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WARD COMMITTEE SYSTEMS AS AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

- Institute for Economic Research on Innovation
- We undertake research that seeks to promote sustainable economic growth, social development and political democracy
- We are centrally concerned with evidence-based policy research
- We believe that academics should not only interpret the world without doing anything to change it

INTRODUCTION

- Background as a development planner and economic geography
- As an academic work more in the area of sustainable local development
- View effective public participation with the lenses of local development and within the context of local development
- Effective public participation should generate visible outcomes

STRUCTURE OF THE REST OF PRESENTATION

- Context matters
- Normative context of public participation
- Actual realities
- The experiences of south of Durban, Rustenburg, and councillor Zulu in Soweto, Johannesburg
- Capability and competence building
- Conclusions

CONTEXT MATTERS

- Our political past and disempowerment
- Transition and nation building
- Transformative objectives of our national project
- A national and provincial project that is implemented locally
- Public participation is embedded in our experiences
- Our experiences provide us with our starting point and context of public participation

NORMATIVE KNOWLEDGE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- There are both legal and policy frameworks that encourage public participation
- We can talk of ward committee members as community change agents
- Together, they form development change agency- the ward committee
- Set development planning agenda at ward level
- Enable local people to participate in their development

NORMATIVE KNOWLEDGE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- Improve public policy content, process and public policy outcomes
- Promote good governance
- Seek to achieve sustainable local development
- Vehicles through which to achieve participatory democracy

WARD COMMITTEES

- Link between ward committees and deepening of democracy
- Enable local government to fulfill their mandate of ensuring representative democracy and democratizing development
- Ensures that government is accessible

WARD COMMITTEES

- Ensures that those councillors as part of those who govern are known, are not remote to their communities and understand their wards including the challenges facing their wards
- Ensures that communities are organized partners with local government
- Contribute to inclusive decision-making
- Ensures communication between local council and local inhabitants at the lowest level

NORMATIVE LEVEL

- At a normative level, there is no disagreement about the rationale and objectives of public participation
- Logically, ward committee systems are indeed a practical way of implementing public participation
- However, if we want to improve performance of ward committees, the knowledge of normative realities of public participation may not sufficient

THEORY VERSUS ACTUAL REALITIES OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- So we may talk of the challenges of theoretical knowledge and practice as it is often associated with understanding the local realities
- So we can then talk of the tension between theoretical knowledge and actual realities
- I will argue that in order to understand the effectiveness of ward committees as agencies that are tasked to deliver effective public participation, we should look at the actual workings of ward committees

CHALLENGES AND CONTEXTUAL CONSTRAINTS

- There are challenges facing ward committees
- However, generalizing about them may not be helpful
- Low levels of education have been cited as a constraint
- However, there is still no conclusive evidence that links high levels of education with effective public participation

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

- I will argue that there is a link between high levels of education and social exclusion
- This is when education and specialized knowledge is used to exclude people from effective participation especially on issues that directly affect them at ward level
- That is to say, education has never been neutral and its products can never be neutral

THE CASE OF SOUTH OF DURBAN

- Durban South is that part of Durban/ eThekweni which is more industrial
- It hosts ENGEN and SAPREF refineries
- The impact of pollution is evidence through diseases like TB affecting local inhabitants
- Issues of environmental and social justice are often the rallying points for public participation

THE CASE OF SOUTH OF DURBAN

- Environmental impact assessment has been the main issue
- The process has been driven by scientific and technical knowledge
- Reports are compiled by knowledgeable people
- Scientific and technical knowledge can be seen as an instrument of power and social exclusion

THE CASE OF SOUTH OF DURBAN

- The process has been empowering to those environmental and community organizations that have capacity, and skills to understand scientific and technical language of the EIAs
- The regulations have hindered the inclusion of local voices on matters that directly affect them
- Consequently, language and technical issues have prevented effective public participation

SOME INSIGHTS

- The experience of Durban South points to interesting insights
- I will argue that the problem is not just with technical jargon used in EIAs but with education system itself
- Its an education system that produces people who may not simplify technical language in ways that enable local inhabitants to participate effectively on issues and decisions that require their inputs
- Its an education system that reproduces inequalities

THE CASE OF RUSTENBURG

- The municipality experienced both economic growth and population growth
- New residential areas and shopping malls
- Informal settlements also sprang up
- In 2002, the council took a decision to establish ward committees to effect public participation

THE CASE OF RUSTENBURG

- At first there was expectation that participating in ward committees would be rewarded by certain benefits
- When these were not realised, the motivation and interest was lost
- In some cases people reported lack of contact with their local councillors
- The council took hard lessons from their experiences
- Evidence of political will from the side of the council

THE CASE OF RUSTENBURG

- Ward committees reported participating in policy matters and monitoring provision of basic services
- Participation has shaped local politics and the way people perceived democracy and service delivery in the municipality
- The poor participated because they wanted development



THE CASE OF COUNCILLOR ZULU

- Councillor Mandla Zulu is a ward councillor in ward 50, in Soweto, Johannesburg
- He left school in grade 7 in 1977
- His wife sells chickens as a form self-employment and income generating enterprise
- He has worked as a volunteer through CPF, SGB, and later SAPS
- He has 18 years as a volunteer

THE CASE OF COUNCILLOR ZULU

- He knows the boundaries of his ward including how many elderly people are in his ward
- The main challenges facing his ward are poverty, unemployment and crime
- He has established an ABET centre using local primary school premises
- To-date he has 250 students in the centre enrolled from grade 1 to grade 12

THE CASE OF COUNCILLOR ZULU

- Using his own funds, he has organized an event for senior citizens
- He has organized awards for 2 students who had 13 distinctions between the 2 of them
- Encouraged youth to study further
- 3 of them are at Wits University and one is currently studying BSc in biochemistry

THE CASE OF COUNCILLOR ZULU

- The student studying for BSC attributes his current success to the efforts of Councillor Zulu
- After getting my results I was not sure what to do as I did not apply to any university. Councillor Zulu encouraged me to study further. He even made calls to some offices and before I arrived at those offices they were expecting me

THE CASE OF COUNCILLOR ZULU

- Earlier this year, there was public works-led project
- He convinced local residents to prioritize unemployed people from households where there was no one employed
- At the end of February while attending conference on public participation, he received a call that people had not been paid

THE CASE OF COUNCILLOR ZULU

- He left the conference in the afternoon
- Used a taxi and sat at the back where he was able to listen to conversations in the taxi without disrupting the conversations
- Organized meeting that evening and later called the contractor with whom he explained the situation of those workers
- By 7 am, the majority of the people had been paid and the rest were paid in the afternoon

THE CASE OF COUNCILLOR ZULU

- He attributes his success to hard work and working extended hours
- He says in order to succeed one needs to be patient, disciplined, trust himself, be active, and commitment
- Asked if the success is based on the collective workings of the ward committee, his response was interesting
- Ward committees have not been working as we are awaiting their induction

CAPABILITY AND COMPETENCE BUILDING

- I will argue that in order to improve the performance of ward committees, we need to pay attention to the actual realities and workings of ward committees as they occur in their socio-political contexts
- Based on needs assessment, and need for a common conceptual/ ideological framework we can design forms of capability and competence building
- Rather than talk about training I will prefer to talk about capability and competence building
- I am trying to emphasize the need to address and build specific capabilities and competencies

ENHANCE UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

- Improved understanding of local development as a collective and inter-disciplinary undertaking- economics, politics, law, sociology
- A political economy approach may help enhance their understanding and appreciation of both public participation and local development including development planning as a contested terrain
- The whole exercise should be less academic and through case studies

LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION

- Ward committees are expected to undertake communication between local council and local inhabitants and vice versa
- A generalized communication course may not be useful enough for this local leadership
- A communication course for leaders may be more helpful as leaders are change agents

ADDITIONAL AREAS OF CAPACITY BUILDING

- Community leadership
- Conflict management as leadership skill
- Negotiations
- Meeting procedures
- Writing minutes

CONCLUSIONS

- Ward committees occur in socio-political contexts
- There may not be a blueprint on how to make them effective instruments of public participation
- The need for common understanding
- Effectiveness of ward committees can be linked to local leadership, how they are viewed by local residents and their relevant functions
- Ward committees should remain relevant to their local contexts
- Their impact can be linked to the nature and performance of their human resources

REMUNERATION AND PROFESSIONALIZING WARD COMMITTEES

- Ward committee members are local volunteers
- They are not paid but are reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses
- It may be worth considering professionalizing ward committees
- A form of allowance for them as a form of encouragement
- That could be linked to performance targets

FORMALIZED PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN LEGISLATURE AND UNIVERSITIES

- Worth considering is a partnership between academics and legislature
- Encourage local governments in Gauteng to form partnerships with Gauteng universities
- Use the partnerships to generate empirical knowledge and enhance local development
- Generate case studies as contexts and bases for knowledge generation
- Establish communities of practice to share good practices



Thank You

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