government as outlined in the Local Government Act No.27 of 1998 and the South Africa's Decentralisation Policy that provides for the establishment of local government authorities. Local Government is one of the decentralised structures included in the three spheres of government in South Africa. Local government in South Africa plays a leading role in local economic development through municipalities. The primary purpose in this article is to evaluate the extent to which decentralisation and citizen participation through Multipurpose Community Centres (MPCC), promote local economic development. This paper is based primarily on the review of the relevant literature and supplemented by interviews conducted with senior officials from local governments, community leaders and with selected members of the public. The findings show that decentralisation and citizen participation effectively promote local economic development through MPCC in Mamelodi, South Africa.

1 -Introduction

Local Economic Development (LED) occurs when communities, government and business sector usually acting in partnership start to engage in activities deriving from decentralisation to improve local economic conditions. Decentralization on the other hand is a process where some parts of power are shifted to the lower sphere of government for better service delivery. Most developing countries, including South Africa, have embarked on the political and administrative decentralisation of government and development structures, among others, to promote democratic governance and participatory approaches in development (Hussein, 2004). Scholars have documented a wide range of political and socio-economic merits for adopting some form of decentralisation and participatory approaches (Cook and Kothari, 2001:5). From the political perspective, decentralisation is considered as a key strategy for promoting good governance, interpreted as greater pluralism, accountability, transparency, citizen participation and development (Crook 1994:340).

Administratively, decentralisation is an important process that allows decongestion of the central government and reduces the workload to manageable proportions. The breaking-up of the workload promotes greater efficiency, coordination and effectiveness in public service delivery. Since decision-making powers are transferred from the centre to local institutions, decentralisation provides an opportunity for local involvement in decision-making and harnessing local knowledge, resources and expertise in the development process (Hussein, 2004). South Africa's decentralisation initiatives can be traced back to the colonial era. Yet this paper focuses on the decentralisation initiatives undertaken in Post Apartheid South Africa where local governments are the implementing agents. It is worth noting that the reorientation of the local governance system towards decentralisation (devolution) has been at the centre stage since the government of National Unity took over in 1994. Among the steps taken to institutionalise the 'new' decentralised local governance system include the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, the passing of the Local Government Demarcation Act No. 27 of 1998 and the South Africa's Decentralisation Policy. However, there is a need for a comprehensive understanding of the context in which decentralisation initiatives are undertaken in order to appreciate the major outcomes of such initiatives. This is important as it provides a base for identifying viable strategies that ensure effective decentralisation and sustainable local development.

This article is divided into major parts. It starts with clarification of three inter-linked concepts, namely, decentralisation, development and citizen participation. These concepts provide the theoretical framework for this analysis. The second part explains the link between decentralisation and development and presents an overview of the outcome of decentralisation initiatives in selected countries across Africa. This is followed by an analysis of the decentralisation initiatives in post Apartheid South Africa in part three. The aim of this part is to determine the extent to which the decentralised structures promote citizen participation in local development. This is achieved through Multipurpose Community Centres (MPCC). In part four the methodology explains the procedures adopted to collect relevant information as well as the analysis of the results .Key issues drawn from the analysis are also presented in part five by way of conclusions and recommendations

2- Review of Literature

Concepts such as decentralisation, development and citizen participation, which are pertinent to this analysis, reveal a variety of meaning and purposes since scholars in the social sciences define and interpret them in different ways (Sharma 2000:183).

Decentralisation

Hussein (2004) opined that, discourses in Development Studies show variations in the meaning, purpose and forms attributed to the concept of decentralisation. For instance, concepts such as *delegation, participation, divisionalisation, deconcentration* and *devolution* are associated with decentralisation (see Barle and Uys 2002:143; Rondinelli 1981:137). Despite the variations, there tends to be a common agreement that decentralisation is a generic concept for various forms of structural arrangements in government and organisations. As a process, decentralisation involves the transfer of authority and power to plan, make decisions and manage resources, from higher to lower levels of the government, in order to facilitate efficient and effective service delivery (Smith 1985:1).However, the major forms of political and administrative decentralisation that have been adopted by most developing countries including South Africa are *deconcentration* and *devolution* (Maywood 1993:3; Tordoff 1994:555–80).

On the one hand, deconcentration involves the transfer of workload and selected administrative or decision-making authority and responsibility from the headquarters to lower field-level officials within central government ministries or public agencies (Sharma

1995:26). On the other hand, devolution involves the transfer of authority and power to local units of government, which operate in a quasi-autonomous manner outside the direct administrative control and structure of the central government. It entails conferment of the necessary legal powers to discharge specified functions upon formally constituted local structures characterised by a measure of autonomy (Smith 1985). As will be shown in the subsequent analysis, the local governance system has been oriented towards devolution since the advent of the 1994 democratic elections.

Development

The concept of development is elusive and difficult to define in standard terms since it is associated with a wide range of definitions and interpretations (Oyugi 2000). For instance (Hussein, 2004) argued that, most laissez-faire economists explain development in terms of economic growth and quantifiable indicators like increase in the gross national product or per capita income. On the other hand, welfare economists tend to emphasize organisational and structural transformation, and associate development with public welfare and the attainment of goals like rising net income, reduction of poverty, unemployment and social inequality (Hussein, 2004).

In another context, development is associated with modernisation, for instance, the acquisition of services, the facilities and infrastructure including clean and safe water, education, health facilities, roads, and the degree of citizen participation in decision making at local level (Venter, 2001). In this regard, this analysis adopts a broader view of development that transcends economic views and mere material changes and includes human attitudes regarding a spirit of enhanced self-help, and citizen participation in the decision-making process. Development then is viewed as a process of social action in which citizens or local people at the district, area and village or grassroots levels organise, plan and take action in partnership with government to improve the political and socio-economic conditions of the locality (Sharma 2000). Thus, the focus is largely placed on the state of social well-being and general quality of the citizens as reflected in the human life or non-economic indicators rather than quantitative aspects of economic growth and the state economy.

Citizen participation

The term 'citizen participation' is a multidisciplinary one, and falls into four major areas of democratic theory, namely, political behaviour, community development, citizen action and government initiated citizen action (Checkoway and Van Til 1978:60). Consequently, there are variations in terminology and definitions. For instance, terms like popular participation,

community involvement, public participation and citizen participation are often used. However, in this analysis the term 'citizen participation' is preferred because of its relevance to the South Africa's context. In addition, there is common agreement that citizen participation entails an active process in which participants take initiative and action in purposeful activities in relation to a local institution or area of which they are citizens or legal residents (Brynard 1996). Citizen participation is critical to development since it enables local people to control and monitor resources and developmental activities. It serves as a means of monitoring abuse of the powers and ensuring transparency and accountability in resource utilisation (Clapper 1996). In addition, by participating in the various development committees, citizens provide the necessary input in form of labour, resources, information, feedback and advice required in the development process.

The Link between decentralisation and development

Political and administrative decentralisation is considered as important for the promotion of citizen participation in governance and development. However, the relationship between the two tends to be unclear. Scholars suggest that much depends on the unique circumstances in individual situations (Oyugi 2000). Although there seems to be an ambiguous linkage between decentralisation and development, it is commonly agreed that decentralised local governance contributes to development in terms of promoting participatory development strategies, and the production of policies that are adapted to local needs (Sharma, 2000). The involvement of citizens in development planning and implementation enables the formulation of realistic plans that are in line with local circumstances and conditions. Administratively, decentralisation is considered as a key strategy that provides solutions to overloaded and over-centralised agencies (Boeninger, 1992). The decongestion of the workload at the centre promotes cost-effectiveness and greater coordination and efficiency in public resource utilisation, service delivery and local development. For instance, by giving local institutions the power to make some decisions without constantly referring to the top levels, delays are minimised and responsiveness in development or project management is enhanced since decisions are flexible and adjusted to respond to circumstances on the ground. In addition, decentralisation is regarded as a means of facilitating the even distribution of resources and minimising development regional inequalities (Sharma 2000).

As an economic strategy, the decentralisation process contributes to facilitate the development of small-scale projects close to the grassroots. Decentralisation and participatory approaches in development are not without their critiques. Although a wide

range of political, administrative and socio-economic merits are attributed to decentralisation and participatory approaches, a number of scholars have raised criticisms relating to their technical, theoretical and conceptual limitations (Cooke and Kothari 2001). For instance, Smith (1985) states that decentralisation appears to be separatist as it threatens the unity of the general will, reinforces narrow sectional interests especially and encourages development inequalities, among others, due to its emphasis on local autonomy (Hussein, 2004). There are a number of critiques relating to the quality, validity, ethics and operations of participatory approaches. These approaches to development are methodologically considered to be parochial (Cooke and Kothari 2001). For instance, it is argued that participatory strategies generate poor standards and practice and lead to the abuse or exploitation of the people involved. Cleaver (2001) argued that, despite claims that participatory approaches to development improve efficiency and effectiveness, and promotes processes of democratisation and empowerment; there is little evidence about the effectiveness of participation in ensuring sustainable development and material improvement among poor and marginalised people (Hussein, 2004).

There is debate over a number of related issues including the use terminology like ‘community participation’, the objective of participation as to whether it is a means or an end, and the applicability and the appropriateness of the techniques and tools (Cook and Kothari 2001). For instance, it is argued that the term ‘community’ masks power relations, biases in interests and needs based on ethnicity, age and class. It is also suggested that in practice participatory approaches simply mask continued centralization in the name of decentralisation. However, the detailed rehearsal of the limitations of decentralisation and participatory approaches to development is beyond the scope of this analysis. As indicated in the introduction, the purpose of this analysis is to highlight the decentralisation and development experience in South Africa, explain the participative approach to development in the South African context and its implication on local economic development

Decentralisation in Africa – Overview

Democratic decentralization as currently conceptualized and pursued by several African governments focuses on the promulgation and revised rules and responsibilities for administrative and political personnel, and on establishing the framework for some sort of local accountable political institutions ,(Olowu ,2004).

Olowu (2004) pointed out that any debate on decentralization policies and local government in Africa must be rooted in appreciation of the political realities that produce such policies. According to the same source, most African States were formally centralized during the colonial rules. Between 1945 and the 1950s, African local authorities were inspired by local government systems in operation in the colonial country. Their role was prominent in education, health, roadwork and other social services. Centrally appointed servants operated within the territorial administrative system. As far as local governance is concerned, most colonial governments endorsed this colonial legacy at after independence. In the French speaking-territories, the central government kept on appointing local government officials (Olowu, 1995). Local structures inspired from protectoral system applied in France proliferated. Centralization became dominant while decentralization lost ground and the same evolution applied to former British colonies.

Whatever the case was, it was noticed that during that period, there has been a creeping centralization in favor of the central government, which exerts strong control over decentralized local units. The consequence is that sub-Sahara Africa has not been able to take advantage of the potentials of local governments.

Equally, the idea of nation building and planning for development became buzzwords in English Speaking countries at the dawn of independence. The quest for appropriate planning resulted in the establishment of decentralisation (deconcentration) in the form of a network of development committees, which operated in every administrative unit in the field and were linked to the parent committee or a government ministry at the centre (Oyugi 2000). The development committees were established at the district level and the periphery in most English-speaking countries such as Tanzania, Kenya, Lesotho, Tanzania, Botswana, and Zambia (Kiggundu 2000; Mukandala 2000). From the 1960s to 1980s decentralisation initiatives were undertaken in the context of nation building. Thereafter, they accompanied the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). During the introduction of SAPs, a relatively strong deconcentration programme called the district focus for rural development was introduced under donor initiative in countries like Kenya and Malawi in order to strengthen citizen participation in decision-making (Hussein ,2004). The wind of democratisation and globalisation that blew in the late 80s has prompted African countries to adopt political and administrative decentralisation (devolution) and. This includes the deregulation of economic activities, reduction of central government's participation in economic production, delegation of responsibilities for the provision of some services and

infrastructure to sub-national institutions such as district councils, community based groups and non-government organisations (UNDP 2000:95). It is of note that countries tend to adopt selective interpretations of decentralisation and adjusted decentralisation policies to suit the prevailing ideologies of development (Hussein 2004). However, the underlying assumption for adopting some form of decentralisation is that it promotes citizen participation in decision-making and it is considered a right and part of political democracy.

Decentralisation is viewed as an important strategy that enables citizens to express their real development needs and engenders sustainable development and grassroots commitment to political and development activities. In this regard, most developing countries in Africa including South Africa have reinvigorated local structures and set up a system of committees at the local level (Hussein, 2004). At this stage, it is important to have an overview of how well decentralisation initiatives in African countries have performed and facilitated participatory approaches to development. The outcomes of various forms of decentralisation have tended to be unsatisfactory in most developing countries. Apparently, the promotion of the merits of decentralisation, and in particular, citizen participation in development, reveals a gap between theory and practice. Oyugi (2000) states that the development organs that were set up in the 1960s and survived up to the 1980s functioned as appendages of the central government and were not autonomous entities. The committees were used as instruments of the central authority to control the behaviour of the citizen in the development process. In short the decentralised structures failed to effectively involve the citizens in decision-making matters relating to development in most African countries (Hussein,2004).The results of a centralised economy system and development planning adopted from the 1960s–1980s have been disappointing in most developing countries.

This situation has provided strong justifications for the adoption of some form of decentralisation, and in particular, devolution, in the hope to promote participatory development strategies, to improve efficiency and effectiveness in development planning and administration, and to implement egalitarian policies (Hussein MK, 2004). However, the outcome of such decentralisation initiative tends to be unsatisfactory. For instance, (Olowu,2004) states that public management at the local level remains centralised in most developing countries despite the pronouncements by politicians and pressures from international donor agencies in favour of decentralisation. In most Anglophone countries in Africa, local government structures are facing problems such as the lack of local autonomy,

high dependence on central government policy, shortage of financial resources and poor administrative capacity (Olowu,2004).

Hussein (2004) argued that, in Ghana, (Nkrumah,2000), Uganda (Makara,2000), Zambia (Chikulo,2000:) and Kenya (Omiya,2000) decentralisation has been neither a major process of good governance and development nor has it facilitated citizen participation, accountability and transparency, due to centralist tendency and interference in issues of local institutions by central government officials, among other factors. In Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho and Tanzania as elsewhere, decentralisation is facing challenges due to the inability of local structures to function without guidance from the centre and to make binding decisions (Munro 1995; Oyugi 2000). Aril (2000:) states that despite the introduction of political and institutional reforms aimed at increasing political decentralisation and introducing democratic local government, the performance of local councils in Zimbabwe and Tanzania has not been responsive due to central government control over local planning and local councils' limited financial autonomy. In some instances, decentralisation has promoted regional inequalities, in that financially better-off localities such as cities and towns have prospered while the development of rural areas has tended to lag behind. It can be deduced from the above analysis that decentralisation initiatives have neither promoted democratic governance nor have they led to viable participatory approaches to development.

The various decentralised strategies have failed to actualise genuine participation due to *inter-alia*, centralised systems that allow minimal citizen participation and regulate local institutions heavily. Clearly, the success of decentralisation initiatives depends upon a number of internal and external factors, which according to Kiggundu (2000:102) include age and size, nature of tasks, technology, internal management and administrative capacity, and sociopolitical and economic factors. This confirms the view that, there is no automatic relationship between decentralisation and development and much depends on the unique circumstances obtaining in a particular country. However, there are specific prerequisites for decentralisation to impact on LED. These are based on good governance concepts where the exercise of the power by local authorities should be centered on two specific elements: (1) accountability (i.e., officials being answerable for government behavior), (2) transparency (i.e., the availability of information to the public and the clarification of government rules, regulations, and decisions). When these two elements are strongly involved, local economic development will take place.

Therefore, following the above review, the South African Case is guided by the impact that, the decentralisation of state structures has on local economic development in Post Apartheid South Africa.

Decentralisation and local economic development in South Africa

One of the most important aspects of the post apartheid reconstruction project was the establishment of decentralised local government. The imperative of radically transforming the apartheid system of segregated municipal government provided an excellent opportunity to totally redefine the goals and operational procedures of local government in South Africa (Venter,2001). The government of National Unity led by the African National Congress (ANC) replaced the South Africa's Apartheid regime in 1994. This opened up possibilities for restructuring and adjusting the existing white-ruled administrative system. A unitary, but decentralised governmental system with three spheres of government (national, provincial and local) was created. The three spheres are seen as distinctive, but interrelated. The previous four provinces and nine homelands were substituted by nine provinces. According to Venter (2001), the Apartheid local government consisted of over 1.200 racially-based local authorities. Local government was transformed in two phases: In 1995, 843 transitional municipalities were created. The second phase, in 2000, was characterised by the incorporation of urban and rural areas, reducing the number of local municipalities to 284 (47 Districts, 6 Metros, 231 Local Municipalities). Each municipality has to develop a 5-year Integrated Development Plan (IDP), which guides all investments at local level. The main features of the new governmental system were confirmed in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in 1996. Each sphere of government is assigned its specific powers, functions and responsibilities. A pivotal principle is co-operative government, which commits the different spheres to mutual support and consulting (Rakner, 2004).

This was made possible because a number of steps have been taken to institute a new decentralised local governance system including the adoption of the new Constitution of South Africa (as amended) Act No.108 of 1996, the passing of the Local Government Act No.27 of 1998 and the South African Decentralisation Policy (A. Venter, 2001). The Constitution (as amended) Act No. 108 of 1996 envisages political and administrative decentralisation by providing in Chapter seven, the creation of local government authorities whose responsibilities include the promotion of participatory approaches in development.

Section 151 (1) of the Constitution states that issues of local policy are to be decided at the local level under the supervision of local government authorities. Similarly, the Local Government Act of 1998 provides for decentralised local governance and development. Section 4 requires local government to promote democratic principles, accountability, transparency and participation of the people in decision-making and development process. Among the policy objectives to be attained by the decentralisation process, as highlighted in the South Africa Local Government Act of 1998, this includes:

- the creation of democratic environment and institutions of governance and development, at the local level which will facilitate the participation of the grassroots in decision-making
- the promotion of accountability and good governance at the local level in order to help government reduce poverty;
- the establishment of strong local institutions that embrace participatory democracy, and the strengthening and deepening of democracy by bringing the services and decision-making closer to the people and improve governance by achieving accountability and transparency. The above provisions envisage a new status and increased role for the decentralised local government system. The decentralisation process aims at bringing the government closer to the community, facilitate bottom-up development planning and give greater attention to the needs of the local people. Most importantly, the role of local government is expanded to include, the eradication of poverty, local economic development and the management of the environment in a sustainable manner (Susan and Pieterse, 2002).

The institutionalised mechanism for local authorities to achieve these responsibilities is a planning tool known as the Integrated Development Planning (IDP). A.Venter (2000) stated that IDP is a mechanism created to coordinate and integrate a number of municipalities. IDP is the primary tool to ensure the integration of local government activities with other tiers of development planning at provincial, national and international levels.

Susan and Pieterse (2002) opined that, IDP,s help local communities to identify development needs to execute agreed anti-poverty and growth strategies which emanate from a common vision that spells out how local needs will be reached. They argued that, to achieve maximum

impact, the IDP and budget process should be linked and that citizen participation should be taken into consideration. The following section discuss in detail, the link between Citizen Participation through Multipurpose Community Center in Post Apartheid South Africa.

Local Economic Development: The link between decentralisation and Citizen Participation through Multipurpose Community Centre (MPCC)

One of the main objective of this paper is to evaluate that, Citizen Participation contribute to local economic development through government decentralised structures such as the Multipurpose Community Centres (MPCC). Citizen participation emphases people's direct involvement in the decision making process. Christenson (1971) characterised citizen participation as highly motivating politically and believe citizens will participate fully and continually in local economic development. He also views it as very efficient as citizens are able to communicate their political views to others and debate them effectively. For instance citizen participation to development in South Africa could be achieved through programs such as the Multipurpose Community Centres (MPCC). MPCC was initiate in South Africa by the government to facilitate community participation in local economic development .The South African government defines an MPCC as a “one-stop, integrated community development centre, where there is community participation and where people's needs are addressed by providing relevant services (Kangala, 2003)

The South African government identified MPCCs as the primary approach for implementing development communication and distributing information. MPCCs are considered to be viable channels for offering a wide range of services that could be used by communities for their own empowerment. It was envisaged that provision of services and information in an integrated and decentralised fashion would address particular historical, social and economic factors that inhibited freedom of access to information and citizen participation by poor and disadvantaged communities. The MPCC approach was a response to historical, social and economic factors which had curtailed access to information and citizen participation for the majority of South Africans during decades of apartheid rule (Kangala, 2003). These factors included high levels of poverty, high unemployment rates, low standards of living (people living below the poverty line), poor access to basic services, remote settlement patterns, a lack of access to technology and information, poor health services, a lack of education and skills, a lack of or poor and inferior infrastructure, and many others. The aim was for

communities to access such services and engage in government programmes for their own empowerment. However, participation by communities, business and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) was critical for the sustainability and success of these centres.

Advantages of MPCCs

The South African economy stands to benefit through increased community involvement. It is envisaged that MPCCs would facilitate and enable wider economic participation by the South African population. They would also contribute to the personal and economic development of individuals and other important sectors, such as small, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs), thus enabling more participation in the national economy.

They also provide a broad range of relevant services in an integrated manner, some of which other service providers cannot economically and sustainably provide alone.

Services offered by MPCCs

MPCCs are points of two-way communication between government and citizens. They are centres where citizens could share their views on government programmes, policies and activities, and make their needs for services known to government. MPCCs are also places where community events take place, such as music concerts, meetings, voting, workshops, training (Kangala, 2003). They are also places where government representatives and elected members of parliament conduct discussions with communities. Communities can hold forums at MPCCs to share information and lessons on successful development efforts. Essentially, MPCCs are points of service where government departments from national, provincial and local levels offer their information and services. However, services differ from centre to centre based on the needs of communities where they are located. Some services, such as applying for identity documents or receiving pensions and social grants, have proved to be more popular in MPCCs that have already been launched since the beginning of the rollout plan. Services offered by MPCCs include:

- Government services including the provision of identity documents, passports, library services, pensions and health information, and services normally rendered by an unemployment office or a government information office;
- Training in the use of computers, the Internet and other online services; and

- Other kinds of services and information like community banking, craft shops, women's clubs, food production programmes, etc.

3. Purpose of the Study

Following the review of literature, the primary purpose in this article is to evaluate the extent to which decentralisation and citizen participation through Multipurpose Community Centres (MPCC) promote local economic development. A methodological approach is therefore considered and one hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires were sent to local government official, member of the public and community leaders in Mamelodi to determine mainly

- ❖ Whether they were familiar with decentralisation and local economic development
- ❖ Whether they were familiar with the MPCC concept;
- ❖ Whether they were aware of services rendered by the Mamelodi MPCC
- ❖ Whether they participated in the activities of the Mamelodi MPCC; and
- ❖ Which factors facilitated or inhibited their participation.
- ❖ Whether Mamelodi MPCC is cost effective and if it is, what benefits local residents gained from that MPCC?

4- Methodology

Procedures

The reason for choosing the Mamelodi MPCC is related to the fact that, Mamelodi is one of the previous disadvantages areas in South Africa where the policies of Apartheid did not contribute to the empowerment of local residents. The study, therefore, wanted to evaluate the extent to which decentralisation and citizen participation through MPCC promote local economic development in Mamelodi, and to achieve this evaluation, the study conducted a field study. The research team was formed around five graduates all residing in Mamelodi. The reasons for choosing a team of this nature were that, besides residing in Mamelodi, all five students were familiar with the languages, culture and geography of that area. These qualities made it easier for conducting interviews. Also the fact that they were all university graduates implies that their levels of literacy were sufficient for them to understand the proceeding and explain the process to respondents. Another reason was that, the team members were well briefed by the authors themselves to ensure that, they understood local

economic development concepts and the concept of citizen participation through MPCCs as well as the main objectives of the study. The briefing included a short video on MPCCs. Several follow-up meetings were held during fieldwork. At these meetings the fieldworkers reported back on the progress made as well as obstacles experienced. It took six weeks for the fieldworkers to complete their work.

Selection of Respondents

The impact of MPCC in Mamelodi is related to services and information offered to communities for their empowerment. To test this impact, one hundred and fifty (150) questionnaires were sent to local government officials of the City of Tshwane, members of the public and community leaders in Mamelodi. The questionnaire covered four areas, namely: decentralisation structures; local economic development, good governance, efficiency of MPCC at local level.

Justification of Research Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research approach so that, the theoretical orientation is informed by the concepts and ideas that link research to literature and the gathering of empirical evidence through questionnaires. This methodology was also relevant in this study because, it allows the researcher to gather relevant information that helped to buildup analysis and proposed recommendations.

Fieldwork started on the 20th of June 2008 and was completed on the 31st of July 2008.

Structured in-depth interviews

According to Nlep (2001), a structured interview involves one person asking another person a list of predetermined questions about a carefully-selected topic. It enables the researcher to examine the level of understanding a respondent has about a particular topic - usually in slightly more depth than with a postal questionnaire. It can be used as a powerful form of formative assessment. It can be used to explore how a respondent feels about a particular topic before using a second method (such as observation or in-depth interviewing) to gather a greater depth of information. Structured interviews can also be used to identify respondents whose views you may want to explore in more detail (through the use of focused interviews,

for example). All respondents were asked the same questions in the same way. This made it easy to repeat the interview to other persons.

In addition to questionnaires distributed by the fieldworkers, the project leader interviewed officials from the City of Tshwane and community leaders and were asked the same questions. The project leader personally interviewed the person in Charge of the MPCC in Mamelodi. Taking into consideration the difficulty of securing meeting times that suited the project leader as well as the officials, some of the interviews were conducted face-to-face on a personal level and others were conducted telephonically. This combination of face-to-face and telephone interview contributed to collect relevant and useful information.

The structure of people interviewed was as followed:

- Twenty community leaders
- One hundred and twenty local residents in Mamelodi.
- Five officials from the City of Tshwane and five managers from the Mamelodi MPCC. (of the five officials from the City of Tshwane, three of them are townships managers in Tshwane and the other two are councilors). These officials from the city of Tshwane were chosen to answer questions that were equally asked to local resident in Mamelodi.

On the question related to their knowledge on decentralisation structures, 75% of the respondents said that, mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency in the administration of MPCC in Mamelodi are effective and efficient. During the interviews all community leaders and official from the City of Tshwane argued that, decentralisation was an appropriate approach that facilitates local residents to address their development needs. 64% of the respondents were of the view that MPCC procedures in Mamelodi provide for a full equitable distribution related to service delivery. Respondents further argued that, service delivery of MPCC in Mamelodi fully responds to the basic needs of the community in an efficient manner.

On issues related to local economic development, 71% of the respondents argued that, local government in Tshwane always involves MPCC in policy making. Most respondents confirm that, MPCC facilitated the creation of Jobs for young graduates and many successful grades 12 pupils received bursaries through MPCC education programmes to further their studies in scarce skills related degrees such mathematics, physical sciences. From the above analysis, it

is clear that MPCC in Mamelodi plays a leading role in empowering local residents; this can be further explained from the view of some of the respondents who confirmed that, from the centre, communities received training in skills, such as how to use information and communication technologies like the Internet. They added that, the Mamelodi MPCC offers banking services, including primary health care clinics, enables entrepreneurs to set up small businesses on the premises. The centre also serves as venues where community events such as education campaigns, exhibitions and other activities usually take place, helping people to get information they can use to improve their lives.

On issues related to good governance, 92% of respondents argued that, MPCC personnel in Mamelodi always acts in the publicly accountable manner. This is a clear indication that, local resident have trust on all activities provided by the MPCC including the personnel involved.

On issues related to efficiency of MPCC at local level 72% of the respondents said that, MPCC at local level fully addressed the needs of the poor citizens while 67% confirmed that MPCC fully responds to the basic needs of the community in an efficient manner, 66% also maintained that, citizens in Mamelodi have ready access to government services at local level. On issues related to citizen participation 72% of the respondents said that local citizens and community leaders always participate in decision making process on issues related to MPCC. Truly, by participating in the various development committees, citizens provided the necessary input in form of labour, resources, information, feedback and advice required in the development process.

From these set of analysis it is obvious that MPCC has had positive impacts in Mamelodi, it has hugely contributed in local economic development in that areas. The majority of the respondents felt that, MPCC in Mamelodi is an engine for local economic development. Therefore, by decentralising power to lower level of government, it is possible that local economic development can take place.

Transferability/Generalisability (External Validity)

The external validity of the above findings is related by causal relationship generalised across respondents and settings. Wassenaar (2002) argued that, generalisability is the degree to which generalization can be made from the data and context of the research study to the

wider population and settings. Creswell (1998) defines generalisability as the way in which the reader is able to take the findings and transfer them to other contexts. For the purpose of this study, the researcher used respondent's information to explain the impact of the MPCC on LED in Mamelodi. This paper therefore tried to evaluate the impact of decentralisation on local economic development via citizen participation by using the Mamelodi MPCC.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Decentralization is a complex process. The process of attaining decentralisation objectives, including the promotion of participatory approaches to development by local institutions such as the MPCC largely depends on what is happening within the local government sector and at the national level. Decentralisation as defined earlier is a process that gives roots to democracy. It is a process where the transfer of power and resources to the local level will help to empower communities to work together to define and resolve their problems (Oyono, 2004). It entails gaining broad consensus on which level of government should do what, creating institutional capacities of sub-national governments to raise revenues and deliver services, and implementing mechanisms to make sub-national government accountable to citizens for taxing and spending decisions, (Ebel, Robert D, ,2000). In this way development results could filter down to the poor and uplift their living conditions. Through decentralization, local governments play developmental role where councils are supposed to provide leadership and define the kind of relationship municipalities need to build with communities, organizations, businesses and others who can contribute to the development of any given areas (Bennett, 1993).

The benefits of effective and participatory decentralization have been given considerable prominence over the years, (Reddy, 1999). The argument behind the effectiveness of decentralization lies in its ability to improve basic service delivery. Effective and fair forms of decentralized local government that is given the required support could constitute the basis for a new and improved relationship between the local citizenry and the state. In this context, the advantages of decentralization are propounded by Cheema and Rondinelli (1983) and Smith (1985) as follows:

Decentralization can become an effective mechanism for overcoming the serious limitations of centrally controlled national planning, (Bellshaw, 2000). The most important consideration

in this regards would be to delegate some control and authority in national development planning and government to officials who are directly concerned with the field of local situation. Local need could be addressed in this manner, (Reddy, 1999).

Through decentralization, it will be possible to reduce the bureaucracy and red tape usually associated with highly centralized planning, particularly in developing countries where the concentration of power, authority and resources are generally the national capital, (Bellshaw,2000). Furthermore, decentralization will enable officials to become more knowledgeable and sensitive to local problems and needs and to gain insight on possible implementation plans. Greater representativity should be ensured for the divergent political, religious, ethnic and tribal groups in development decisions. It would also promote equity in the allocation of resources; it will facilitate the political and administrative penetration of national government policies in the remote/rural areas where the support for national policies are weak, (Reddy, 1999).

It could develop management capacity among local government and the provinces, thereby taking over functions that are not performed efficiently and effectively by national departments. It could also develop the capacities of local officials. Efficiency of the national government could increase, as decentralization would relieve top management officials of routine tasks. It could also assist local officials to develop their management and technical skills, (Reddy, 1999). Decentralization could provide a coordinating structure for central government ministries and agencies, non governmental organizations and local leaders involved in development initiatives in different districts/provinces/ regions,(Rakner ,2004). It could provide vehicle for mass participation by the local citizenry. It could facilitate the exchange of information relative to the local needs and channel them directly to the local government. It creates an alternative means of decision-making. Consequently, it can offset the influence and control over development activities by elites who are often insensitive or unsympathetic to the local needs, (Bellshaw, 2000).

Decentralization could further promote more flexible, innovative and creative management, District; regional or provincial government could be more innovative relative to policies and programs, (Rakner, 2004). If they are successful, they could be replicated in other part of the country; if they fail the costs are limited to a small jurisdiction. It enable local leaders to locate services more effectively within communities, to integrate areas that are isolated or

lagging behind and draw them into regional economies and to monitor and evaluate the implementation of development projects more carefully,(Reddy .P.S ,1999). It can promote political stability and national unity by facilitating the participation of groups in different parts of the country developmental decision making; thereby ensuring they buy into the political system, (Rakner, 2004). The relationship between national, provincial and local government could constitute a cooperative system. Working together, these spheres of government can better achieve the aims of development.

There are high expectations among policymakers and enlightened citizens for an increased public role in development and governance. As observed by (A. Venter 2001), the citizens are looking forward to genuinely taking part in the decision making process on matters that concern their welfare. The basic elements of good governance that were absent in South Africa during the Apartheid era, are to be actualised through the decentralisation process. In Post Apartheid South Africa, effective decentralisation and citizen participation in governance and development is expected to reinforce democratic ideals, legitimise democratic institutions, and give a sense of ownership of the development projects and lawmaking process to the citizens.

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