Are ward committees working?
Insights from six case studies

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Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
CBD	Central business district
CBP	Community-based planning
CDW	community development worker
CPF	Community policing forum
DA	Democratic Alliance
DPLG	Department of Provincial and Local Government
IDP	Integrated development plan
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
MEC	Member of the Executive Committee
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PR	Proportional representation (councillor)
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SANCO	South African National Civics Organisations

PART 1

Introduction

PART

1

Are ward committees working? Insights from six case studies

Since 1994, there has been a widely observed commitment in South Africa to participatory governance within both government and civil society, which has been given legal standing and encouragement through the country's Constitution and other pieces of progressive legislation. While in many instances implementation has lagged behind the ideals of legislation and policy, it has to be said that never in the country's history have law and policy-making and development practice been as democratic and participatory as under the present dispensation.

At the level of the local state, the commitment to participatory governance is reflected in an impressive host of laws and policy documents and is intended to be realised through new modalities of development that require formal participatory processes and institutions in local governance. Since 2001, ward committees have emerged as a key institutional mechanism intended to contribute towards bringing about people-centred, participatory and democratic local governance. The rationale for ward committees is to supplement the role of elected councillors by creating a bridge between communities and the political and administrative structures of municipalities. These committees have been set up in the vast majority of wards in municipalities across the country.

Ward committees have been the focus of considerable attention by government as well as civil society, with substantial investment already made in an attempt to ensure that these structures have the necessary capacity and resources required for them to fulfil their envisaged roles as a 'voice' of communities. At the same time, questions have been asked about how effective these institutions actually are; whether they are useful conduits for community involvement in local governance; whether, as 'created spaces' for public participation, they are inherently capable of playing the critical role expected of them; and whether they create opportunities for real power-sharing between municipalities and citizens.

The research presented in this book sets out to offer a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the functioning and value of ward committees. In-depth qualitative studies of six ward committees are described. They provide insights into how ward committees are functioning and the key reasons behind the dysfunctionality that appears to plague the majority of ward committees. They also provide lessons for the future to strengthen the role of ward committees.

It is envisaged that this resource book will be useful for local government councillors and practitioners, ward committee members, policy makers and ordinary citizens interested in the structures of participatory local governance.

The sample

Six ward committees, two each from three municipalities, were selected for the case studies. Their names and identifying features have been withheld to ensure anonymity. The municipalities were selected to incorporate a number of different criteria, including category of municipality (one metro was included), size (in terms of number of wards) and rural/urban profile.

Municipality	Category of municipality	No. of wards
1	Local	29
2	Local	20
3	Metro	100

The selection of the case study wards in each municipality was made in consultation with the Speakers' offices of the three municipalities. The sample selection criteria sought to achieve a balance between well functioning and poorly functioning committees, rural and urban locations, and ruling party and opposition party-led committees.

Data was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews with councillors (including Speakers and ward councillors), municipal officials responsible for overseeing ward committees, members of the ward committees, and, in the case of Municipalities 1 and 2, members of the public resident in the selected wards. Focus groups were conducted with two of the ward committees. In addition, in two municipalities ward committee meetings were attended and observed.

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Legislative
and policy
provisions
for ward
committees

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Municipal Structures Act

The Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998) was the first piece of legislation to formally introduce the concept of ward committees. Part 4 of Chapter 4 of the Act sets out the composition and election of ward committees, as well as a framework for the powers and functions of committees, the term of office of committee members and procedures for dealing with vacancies and the dissolution of committees.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: MUNICIPAL STRUCTURES ACT

Act No. 117, 1998

Part 4: Ward committees

Only metropolitan and local municipalities of certain types may have ward committees.

72.

(1) Only metropolitan and local municipalities of the types mentioned in sections 8(c), (d), (g) and (h) and 9(b), (d) and (f) may have ward committees.

(2) If a metropolitan or local municipality of a type referred to in subsection (1) chooses to establish ward committees, the provisions of this part apply.

(3) The object of a ward committee is to enhance participatory democracy in local government.

Establishment of ward committees

73.

(1) If a metro or local council establishes ward committees, it must establish a ward committee for each ward in the municipality.

(2) A ward committee consists of—(a) the councillor representing that ward in the council, who must also be the chairperson of the committee; and (b) not more than 10 other persons.

(3) A metro or local council must make rules regulating—

(a) the procedure to elect the subsection (2)(b) members of a ward committee, taking into account the need—

(i) for women to be equitably represented in a ward committee; and

(ii) for a diversity of interests in the ward to be represented.

(b) the circumstances under which those members must vacate office; and

(c) the frequency of meetings of ward committees.

(4) A metro or local council may make administrative arrangements to enable ward committees to perform their functions and exercise their powers effectively.

(5) (a) Out of pocket expenses referred to in paragraph (c) must be paid from the budget of the municipality in question.

(b) A metro or local council must develop a policy and determine criteria for and calculation of the out of pocket expenses referred to in paragraph (c) based on a provincial framework determined by the MEC subject to paragraph (e).

(c) A metro or local council may make arrangements for the payment of out of pocket expenses to members of ward committees in respect of participation by ward committee members in the activities of the ward committees.

(d) A municipal council may allocate funds and resources to enable ward committees to perform their functions, exercise their powers and undertake development in their wards within the framework of the law.

(e) The Minister must determine a national framework including criteria for the calculation of the out of pocket expenses referred to in paragraph (b).

Functions and powers of ward committees

74.   A ward committee—

(a) may make recommendations on any matter affecting its ward—

(i) to the ward councillor; or

(ii) through the ward councillor, to the metro or local council. the executivecommittee, the executive mayor or the relevant metropolitan subcouncil:and

(b) has such duties and powers as the metro or local council may delegate to it in terms of section 32.

Term of office of members

75.

(1)   The section 73(2)(b) members of a ward committee are elected for a term that corresponds with the term referred to in section 24 of this Act.

(2)   The Minister may by notice in the Government Gazette prescribe regulations for the implementation of subsection (1).

Vacancies

76.   If a vacancy occurs among the section 73(2)(b) members of a ward committee, the vacancy must be filled in accordance with a procedure determined by the metro or local council.

Remuneration

77.   No remuneration is payable to the section 73(2)(b) members of a ward committee.

Dissolution of ward committees

78.   A metro or local council may dissolve a ward committee if the committee fails to fulfil its object.

Ward committees consist of ten individuals plus the ward councillor who, according to the Act, must be the chairperson of the committee. Municipalities are required to make rules regulating the procedure to elect members onto the ward committee. Women should be equitably represented, and a diversity of interests needs to be represented.

Importantly, the Structures Act limits the statutory powers and functions of ward committees to those of advisory bodies. Section 74 states that a ward committee may make recommendations on any matter affecting its ward to the ward councillor or, through the councillor, to the council, executive committee, mayor or sub-council. Ward committees can also have any duties and powers delegated to them by the municipal council.

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Municipal Systems Act

Chapter 4 of the Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000) (the Systems Act), while not dealing specifically with ward committees, implies that they are one of the structures through which participation by the local community in the affairs of the municipality must take place (section 17(1)). The Act details the obligations of municipalities in terms of what processes and procedures they need to put in place to facilitate community participation in local governance, how information regarding opportunities for public participation should be communicated, and how access by the public should be afforded to municipal decision-making processes. Section 16(1) draws specific attention to the fact that municipalities should facilitate the participation of the local community in all processes related to their integrated development plans (IDPs) and performance management systems, the preparation of municipal budgets and strategic decisions about the provision of municipal services. These are then the principal processes in which ward committees are expected to participate. Moreover, the Act states that municipalities have an obligation to build the capacity of local communities to participate in these processes as well as the capacity of councillors and staff to foster community participation.

Section 17(2) also notes that with regard to all 'mechanisms, processes and procedures' for community participation, municipalities must take into account the special needs of people who cannot read or write, people with disabilities, women, and other disadvantaged groups.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: MUNICIPAL SYSTEMS ACT

Act No. 32, 2000

Development of culture of community participation

16.

(1) A municipality must develop a culture of municipal governance that complements formal representative government with a system of participatory governance, and must for this purpose—

(a) encourage, and create conditions for the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality, including in—

(i) the preparation, implementation and review of its integrated development plan in terms of Chapter 5;

(ii) the establishment, implementation and review of its performance management system in terms of Chapter 6;

(iii) the monitoring and review of its performance, including the outcomes and impact of such performance;

(iv) the preparation of its budget; and

(v) strategic decisions relating to the provision of municipal services in terms of Chapter 8;

(b) contribute to building the capacity of—

(i) the local community to enable it to participate in the affairs of the municipality; and

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(iii) councillors and staff to foster community participation; and

(c) use its resources, and annually allocate funds in its budget, as may be appropriate for the purpose of implementing paragraphs (a) and (b).

(2) Subsection (1) must not be interpreted as permitting interference with a municipal council's right to govern and to exercise the executive and legislative authority of the municipality.

Mechanisms, processes and procedures for community participation

17.

(1) Participation by the local community in the affairs of the municipality must take place through—

(a) political structures for participation in terms of the Municipal Structures Act;

(b) the mechanisms, processes and procedures for participation in municipal governance established in terms of this Act;

(c) other appropriate mechanisms, processes and procedures established by the municipality;

(d) councillors; and

(e) generally applying the provisions for participation as provided for in this Act.

(2) A municipality must establish appropriate mechanisms, processes and procedures to enable the local community to participate in the affairs of the municipality, and must for this purpose provide for—

(a) the receipt, processing and consideration of petitions and complaints lodged by members of the local community;

(b) notification and public comment procedures, when appropriate;

(c) public meetings and hearings by the municipal council and other political structures and political office bearers of the municipality, when appropriate;

(d) consultative sessions with locally recognised community organisations and, where appropriate, traditional authorities; and

(e) report-back to the local community.

(3) When establishing mechanisms, processes and procedures in terms of subsection (2) the municipality must take into account the special needs of–-

(a) people who cannot read or write;

(b) people with disabilities;

(c) women; and

(d) other disadvantaged groups.

Municipal Finance Management Act

The Municipal Finance Management Act (No. 56 of 2003) does not mention ward committees explicitly. However, it does call for community participation in a number of processes related to how municipal resources are used and reported on, such as the

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drawing up of the annual municipal budget, the establishment of municipal entities and public-private partnerships, and the publication of the annual report of the municipality.

Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees

In June 2005 the Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees were gazetted by the Department of Provincial and Local Government (Notice 965 of 2005). The guidelines supplement legislation by providing uniform guidelines to ward committee members, councillors and officials on the procedures to be followed in establishing ward committees, how they are intended to operate and the conduct of their members. The guidelines state that the object of ward committees is to enhance participatory democracy in local government. The document describes a ward committee as:

a) an advisory body;

b) a representative structure;

c) an independent structure; and

d) an impartial body that must perform its functions without fear, favour or prejudice.

The guidelines offer some possible powers and duties that municipalities may delegate to ward committees, namely:

a) *To serve as an official specialised participatory structure in the municipality.*

b) *To create formal unbiased communication channels as well as cooperative partnerships between the community and the council through*

   i. *Advising and making recommendations to the ward councillor on matters and policy affecting the ward;*

   ii. *Assisting the ward councillor in identifying challenges and needs of residents;*

   iii. *Disseminating information in the ward concerning municipal affairs e.g. the budget, IDP, performance management system, service delivery options and municipal properties;*

   iv. *Receiving queries and complaints from residents concerning municipal service delivery, communicating these to council and providing feedback to the community on council's response;*

   v. *Ensuring constructive and harmonious interaction between the municipality and community through the use and co-ordination of ward residents meetings and other community development forums;*

   vi. *Interacting with other forums and organisations on matters affecting the ward.*

c) *To serve as a mobilising agent for community action within the ward (e.g. ensuring the active participation of the community in service payment campaigns, IDP and budget processes and decisions about municipal services and by-laws).*

The DPLG's Handbook for Ward Committees explains the roles of ward committees and ward councillors as follows:

Roles of ward committees

- Increase the participation of local residents in municipal decision-making, as they are a direct and unique link with the council;
- Are representative of the local ward, and are not politically aligned;
- Should be involved in matters such as the IDP process, municipal performance management, the annual budget, council projects and other key activities and programmes as all these things impact on local people;
- Can identify and initiate local projects to improve the lives of people in the ward;
- Can support the councillor in dispute resolutions, providing information about municipal operations;
- Can monitor the performance of the municipality and raise issues of concern to the local ward;
- Can help with community awareness campaigns e.g. waste, water and sewage, payment of fees and charges, as members know their local communities and their needs.

Roles of the ward councillor

Is the chairperson of the ward committee;

Is responsible for convening the constituency meeting to elect ward committee members;

Is responsible for calling ward committee meetings;

Is responsible for ensuring that a schedule of meetings is prepared, including: ward committee meetings, constituency meetings and special meetings;

Works with the ward committee to ensure that there is an annual plan of activities;

Is responsible for ensuring that the ward committee does what the municipality expects about reporting procedures;

Is responsible for handling queries and complaints in the ward;

Is responsible for resolving disputes and making referrals of unresolved disputes to the municipality;

Should be fully involved in all community activities that the ward committee is engaged with;

Is responsible for communicating the activities and meeting schedules to the PR councillor.

Source: *Having Your Say: A Handbook for Ward Committees*, Department of Provincial and Local Government/GTZ, Pretoria, 2005.

The guidelines are clear that no executive powers should be delegated to ward committee members. They also indicate that a ward committee may express dissatisfaction with the non-performance of its ward councillor in writing to the municipal council.

With regard to capacity building, the guidelines require ward committees to prepare an annual capacity-building and training needs assessment for members of the committee. A capacity-building plan for each member, with a budget, should then be developed.

In terms of the composition of ward committees, the guidelines echo the Structures Act's call for equitable representation of men and women. It suggests the diversity of

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interest groups that should be included, such as youth, religious groups, sports and culture, health and welfare, business, environment, education, older persons etc.

The election procedure for members of the ward committee can be through either sectoral or geographic representation. In the case of the former, the different interest groups in the ward are first identified and then organisations and individuals representing each sector are invited to stand for election onto the ward committee. In the case of geographic representation, the municipality identifies the different geographical areas, villages or clusters of farms that will represent an equitable geographic spread of the residents of the ward, and then calls for nominations from each area. Voting to elect the ward committee members then takes place at a community meeting.

Ward committees are required by the guidelines to meet at least quarterly. Public, or ward, meetings should also be convened regularly. These are meant to enable the ward committee and ward councillor to register the concerns and inputs of the community about service delivery and other issues in the ward, and to report back to the community on issues that affect it.

The guidelines also require that municipalities make administrative arrangements to enable ward committees to perform their functions and exercise their powers effectively. Administrative support can include assistance to community members to identify ward committee members (e.g. providing identity cards), making administrative staff available to assist the committee with clerical functions, arrange meeting venues, provide logistical resources such as office equipment and stationery, advertising community meetings, providing transport, and developing and implementing capacity-building and training programmes for ward committee members.

The guidelines indicate that the term of office of ward committee members should be determined by the municipality. The document recommends that the term be no less than two and no longer than three years.

Municipal policies and by-laws regulating ward committees

Many municipalities have introduced their own municipal policies, and in some cases, by-laws to regulate the powers, functions and operation of ward committees. However, to a large extent, the provisions within these policies and by-laws appear to be taken straight from the Structures Act and the Guidelines.

Local Government Laws Amendment Act

The recently passed Local Government Laws Amendment Act (2008) makes a number of changes to the governance and functioning of ward committees. Firstly, it determines that the term of office of ward committees be standardised and aligned to the five-year term of councils. Secondly, it encourages municipalities to make financial provision for

the functioning of ward committees, such as reimbursement of committee members' out-of-pocket expenses. Such expenses should be allocated from the municipal budget. The Act also makes it possible that funds are allocated to ward committees to enable them to undertake development in their wards.

PART 3

Key issues and
challenges

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This part provides an outline of some of the key issues and challenges that are commonly highlighted in the research that has been conducted on ward committees.

According to Oldfield (2008) ward committees face three critical limitations: i) the politics of representation, ii) structural limits to power, and iii) the vagaries of councillor and party politics. This provides a useful starting point for analysing the various critiques and shortcomings of ward committees.

Representivity

A major concern has to do with the way representation on ward committees is constituted. In particular, the allegation often arises that ward councillors have a direct hand in picking ward committee members in line with their political affiliations. This has given rise to the charge that ward committees are often merely extensions of party structures and do not encompass the full range of interests in communities. It is also alleged that ward councillors, in their role as chairpersons of the committees, are able to manipulate deliberations and decisions to reflect the mandate of the political party they represent, rather than the real needs and aspirations of the community. As one ward committee member in the Govan Mbeki Municipality is reported to have said:

> *The problem is that the ward councillors are not independent, they want to be spoon-fed. When we come up with creative constructive ideas, you become a threat to them... When we have elections for ward committee members in our communities, the councillors already have the names of the people they want elected. This situation makes some ward committee members to become 'Mickey Mouse' of these councillors because they do not contribute, but are told what to do (SA Local Government Briefing, 2005:28).*

Piper and Deacon (2008), in research conducted in Msunduzi Municipality, found that ward committees are very often politicised in one of three ways. Firstly, there is 'inter-party competition', in which political parties vie for control of the committees and where the composition of committees is skewed towards supporters of one or other party. Then there is 'intra-party competition' in which ward committees have become embroiled in factionalism within political parties, where one or other faction within the party (typically the ANC) uses ward committees to secure greater political power. Finally, there is what they term 'policy competition' where the role of ward committees, rather than their composition, is defined by the political party. In Msunduzi, the latter has apparently been manifested by ward committees in predominantly DA areas refusing to participate in the municipality's ward committee processes, such as the training that was provided for ward committees.

Piper and Deacon (2008:44) also observed that in some cases there is a close relationship between ward committees and branches of political parties. In some instances, the members of both structures are the same. They cite an example of a ward

councillor who combined ward committee and ANC branch meetings 'to avoid a state of animosity between the two groups, which are essentially the same thing'.

Thus an important objective is to ensure that representation on ward committees is derived from a democratic and inclusive nomination and election process. In many cases nomination and election processes appear to have been deeply flawed, which has compromised the quality of representation on ward committees. Research by Chanza and Piper (2006), again in Msunduzi Municipality, for example, found that the youth were under-represented and under-participated in ward committee processes. Other research by Piper and Deacon (2008) found that there were too few women on ward committees in Msunduzi Municipality. It has also been reported that it has been difficult to establish representative ward committees in wards where the communities are racially and economically very diverse (Portfolio Community on Provincial and Local Government, 2003).

In many cases nomination and election processes appear to have been deeply flawed, which has compromised the quality of representation on ward committees.

Particularly in the case of large wards, there have been concerns that the size of ward committees (limited to ten community members plus the ward councillor) is inadequate to ensure full representation of all interests and geographical areas within the ward. Hence the suggestion, even as far back as 2003, to allow some flexibility in the size of ward committees. This would require amendments to section 73(2)b of the Municipal Structures Act (Portfolio Committee on Provincial and Local Government, 2003). To date there have been no serious moves to bring about this change, although the idea that ward committees may have sub-committees, as one way of broadening representation, has been promoted. One exception is the City of Cape Town where, following the 2006 municipal elections, the municipality opted to establish 'ward forums' instead of ward committees. These forums consist of up to 20 representatives of various sectors within the wards.

The challenge is further to ensure that, through their consultation processes, ward committees are fully embedded within the multiple interest groups and sectors in their communities. This implies that those elected to represent specific groups or issues regularly consult and obtain a mandate from those groups. Sub-committees are one means of achieving broader representation.

Ways of limiting undue party political influence on ward committees also need to be investigated. One option is to legislate that councillors can no longer be the chairpersons of ward committees. This was part of an earlier version of proposed amendments to the Structures Act but was subsequently abandoned. While the undue political influence on ward committees through ward councillors has emerged as a significant problem, careful thought would need to be given to making councillors relinquish their chairing role as they provide an important link to municipal information and decision-making processes.

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Powers

Another set of issues relates to the limitations of ward committees' powers. These limitations are legislatively imposed in the first instance – i.e. the Structures Act confines the powers of ward committees to merely providing advice to ward councillors and receiving inputs from communities. Although the Structures Act makes provision for municipalities to delegate certain powers and duties to ward committees, it would appear that few municipalities have done this in any meaningful sense.

The role of ward committees (as supposedly independent structures rooted in civil society) in monitoring the performance of ward councillors is another contentious issue. At a national DPLG conference on community participation in March 2005, there was a strong backlash from representatives of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) against the notion of ward committees playing any role in evaluating or reporting on the performance of ward councillors (Hollands, 2005). Arguably ward committees should have a role in monitoring and evaluating the performance of the municipality within their wards. However, this aspect of their role has been poorly defined and implemented.

Skills

In most instances, ward committees' effectiveness is constrained by limitations in members' levels of education, skills and expertise. A skills audit of 373 ward committee members in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality carried out by the Project for Conflict Resolution and Development in 2008 (Bendle, 2008) found that only 34 of the members (9%) had any post-matric training or qualification and 59 members (16%) did not have a matric qualification. These are results from a metropolitan municipality. It is likely that the education profile of ward committee members in more rural municipalities will reflect even lower education and skills levels.

A significant impediment to capacity building of ward committees appears to be a lack of funding at municipal level.

Research by Himlin (2005) in the City of Johannesburg found that many ward committee members were not clear about their roles or how to carry out their functions. The need for ward committee members to receive capacity-building training is widely recognised and is encouraged by the Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees. The Structures Act and the Systems Act also place a duty on municipalities to make provision for capacity building to enable active community participation. From national government there have been moves to provide guidance on the nature of the capacity building that should be offered. A national, accredited training programme for ward committee governance has recently been unveiled, which is meant to be the uniform standard for all ward committee training.[1]

A significant impediment to capacity building of ward committees appears to be a lack of funding at municipal level. While levels of support to ward committees appear to vary greatly (for example, some municipalities have allocated budgets of up to R50 000 to each of their wards) (Portfolio Committee on Provincial and Local Government, 2003), many municipalities simply have not been in a position (or perhaps have not seen sufficient need) to budget for the capacity building and training of ward committees. The same applies to the often-raised issue of reimbursement of ward committee members for out-of-pocket expenses, such as for transport or the use of cell phones, or what some suggest more contentiously should be a basic stipend to serve as an incentive for the community work performed by ward committee members.

Lack of access to resources such as office space, computers, printers, photocopiers etc. has also been a constraint. Many municipalities appear not to be able to budget adequately for such resources.

Functionality

According to some critics, ward committees are fundamentally flawed in operation. As one commentator puts it: 'Put simply, ward committees do not work' (Schmidt, 2008:13). Schmidt argues:

> *There is much research or anecdotal evidence to support this and little research or anecdotal evidence suggesting that there are, in fact, examples of effective ward committees that have had an impact over a sustained period.*

Not all observers are quite as critical. Nevertheless, a range of concerns are commonly expressed about the practical functioning of ward committees, which have implications for their effectiveness in enhancing public participation. Some of the typical kinds of challenges that have beset many committees include (Himlin, 2005; Portfolio Committee on Provincial and Local Government, 2003; Piper and Deacon, 2008):

- difficulties in sustaining ward committee members' participation and interest. In some cases meetings are not held or there are insufficient members to constitute a quorum;
- a high turnover of members as they lose interest or relocate for work opportunities;
- the chairpersons (ward councillors) not being available to attend meetings or failing to call meetings;
- no clear terms of references for committees, resulting in ad hoc responses to any matters that arise in the wards;
- poor working relationships between ward councillors and the committees, with ward councillors sometimes feeling threatened by the committees;
- related perceptions that some ward committee members have aspirations to become ward councillors, to the extent that they may deliberately try to undermine incumbent ward councillors and derail ward committee processes;

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- insufficient administrative and other resources allocated to ward committees to enable them to function effectively – for example, ward committee members having no money for transport to attend meetings;
- minutes of meetings not being taken;
- wards being spread over vast areas, particularly in rural areas, which poses challenges for both the practicalities of ward committees meeting as well as how representative the 10-person structure can be of the entire ward area; and
- the term of office of ward committees being two years or less, leading to a brain drain as experienced and capacitated members are regularly replaced.

Access to information

It has also been noted that the ability of ward committees to function effectively as communication channels between municipal councils and communities is constrained by poor municipal communication strategies and a lack of accessible information at ward level. Specifically in relation to municipal planning processes, where ward committees could potentially play an important communication role, a report by Afesis-corplan (2003) noted that '[w]ithout a proper understanding of the targets and indicators for development as set out in the IDP, and the ability to disaggregate these to their own ward areas, ward committees cannot be expected to provide any empirical or qualitative feedback on municipal delivery strategies and performance.' The same constraint applies to the ward committees' role in relation to communicating municipal budget information, which is usually only available in highly technical and inaccessible formats, and is rarely packaged in such a way as to provide useful information on budget allocations at ward level.

Influence on decision-making

One of the key tests of the effectiveness of ward committees is their impact on council decision-making. In this regard, available research suggests that ward committees are in general not having a significant influence on the decisions made by council and how resources are allocated at ward level. Himlin's (2005) study of ward committees in the City of Johannesburg, for example, noted a sense of frustration on the part of ward committee members that many of their ideas and proposals for improvements in their wards were not being responded to by the council. As Himlin observes, where members feel they are not having an impact, they may sense that their considerable investment of time in ward committee work is wasted and apathy may easily set in.

One of the key impediments to ward committees having an influence on council decision-making appears to be the limited power most ordinary ward councillors have within the deliberation processes of municipal councils. As Oldfield (2008:494) points out:

> *...ward councillors are functionally challenged if there is no explicit way in which ward committee concerns structurally become part of council agenda. Bound by the political party caucus processes and party structures, ward councillors often sit lower in political party hierarchies, with proportional representation councillors shaping party policy decisions.*

As one evaluation of ward committees released in 2003 commented, '...some councillors feel quite isolated in trying to raise ward committee matters within council' (Afesis-corplan, 2003:7).

The power of opposition party councillors to influence council decision-making is even more limited. It is also worth recognising that in many municipalities there is little political contestation, with more or less one party dominance of councils. In such scenarios, there is arguably little incentive for councils to take the demands of opposition councillors seriously.

Relationship to other structures

Finally, a number of observers have expressed the fear that ward committees have competed with, undermined or displaced other channels and spaces for community participation at local level (Schmidt, 2008; Oldfield, 2008; Piper and Deacon, 2008). As Mathekga and Buccus (2006:12) note, 'South Africa entered the new political era armed with a culture of participation.' However, it would appear that, instead of drawing on the richness of this participatory culture and the host of structures it has given rise to, most municipalities have come to rely solely on ward committees as the only legitimate conduit for engaging community members. Ward committees have thus been set up in competition with, or even to the detriment of, a range of other structures and processes through which citizens also participate in local governance. As Schmidt (2008:13) puts it:

> *the bigger problem with ward committees is not that they are dysfunctional or lack a compelling rationale, but that they have crowded out many more appropriate and effective forms of participation. They are typically the beginning and the end of the discussion about participation. The common presumption is that we have ward committees in place – therefore we have substantially fulfilled our participation compliance requirements.*

In Msunduzi Municipality, Piper and Deacon (2008:44) observe that '...the establishment of ward committees has affected other organisations and structures already in existence in Msunduzi'. They note that ward committees have sometimes duplicated or replaced, functions previously performed by other structures, such as ratepayers' associations.

It does not help that the 2005 Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees imply that ward committees have exclusive claim to legitimacy, declaring that they are the 'official specialised participatory structure in the municipality' (Chanza and Piper, 2006). However, as Oldfield (2008:492) argues, '...ward

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committees cannot be understood as the only avenue for participation at neighbourhood level.' 'Ward committees can only be effective when they are complemented by pragmatic, more inclusive mechanisms for participation'. Oldfield (2008:492) goes on to say that the introduction of ward committees is part of a process over the past decade in which processes and spaces for participation have been formalised, with the result that 'the nature of engagement between communities and local government has become increasingly procedural and technical.' The danger herein is the possibility that the formally created, government sanctioned 'invited' spaces such as ward committees crowd out other spaces through which citizens prefer to participate on their own terms. Indeed, one explanation for the spate of community protests that have been experienced throughout many parts of the country in recent years lies in the fact that citizens feel alienated from and ignored by the formal spaces for participation, which include ward committees (Mathekga and Buccus, 2006).

Having discussed some of the key issues related to ward committees, we now move on to look at the findings of the case studies of the six ward committees that were part of the research.

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Case studies

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Municipality 1

Municipal profile

Municipality 1 has an estimated population of 270 000, who are mostly concentrated around three main towns and surrounding townships and villages. While a predominately poor and undeveloped municipality, there has been significant development of the mining industry in recent years, which has served to attract a large number of migrants to the area, adding pressure to unemployment and housing and other infrastructure needs. The municipality has 29 wards and 57 councillors.

Ward committee policy

The municipality has a 'Policy on Ward Committees and Public Participation,' which was passed by council resolution in October 2006 and which sets out, among other things, the establishment, status, functions and composition of ward committees. It also explains the roles of the Speaker, administration and proportional representation (PR) councillors and includes a ward committee members' code of conduct. While comprehensive, much of the policy is generic and is based on the Structures Act and the Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Ward Committees.

The council took a resolution to make the term of office of ward committees five years, in line with the term of council.

Ward committee training

An initial round of training was conducted for ward committee members after the March 2006 municipal elections, which consisted of a one-day induction workshop followed by two further days of training with clusters of committees. The need for further training was identified by all respondents as an immediate priority. In particular, ward committees need training on the IDP and budget, and on the powers and functions of the different spheres of government.

Resources

Despite being relatively poor, this municipality has been able to make some resources available to support ward committees. Since the end of 2006 all ward committee members have received a monthly stipend of R250,[2] funded jointly by the District Municipality (75%) and Municipality 1 (25%). In order to qualify for the stipend, members need to attend meetings. A number of respondents suggested that ideally the stipend should be much higher, although one respondent did caution that the stipend is meant to serve as an incentive, rather than as remuneration for what should be voluntary community work by ward committee members. The municipality also provides other support to ward committees in the form of stationery and transport.

Functionality

According to several respondents, the functioning of ward committees is mixed, although generally there is much room for improvement. One of the specific constraints is the capacity and level of education of members. A skills audit of ward committee members found that, of the 319 ward committee members and ward councillors surveyed, 20 (6%) were illiterate, 124 (39%) were semi-literate, 99 (31%) had a matric level education and 56 (18%) had some kind of post-matric qualification. According to the Mayor, the level of education of councillors is also a concern. There is a need for further capacity building of both ward committee members and councillors.

Service delivery

A challenge noted by more than one respondent was that the municipality has very limited capacity for service delivery. Insufficient funding was noted by the Executive Committee as a serious challenge. A cursory analysis of the projects in the municipality's 2007–2011 IDP reveals that the bulk of individual projects are not budgeted for. It was pointed out that the municipality could potentially be self-sufficient but it is currently not able to generate revenue from the local mining industry because of legislative restrictions. Thus, even where ward committees have communicated community needs to council, there has often been little the municipality can do to meet them. This has led to frequent community protests.

The two major service delivery issues are water and electricity, both of which are the responsibility of the district, not the municipality. However, as one Executive Committee member explained, the municipality is 'going out of its way' to address the backlog in basic services provision, having even contributed R5m for the electrification of villages, funds which it will not be able to recover. It was also noted that most of the investment in basic infrastructure is focussed on the towns, to the detriment of the rural areas.

One of the concerns noted was that there is no direct ward committee representation in the affairs of the district municipality. It was suggested by the Mayor that ward committees need to be properly capacitated to be able to deal with the complex political issue of service delivery in their communities, and to be able to relay to communities the serious capacity constraints the municipality faces.

Mechanisms for ward committee input to council

Typically, ward committees raise issues with their ward councillor, who then takes the issues to the Speaker, who then notifies the relevant portfolio committee to have the issue addressed. It was noted that ward committees do not take issues directly to council. An important point raised by one respondent is that there is not enough follow up from councillors with the Speaker about issues that are raised by the ward committees. Communities then do not receive feedback from the municipality about the concerns they register with the ward committee.

According to the Speaker, there has not been a problem with a high turnover of ward committee members. In terms of representation, however, the Speaker expressed

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a concern about the low level of participation of white and Indian residents in ward committees.

Other structures for community participation

Besides ward committees, the other formal structure the municipality has established to promote community participation is the IDP forum, which includes representatives of ward committees as well as councillors and officials and representatives of a host of sectors within civil society. The manager of Community Participation also explained that the Executive Committee conducts quarterly outreach visits to communities. The relationship between ward committees and community development workers (CDWs) was reported to be good. The relationship between ward committees and traditional leaders was noted to be strained in some cases, where traditional leaders sometimes feel ward committees are taking over their powers.

Ward A

Ward A is based around the main town in the municipality (where the seat of council is located) and some of the surrounding villages. The ANC ward councillor has been a councillor since 2006.

Composition
The committee has ten members, six of whom are men. All ten members are black African and between the ages of 26 and 50. All of the members were reported as being either employed full-time or unemployed.

Roles
The ward councillor explained that he sees his role as making sure that the ward committee meets and that they discuss community problems. He should meet with the ward committee before he meets with the community. He expects ward committee members to raise problems from the community and to assist him with bringing delivery to the community. From their side, members of the ward committee explained that they see their role as being the link between the community and the municipality.

Ward committee members claimed that the ward councilor is not involved and does not convene ward committee meetings or engage with the community.

The ward committee members interviewed were very disparaging about the role of the ward councillor. They claimed that he is not involved and does not convene ward committee meetings or engage with the community. They have apparently complained about his performance to the Speaker and to the Chief Whip but have received no response.

Establishment

The Ward A committee was established after the 2006 elections. Community meetings were held in all of the main villages in the ward and members were elected to represent each village. The elections were generally held in tribal halls. According to the councillor there were many members of the public at each meeting; more than 100. In some cases a secret ballot was used in the elections. The elections were publicised through letters the councillor distributed in the communities. According to the councillor, politics played no part in who was elected onto the ward committee – 'the people chose hard workers' who are close to the community.

The committee has not experienced a high turnover of members. One member has apparently left to work in Johannesburg but has not been replaced.

Representation

Ward committee members each represent one of the five main villages or towns in the ward. They consult with their communities through meetings. According to the ward committee members interviewed they also each represent specific sectors, such as education and safety and security.

Functionality

According to the ward councillor, the committee is functioning as it meets monthly and identifies problems in the communities. According to the ward committee members interviewed, however, the committee had not met once in 2008. The councillor indicated that he attends almost all meetings, although this was refuted by the committee members – they claimed that he has not attended most meetings and does not give apologies. According to the councillor, when he can't attend it is because of other community engagements. If the councillor cannot attend, the meeting is postponed. It was reported that sometimes the committee is unable to constitute a quorum. According to the councillor, some members feel frustrated because of lack of service delivery in their areas and choose not to attend ward committee meetings.

Meetings

Ward committee meetings, when they are held, usually take place in the council chambers or boardroom at the municipal offices. The councillor takes minutes and is responsible for compiling a report after the meetings, which all members sign, after which it is forwarded to the Speaker's office. One of the frustrations expressed by the ward councillor is that nothing seems to be done by the municipality in response to the service delivery issues raised in the reports.

The committee holds community meetings each quarter in one of the main towns in the ward. According to the ward councillor, both he and the relevant ward committee members participate in the meetings. However, the ward committee members interviewed indicated that the councillor does not attend these meetings. As one member put it, they are 'always walking naked' without the councillor and they 'just stand alone.' The councillor expressed satisfaction with the number of community members who attend mass meetings. The ward committee members, on the other hand, were of the view that

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public participation was declining, as the public becomes increasingly tired of 'hearing the same stories' about non-delivery.

Key issues

The issues normally discussed at ward committee meetings have to do with service delivery issues in the villages, such as water, electricity, access roads, housing, schools, halls, stadia, fencing of cemeteries etc. According to the councillor, the committee has had some influence on improving service delivery. For example, in the main town in the municipality there used to be a problem with the roads being in poor condition and there not being enough street lights and traffic lights. With the feedback from the ward committee through the councillor, there are now some improvements taking place.

It was reported by the councillor that one particular village has been very resistant to the ward committee and the municipality in general. As the councillor puts it, 'they chase us away'. This has been ongoing for a number of years. In 2004 there was a Presidential imbizo in the village, where the community complained about the lack of water and electricity. Promises were made that service delivery would be addressed, but apparently nothing has improved. There appears to be a perception that the councillor was somehow involved in misappropriating funds intended for the upgrading of services.

One particular village has been very resistant to the ward committee and the municipality in general. As the councillor puts it, 'they chase us away'.

Engagement with the IDP

The ward committee has had some engagement on the municipality's IDP and budget, but, according to the councillor, there has not been engagement on other issues, such as performance management and by-laws.

Training

The councillor reported that to date he has not received any training on running ward committees. He has only had training concerning being a ward councillor. He believes, however, that he has the skills required to run the committee effectively. He felt that his members could do with more training, however, especially on how to liaise with the community about service delivery, and understanding how government works. The ward committee members interviewed expressed the need for more training on conflict management, communications skills and project and financial management. As reported by both the councillor and the ward committee, a skills audit of the committee was conducted, although there is as yet no annual skills plan in place for members.

Support from the municipality

The councillor expressed the view that the ward committee members do not receive enough support from the municipality. A particular point of contention is the stipend

members receive, which the councillor believes should be the same as the payment to CDWs – as he put it 'they do the same job, why should they differ?' The members of the committee who were interviewed also suggested that the committee could be more effective with resources such as computers, telephone, fax and stationery. Ideally, they would have an office to work from. They also felt they needed assistance with cell phone airtime.

Relationships with other role players
Some tension between the ward committee and CDWs was reported by the ward councillor, who mentioned that CDWs don't talk to him. However, the ward committee members interviewed stated that they work closely with CDWs to respond to community requests for support. Indeed, one member commented that the CDW 'does all the work supposed to be done by the ward councillor'.

Relationship between the ward councillor and the committee
According to the councillor, there have never been any tensions between himself and his ward committee, although this was clearly at odds with the feedback given by the ward committee members interviewed. According to them they have never confronted the councillor but they need to meet with him.

The committee members interviewed reported that they know the proportional representation (PR) councillor assigned to their ward and that he has attended two ward committee meetings in the past. However, they complained that he does not visit the communities. The ward committee members expressed concern that the community is losing confidence in the committee because the ward councillor and PR councillor are not responsive.

Other structures for community participation
Besides the ward committee, the councillor identified churches and traditional leaders as other channels that can be used for community participation in the ward. He also believes it is important that he, as the councillor, has a direct relationship with the community. The ward committee members interviewed noted that they have a strong relationship with traditional leaders and even use one of the leader's palaces for mass meetings. Other channels for community participation identified by the ward committee members were community policing forums, development committees, home-based care groups and crèches.

The ward councillor expressed his frustration with the lack of service delivery in the municipality. As he put it, he 'hates to be in government now' because community members place their trust in him and he can't deliver. He is concerned about how the community perceives councillors. He gave the example of councillors driving luxury cars, which gives the community the perception that they have been enriching themselves with public funds.

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Community perceptions of the ward committee

Ten residents of two different villages in Ward A were randomly surveyed to solicit their views on the ward committee. Of the ten, seven had heard about ward committees and were aware that their ward had such a committee. In terms of understandings of what ward committees are, there were a number of comments:

- 'They are people who attend meetings in the municipality, after that they give feedback to the community.'
- 'The people who liaise with the municipality. He is the eye of the municipality.'
- 'They are community representatives that assist the community with their needs.'

There were mixed views on how well the ward committee is doing its job:

- 'They are trying to tell the municipality but the municipality is doing nothing. If the municipality can respond the community should have had services.'
- 'We participate fully and the ward committee is involving the community in decision-making processes.'
- 'They have assisted us in many ways. First, they assisted with water when the community was experiencing a shortage of water. They were also in the forefront when labour was hired in one of the road maintenance projects. Our representative has also assisted disabled people to access food parcels.'
- 'I heard that the ward committee in my ward is operating well because they sometimes organise marches to present memorandums to the municipal offices.'
- 'The so-called ward committee is not assisting us.'
- 'No comment because I don't even know them.'
- 'They are not helpful to the community.'

Half of the residents surveyed had attended a ward meeting. Those who had not said either that meetings had not been convened or that they were unable to attend because of family commitments. Those who had attended meetings said they had discussed service delivery issues and the relocation of one of the communities.

In terms of what they would like to see the ward committee doing for them, residents mostly called for service delivery to be expedited. Water and electricity were the most common needs expressed. Roads, RDP houses, clinics and schools were also mentioned by several respondents.

Summary

Ward A's ward committee appears to be characterised by negative perceptions and a lack of cooperation and understanding between the ward councillor and ward committee members. The councillor appears to not be fulfilling his roles effectively. This, together with inadequate capacity building training for the councillor and the ward committee members, is impacting severely on the committee's functioning.

Ward B

Ward B consists of four villages located on the periphery of the main town in the municipality. As in Ward A, poverty is rife in Ward B and service delivery is an acute challenge. The ANC ward councillor is serving his first term as a councillor.

Composition

The ward committee has ten members, six of whom are women and all of whom are black African. Four committee members were reported to be between 36 and 50, while two were between 26 and 35 and two were older than 50.[3] Six members were reported to have passed matric, while one member has some tertiary training. Only one committee member is employed full-time and eight were reported to be unemployed. One member was disabled. Three members reported that this was their second term serving on a ward committee.

Roles

The ward councillor reported that he saw his role as chair of the ward committee as being to direct the committee to be able to both liaise with the public and debate government programmes, as well as inform the community. He expects ward committee members to liaise with the community, bring issues to the ward committee meetings and take the concerns of the public to relevant departments in the municipality. He noted that it is sometimes difficult for ward committee members to fulfil the roles expected of them. His is a large ward and travelling costs for attending meetings are high. Also, some members are household heads and need to earn a living.

According to members of the ward committee, their role is to bring service delivery to the people and to link the community to the councillor and to the municipality. Information dissemination is also a key role. The committee was in agreement that they are performing this role.

Establishment

The ward committee was elected at a public meeting that was held in a central venue in the ward. The election was facilitated by the municipality's public participation unit, and publicised through traditional leaders, NGOs, schools, and letters distributed to the public via spaza shops. According to the councillor, the turnout at the meeting was not very high. Members were nominated from those present. The election took place by a show of hands.

The councillor was forthright that party politics did play a role in the election process, although this view was not shared by the members of the committee. They believed they were selected because they are active in their communities. According to the councillor some opposition party supporters were accepted onto the committee. He voiced a concern, however, that some members of the opposition wanted to be on the ward committee to make problems for him as the councillor. According to the councillor, there are tensions between him and members of the opposition but he 'knows how to manage it.' Another issue, though, is the political ambitions of committee members who

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belong to the councillor's own party, some of whom want to become councillors. This creates some difficulties for the councillor, who is sometimes accused of things and called names.

There has not been a high turnover of members on the ward committee. The councillor reported that one member went to Johannesburg for three months and did not offer his apologies for missing meetings. The matter was referred to the Speaker's office.

Meetings

Meetings of the ward committee usually take place once a month, on a Sunday, which seems to suit more members than having meetings during the week. Meetings are usually held at central venues such as schools, tribal halls or sports grounds. The councillor reported that he has attended all meetings. There has never been a problem with having too few members to make up a quorum. The agenda for each meeting is usually decided by the councillor and the ward committee member designated as the secretary, with input from other members. The secretary takes minutes and the councillor then compiles a report which is sent to the Speaker's office. The report is then presented to the ward committee at the next meeting.

Key issues

The issues discussed at ward committee meetings revolve around the state of development in the ward, specifically issues like water, electricity and roads. They also discuss projects by local NGOs and how the municipality can assist them. The most common requests for assistance from the community relate firstly to electricity, then water, and then roads. A major problem reported by the councillor is that electricity and water are functions of the district municipality and they find that often when they report issues to do with these services they don't get a response from the district. There is consequently a perception among some sections of the community that the councillor is not doing his job, which the councillor admitted is undermining his credibility.

Influence on council decision-making

In some instances, however, the councillor reported that he feels the committee has had some influence on council decision-making. Some of the inputs made by the committee have been accommodated within the municipality's IDP, although lack of funding to implement projects is a serious problem. Generally, according to the ward councillor, the committee has not been very involved in deliberations around the IDP, the budget, performance management or by-laws. A concern pointed out by members of the ward committee was that they feel their councillor does not have much influence within the council because he is just an ordinary ward councillor and is not on the Executive Committee. There is a clear recognition by the ward committee that the councillor does not have the power to decide on service delivery within the ward.

Some of the inputs made by the committee have been accommodated within the municipality's IDP.

Benefits

The committee was able to give examples of specific instances where they had managed to assist their communities. In one case, a local clinic was open 12 hours a day. After requests from the community for it to open longer hours, the committee went to the Department of Health and made a submission, after which the clinic became operational 24 hours a day. Another example was the ward committee writing to the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry to ask for water tanks during funerals.

Representation

Eight of the ward committee members represent the four different villages in the ward, while one represents traditional authorities and one represents the disabled. In addition, each member has been allocated to head one of ten sub-committees on education, health, housing and electricity, sports, arts and culture, moral regeneration, gender, youth, infrastructure, safety and security, local economic development and welfare. However, according to the councillor, this system is not working very effectively, apparently because members are reluctant to consult with their assigned sectors on their own. It was also clear that sub-committees have not been established for each portfolio. Lack of resources and training was highlighted as a constraint.

The members reported that they have individually made some efforts to consult with their respective sectors. For example, the safety and security portfolio person has consulted with local community policing forums, while the education portfolio holder reported that she had had some meetings with school governing bodies to discuss the high failure rates.

Functionality

Overall, the ward councillor and the committee members reported that the ward committee is functioning well. The ward committee has developed a ward-based plan to guide interaction with the community and the private sector. It is apparently the only committee in the municipality to have such a plan. However, there are some challenges that lessen the effectiveness of the committee, one of which is the vast size of the ward and the inadequate public transport network. Another key challenge is that the members need further training. The stipend members receive was also reported to be too little. There was a suggestion from the members of the committee that the stipend should be at least R1 500 per month to reward them adequately for their work. One member argued that even volunteers for the Health Department are paid more than ward committee members.

The ward committee consults broadly with the community through quarterly mass meetings with all stakeholders, as well as through smaller community meetings in the different villages in the ward. The councillor indicated that he is not very satisfied with public attendance at these meetings. The public only appear to be interested when water and electricity are the issues discussed at meetings.

Training

The councillor reported that he has received training on local government as well as

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participated in a workshop on ward committees organised by the Municipality and the District. He feels that he needs training in how to liaise effectively with the community and in skills such as report writing.

A skills audit of the members of the committee has been conducted but there was no follow through in terms of a skills development plan. The committee members need further training to help them understand their roles, as well as on the municipal budget and IDP, project management, by-laws and issues specific to their portfolios. The councillor also felt the municipality could give more support to the committee in the form of an office and a computer to type minutes.

Relationships with other role-players

On the whole, the ward committee reported a good working relationship with their ward councillor. No conflicts were reported among the committee members – as one member put it, 'we are brothers and sisters.' The ward committee was aware that a PR councillor has been assigned to their ward to support the ward councillor but he has never attended ward committee meetings. Generally the committee was reported to have a good relationship with the community, although it was noted that the community's support is diminishing because of non-delivery of services in the ward. There is currently no CDW active in the ward because the previous CDW that was assigned to the ward resigned. The committee also reported that they are working well with municipal officials as well as the three traditional leaders in the ward.

Besides the ward committee, the ward councillor indicated that he also draws on home-based care groups, churches and traditional leaders as structures through which to promote community participation in the ward. However, in the case of traditional leaders, it was noted that they sometimes perceive the councillor as a threat.

Community perceptions of the ward committee

Ten people were interviewed from two villages in Ward B. Six had heard about ward committees and five knew that there was one in their ward. The following were some of the comments about what ward committees are:

- 'It is an elected committee that works with the ward councillor. It is a mediating committee between the councillor and the community.'
- 'It is a councillor committee to assist the community to access government services.'
- 'A committee that represents the community under the councillor.'
- 'A community stakeholder within the ward.'

The following views were expressed on the effectiveness of the ward committee:

- 'The ward committee is working but they had a problem at the municipality. The municipality is full of empty promises.'
- 'They are not doing their work... It's long we were promised water. We do not have place for meetings but under the trees. There is no project. When it is heavily raining our children do not get to school because of the stream.'

- 'I have not yet identified their importance. The community is struggling even if they were elected. They failed to monitor internal roads.'
- 'They ensure that there is service delivery.'
- 'They encourage community members to participate in meetings.'
- 'They do not do their work. There were RDP houses that were not completed. The road was not properly done.'

With regard to what they would like the ward committee to assist the community with, residents raised the delivery of water as the main priority. The provision of RDP houses, upgrading of roads, electricity, bridges, schools, crèches and clinics were also listed.

Summary

In Ward B, the ward councillor and the ward committee members appear to be in agreement that the committee functions reasonably effectively, although the effectiveness of the committee could be enhanced through further capacity-building training and support from the municipality.

Municipality 2

Municipal profile

Municipality 2 is a local municipality that is mostly rural in character. There are four main towns in the municipality and it has 20 wards. The population of the municipality is estimated (from the 2001 Census) to be approximately 139 000, although the municipality believes the figure could be significantly higher. The vast majority of residents live in poverty. One figure contained in the municipality's 2008/09 IDP suggests that 86% of households have an income of less than R1 600 per month. Only 17% of the economically active population are employed, according to the IDP.

Establishment

Ward committees were set up in the municipality following the March 2006 local government elections. Inductions of the new members took place in May 2006. According to the manager in charge of public participation, the municipality invited all stakeholder groups to nominate representatives and submit their names to the municipality. Meetings were then convened in each ward to elect ward committee members from those nominated. The official was satisfied that the committees are adequately representative of the residents of the wards.

Ward committee policy

The municipality is in the process of drafting a public participation policy. However, a search on the internet yielded a 2004 by-law relating to ward committees for the municipality, which sets out in detail all major aspects relevant to ward committees,

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including the functions and powers, composition and election of committees and the role of the Speaker. It was not clear whether the by-law had been adopted by council or whether key officials and councillors were even aware of the document.

Resources

From 1 July 2008 the municipality planned to allocate a stipend of R125 per month to each ward committee member. An amount of R50 per month was also to be allocated to each ward committee member to cover airtime for cell phones.[4] The municipality also plans to produce name tags for ward committee members so that, as one official put it, they can be identified 'as extensions of the municipality'. Where possible, the municipality has also provided transport to enable committee members to attend meetings.

Functionality

The manager of participation's assessment of the functioning of ward committees in the municipality was that they are 'working average, not good, not bad'. The need for further training of ward committee members to enhance the effectiveness of the committees was noted. Through the support of the German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ), forty ward committee members had received training on integrated development planning in 2007. There are plans to roll out the training to the remaining ward committee members in 2008. Until recently funding has been a serious constraint on training, although the municipality has now received a grant which it will use for this purpose and for the stipends and airtime allowances for ward committee members.

Other structures for community participation

Apart from ward committees, other channels for community participation in the municipality are the IDP Representative Forum and CDWs, one of whom is assigned to each ward. According to the manager for public participation there is no tension between ward committees and CDWs, although the fact that CDWs are paid and ward committee members are not is an issue of contention for some.

Ward C

Ward C is made up of the main township just outside the main town in the municipality (where the seat of council is located) as well as two other nearby residential areas. The areas are mostly urban in character, with a mix of formal RDP housing and some informal settlements.

Composition

The ward committee has nine active members (one member left to find work). All are black African. The female/male ratio on the committee is 5/4. Two of the members are under the age of 25, four are between 26 and 35 and three are between 36 and 50. Three members were reported to have an education up to grade 7 and six have matric. Eight of the nine members are unemployed.

Roles

The ANC councillor for the ward is serving his first term as a councillor. He understands his role as the chairperson of the ward committee as being to gather information from the ward committee members, relay it to the municipality and give feedback to the committee. He expects the members of the committee to communicate with their structures, which he says a few members are doing but most are not.

The ward committee member interviewed indicated that she expects the ward councillor to follow up issues that are reported to him and to discuss issues from council meetings with the committee before going to the community. According to her, the councillor is fulfilling her expectations.

Establishment

The ward committee was elected at a mass meeting, the turnout at which was approximately 150 residents. The meeting was publicised by loudhailer the day before and on the day of the meeting. People from different areas within the ward and sectors (such as the youth and churches) were nominated beforehand and stood for election at the meeting. Voting was done by a show of hands. According to the ward councillor, party politics did come into the election processes as parties are active in all areas of the ward. There are some DA members represented on the ward committee. The ward committee member interviewed noted that 'most ward committee members are ANC'.

Term of office

The ward councillor was unsure of the term of office of the ward committee. He thought it was two years. The ward committee member interviewed thought it was two or three years. Three or four members of the current committee have previously served on ward committees. There has only been one drop-out of a member from the committee – in this case someone who went to work in Knysna. The councillor noted, however, that members' attendance at committee meetings is not regular. He attributed this to members being out looking for work.

Representation

The committee is divided into a number of portfolio committees aligned to the portfolio committees of council, namely infrastructure, social sector, local economic development and community empowerment. One member is assigned to each of the four sectors and is expected to attend the council portfolio committee meetings. The six other members each represent a geographical area within the ward. The ward committee members decided to structure the committee in this way.

While there aren't sub-committees of the ward committee, there are nine area committees within the ward, which assist the ward committee members in keeping abreast of the issues in their areas.

Functionality

According to the councillor, the ward committee is working very well, although he noted that committee members do not always report back to communities. The councillor

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regularly calls community meetings to report back to residents. Public attendance at these meetings is usually satisfactory, especially if they are organised early enough.

The ward committee member interviewed shared the view that the committee is working well, but added that the problem was that the municipality's budget was insufficient to address all the needs in the ward, which has resulted in the community starting to point a finger at the ward councillor for non-delivery.

Meetings

The ward committee usually meets once a month, although in 2008 there were some gaps. In a six-month period about four meetings were postponed because a quorum could not be reached. The councillor and the secretary usually prepare the agenda for the meetings, with other members adding items. Meetings are held at a community hall that is central for all members to reach.

Key issues

The usual issues discussed at the committee meetings relate to service delivery, such as roads, water, crime, housing, unemployment and development projects. In some cases the committee has been able to expedite certain aspects of service delivery. An example was given of a community where there had been no water for five months, and the problem was rectified after two members of the committee accompanied the councillor to the district municipality and organised a meeting with the local municipality. The councillor gave another example of committee members reporting bad roads to him, which he then reported to the municipality's engineering department to address. A further example, given by the ward committee member, was of the committee stepping in to clarify the waiting list for a housing project.

The secretary of the committee takes minutes at meetings. The ward councillor stated that he usually reports to the Speaker's office on a monthly basis but he hadn't received a request for reports from the Speaker for several months. He did not know the reason for this.

Training

In term of his own capacity, the ward councillor reported that he has not received any training specifically on ward committees. He felt he could do with more training in how to communicate properly with his constituency. He also believed the ward committee members need further training on understanding their roles, reporting back to structures and taking minutes. The ward committee member added that members need training in computer and listening skills. She reported that they have received no training to date, despite repeated promises from the municipality. No skills audit of the ward committee has been conducted.

Support from the municipality

The ward councillor believed that the committee receives sufficient support from the municipality, especially insofar as the municipality provides transport for members

to attend meetings. The ward committee member interviewed also mentioned that the municipality provides some catering for meetings.

Other structures for community participation
In addition to the ward committee, there is a ward forum that consists of two representatives from each sector (e.g. political parties, churches, sports groups, youth groups, and business). The ward councillor explained that this forum was established in recognition that the ward committee does not have enough members to represent all structures. It meets once a month. According to the councillor it is working well. There appears to be a good working relationship between the ward committee and the forum.

Relationships with other role-players
The relationship between the ward committee and the CDW assigned to the ward was reported to be good. As the ward committee member interviewed put it, 'The CDW goes to all departments. We use him more than the councillor'. The relationship with officials in the municipality was reported to be less satisfactory, however.

The issue of a financial reward for their effort was raised by the ward committee member interviewed, according to whom the ward committee does more than the councillor but gets nothing. The view was that they serve the community and should therefore be rewarded.

Community perceptions of the ward committee

Eight members of the public were interviewed in Ward C. Seven had heard of ward committees and knew there was one in the ward. When asked to explain what a ward committee is, respondents gave the following answers:
- 'The last time I checked while it was working they used to call people on projects such as street cleaning. If you have a problem you take it to them to take to the municipality – but this did not happen. I cannot get hold of the councillor so how is it going to help address problems?'
- 'A person who is representative of the community to the municipality.'
- 'Works hand in hand with the community. Listens to the problems of the community.'
- 'It speaks about issues from the municipality i.e. projects and the things that the community wants.'
- 'It fixes problems in the community, tries to help the residents.'
- They sit in meetings by themselves but not with us. They are supposed to be helping the community solve its problems.'
- 'It has a chairperson and informs residents about the municipality's plans e.g. roads, toilets and what are the problems of the community, the municipal budget, jobs etc.'

In response to a question about how well they think the committee is doing its job, the members had this to say:
- 'I have not heard anything about what it has done.'

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- We cannot see any impact. There are no projects from the municipality. People have been on the waiting list for too long but have not received any assistance. Projects benefit the same people over and over again.'
- 'No, it is not working for the community.'
- 'Yes, because they come with the issues that would have been discussed in the meetings and after that we see the things taking place.'
- 'If you go and explain your problem to them they will take action. For example, the high crime rate – the ward committee went door to door and spoke to the youths and it became better.'
- 'It is not working at all. They talk to residents who are in conflict. If there is a project they select each other and not the rest of the community.'
- 'It used to be effective but not any more because maybe there is a separation because there are many organisations e.g. SANCO. But if there is a problem it assembles quickly to try and solve it. When it was tough it delivered toilets. The last time I heard them speaking about RDP houses but some did not get them and those that did have problems of leakages etc.'

Six people reported that they had attended ward meetings. Several found the meetings useful, although there was some frustration about the lack of follow-up on the issues raised at the meetings. For example, one resident said: 'The meeting helped but we did not see things happening. There are still many things we can just say are still being processed'. Another respondent did not find the meetings constructive: 'The meetings are not useful. What is decided on is only implemented for a short while after the meeting e.g. the high crime rate in the area. The residents are more effective on issues. They elected a crime committee because the other structures were not useful at all'. Another resident complained: 'The meetings are not useful at all and people are complaining of empty promises and unfulfilled ones such as housing'. Another response was that: 'They are not useful because the councillor has no record of being effective. We lost hope in him after he did not deliver but made empty promises'. One resident explained that he has not attended a ward meeting 'because I am still young'.

With regard to what they would like the ward committee to be doing for them, some respondents raised service delivery issues, such as houses, road maintenance, street lights and sports fields. Others mentioned the need for farming projects to help the poor, income generation projects (especially for the youth) and food parcels for indigent families.

Summary

The ward committee in Ward C seems to be working well. The committee appears to have an effective system in place to consult with the different sectors of the local community. The ward committee also seems to be receiving sufficient support from the municipality. However, the committee could benefit from more training.

Ward D

Ward D consists of a number of rural villages on the outskirts of the municipality's main town.

Composition

The ward committee has its full complement of ten members, six of whom are women. All are black African. Three members are between 26 and 35 and seven members are between 36 and 50. Seven have a matric qualification and one has received tertiary training.[5] Nine of the ten members are unemployed. One member is employed part-time.

Roles

The ward councillor reported that he understands his role as chair of the committee as being to guide discussions in the ward committee and to recommend issues to inform the agenda for council to discuss. He expects the ward committee to be independent and to be free to criticise any recommendations. As far as he is concerned the ward committee members are meeting his expectations. The representative of the ward committee interviewed understood the committee's role as being to assist the ward councillor with municipal programmes, to take information to the community and to relay community problems to the municipality.

Relationship between the ward councillor and the committee

It appears that there is a good relationship between the ward councillor and the ward committee. The ward committee member interviewed stated that 'the ward councillor is working hand in glove with us' and noted that he organises public transport for members to attend meetings.

The ward councillor is working hand in glove with us.

Establishment

To elect the ward committee, a notice was published in a local newspaper and various stakeholders (such as SANCO, residents' associations, farmers' associations, youth structures etc.) were invited to submit nominations to the municipality and the councillor. The Community Participation Standing Committee appointed councillors to preside over the election process. Only those nominated were eligible for election. Individuals were nominated at a community meeting and those whose names were seconded by a show of hands were elected onto the committee. According to the ward councillor, the turnout at the election meeting was approximately 100 people. Neither the ward councillor nor the committee member interviewed believed party politics influenced who was elected onto the committee.

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Term of office

According to the ward councillor the term of office for the ward committee is two and half years. As far as he knew none of the current members have previously been on a ward committee, although the committee member interviewed thought that five members had done so. There has been quite a turnover of committee members, with three members having dropped out. Some have left to find work in Johannesburg and others found full-time jobs locally. To replace members, the councillor informed the municipality and then nominated individuals from the specific areas where the members who left came from. Nominees were then confirmed at a community meeting.

Representation

Some ward committee members represent the various geographical areas within the ward, while others represent specific sectors, such as SANCO, the sports council and churches. Each member is meant to consult with their respective sectors/areas and take issues back to the ward committee. In addition, certain members have been assigned one of four portfolios, namely health, infrastructure and service delivery, social cluster, and land affairs and agriculture. The ward councillor decided on these portfolios, based on the IDP review.

Functionality

The ward councillor believes that his ward committee is functioning very well, 'amongst the top three or five in [the municipality]'. He believes the strength of the committee is that it is always in touch with the community.

Meetings

The ward committee usually meets every month, although sometimes it is every two months. The ward councillor has only missed one meeting in a one-year period. He requested the PR councillor to stand in his place. One meeting was cancelled because a quorum could not be obtained. The councillor and secretary together decide on the agenda for meetings. The secretary takes minutes at meetings.

The typical issues discussed at committee meetings relate to service delivery, such as housing projects, roads, water, schools, clinics, fencing of commonage etc. Project steering committee reports are also discussed. The committee also discusses specific requests for assistance from the community, for example, the filling of potholes for funerals and requests by the farmers' association for water for dipping cattle.

The councillor submits a report to the Speaker's office on a bi-monthly basis, which includes a report on his activities as well as the sector reports of the ward committee members. With each report he submits a programme of action for the next two months. The Speaker gives comments on each report and suggests issues for the councillor to consider. The Speaker also liaises with the ward committee secretary and the CDW assigned to the ward to verify the contents of the ward councillor's report.

The ward councillor gave two examples of issues brought to the committee by the community and how the ward committee was able to assist. One case involved a family disagreement over where two parents who had died should be buried. The committee

brought the two sides of the family together at the council chambers and helped them to come to an amicable solution. In another other case, local farmers complained to the ward committee about their stock being impounded on the national road. The committee then wrote a letter to the MEC for agriculture and to the local extension officer to request that the fencing of the commonage be fast-tracked. The farmers received some materials for the fencing, which has helped to reduce the problem.

Mass community meetings are usually held every quarter and are supplemented with issue-specific meetings in different areas of the ward. According to the councillor, public attendance at these meetings could be higher. One of the problems is that there is no hall in the ward, so people have to stand. Meetings are usually held at churches.

Engagement with the IDP

According to the councillor, the ward committee has been involved in the municipality's IDP review. Members attend meetings between August and March and monitor whether issues from the ward have been included in the IDP. The municipal budget process overlaps with the IDP review so the ward committee also gives input on the budget. The committee has not been as active on issues related to performance management. While the committee has not been involved in reviewing by-laws, the councillor gave an example of a situation when it had threatened to enforce a by-law. In this case a resident had seven dogs and neighbours complained that they were roaming free. The committee ordered the owner to keep the dogs in his yard or they would enforce the by-law restricting the number of dogs residents may keep and call the SPCA.

Training

The councillor reported that he has received some training on ward committees. However, only he and the secretary from the ward committee had been trained. The rest of the committee is expected to receive training soon. The councillor believes the committee needs further training, as he put it, 'for them to have guts'. They need to learn more about their roles, how to measure the performance of the municipality and how to engage with the budget process. The ward committee member interviewed said 'We need training in order to know exactly what must we do'. A skills audit of the committee has not been conducted.

Support from the municipality

According to the councillor, the ward committee does not receive sufficient support from the municipality, which leaves committee members discouraged. He complained that he has to organise transport for members and that there is no stipend or allowance for cell phone air time. It was also suggested that identification badges for ward committee members would be useful. The ward committee member interviewed was satisfied that the committee was receiving enough support from the municipality. She mentioned the fact that transport, catering and stationery are provided. The only thing the municipality still needs to provide is training. She did, however, support the idea of a stipend for committee members.

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Other structures for community participation

In addition to the ward committee, the ward has the 'Mondays Forum,' which is a structure consisting of various stakeholders. At each weekly meeting stakeholder representatives present their plans for the week. The ward committee is also represented on the Mondays Forum.

Relationships with other role-players

According to the ward committee member interviewed, the committee has a good relationship with the PR councillor assigned to the ward. He attends community meetings. The committee was also reported to have a good relationship with the general community, although the member indicated that some community members who have ambitions to become councillors sometimes cause problems. The relationship between the committee and CDWs was also reported to be good and the committee appears to draw regularly on the support of the CDW for the ward. Likewise, good working relationships were reported between the committee and municipal officials and traditional leaders.

Community perceptions of the ward committee

Ten members of the general community were interviewed in Ward D, five of whom had heard about ward committees and were aware that their ward has a committee. Two had heard of ward committees but did not know what they are. Some of the explanations of what ward committee are were the following:

- 'People who check on government's service delivery issues – they check if the houses are being built.'
- 'Most cannot tell what the committee is. They speak of the CPF.'
- 'Helping hand to the ward councillor to get information from the community and give to the ward councillor who will take it to the municipality.'
- 'I hear they usually have meetings.'

Asked for their opinions on how well they think the ward committee is performing, the residents who were interviewed gave the following responses:

- 'I am not satisfied with the way they are working. They select places when it comes to delivering services. There are some areas that are left out, for example, the building of houses and toilets from government.'
- 'They are attending meetings in the subscribed way – every last week of the month. They are bringing information to the residents such as IDP and budget and things that are to come. They call meetings with the residents.'
- 'The committees are working but we are not all getting houses. The ward committees are selling the houses to foreign nationals yet we are on the waiting list. As it is there are free houses but we have no houses, yet we fought for the land. However, the ward committees are bringing electricity as you can see.'
- 'It is working quite well for now. We now have houses being built. We also have a school for the disabled now. They have helped the councillor to bring about some development.'
- 'Seemingly they are working. We see the housing project and they take care of the roads and fight crime.'

It would appear that many of these perceptions relate to the municipality in general and not to the ward committee specifically. When community members were asked how the ward committee performs, they tended to respond with their gripes about the municipality. This would seem to reinforce the sense that in many cases ward committees are viewed by communities as extensions of the municipality and are held accountable for the (in)actions of the municipality. Thus it is debatable whether ward committees are seen as agents of civil society or as agents of the state.

Six of the residents interviewed said that they had attended ward meetings and most said the meetings were useful. They mentioned some of the positive developments that appeared to come out of the meetings, such as housing, streetlights and jobs for local residents. Those who felt the meetings were not helpful appeared to be disillusioned about unfulfilled service delivery promises or have perceptions that they had been left out when services were delivered.

Finally, residents were asked what they would like to see their ward committee doing for them. The requests included jobs, assistance with accessing social grants, building of houses, provision of water, sanitation, fencing, sports fields for the youth and streetlights. One resident suggested that the ward councillor should have an office in the ward so that he can be nearer to the community. The resident also suggested ward committees should do door-to-door campaigns to find out what the needs of residents are.

Summary

There appears to be a very good working relationship between the ward committee and ward councillor in Ward D. By all accounts the election process was free and fair and a representative committee was elected. The committee was reported to be functioning very well.

Municipality 3

Municipal profile

Municipality 3 has a population of just over three million people and a budget of R23.4 billion for the 2008/2009 financial year. The municipality has 100 wards and 200 councillors.

Establishment of ward committees

The process of setting up new ward committees started after the March 2006 municipal elections and the last ward committees were established in March 2007. The Community Participation unit mobilised communities within each ward to attend ward meetings where the elections for ward committee members were held. The turnout of the public at these meetings was reported to average about 350 to 400 people, although in some wards much lower turnouts were experienced. One of the allegations that surfaced against

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municipal officials responsible for mobilising communities was that they mobilised only certain sections of the community within the wards. One municipal official interviewed admitted that while this was not generally the case, it did happen in a few instances. The process at each meeting took the standard format of a briefing by senior officials on ward committees (i.e. what they are, why they are being set up, how they are expected to function etc.), whereafter the election, presided over by local officials of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), took place. Care was taken to ensure that councillors played no role in the election process. Members of the community nominated people to stand on the ward committee at the meeting. Usually 15 candidates were nominated from all those present and then an election for the ten members of the ward committee was conducted by show of hands. Only registered voters residing in the ward were eligible to vote.

According to both the Speaker and an official interviewed, party politics has played a role in the composition of the committees, despite the fact that they were elected democratically. In some cases political parties mobilised their constituencies to participate in the nomination and election processes.

Ward committee policy

In June 2006 the municipal council adopted a Community Participation Policy. The policy sets out three channels and mechanisms for community participation at ward level, namely ward committees, ward sector forums and ward forums. The policy states that 'ward committees shall be taken as the legitimate statutory platform for community participation' with the object of ward committees being 'to enhance participatory democracy in local government'. The policy further notes that 'ward committees shall be advisory bodies; independent and must be impartial and perform their functions without fear, favour or prejudice' and that 'ward committees shall drive Community Based Planning and other local development projects'.

Ward sector forums may be set up as sub-committees of ward committees. They shall 'be composed of individuals and organisations with common interests' and they 'shall be IDP outcomes or social interest based'. According to the Community Participation Policy, 'Ward forums shall be advisors to the Ward Committees and Councillors on matters pertaining to support required to enabling (sic) end-user groupings to work through self-mobilization'.

Functionality

According to a senior manager responsible for overseeing ward committee processes, ward committees are generally not functioning. According to the Speaker, they are functioning at '60%'. While some committees are active and are meeting regularly, others are not meeting on a monthly basis. Some councillors are reported to not be calling meetings. A number of committees were reported to not be submitting regular reports to the Speaker's office.

Ward committee training

One of the challenges has been a lack of training. Two-day orientation workshops were conducted for most ward committees between April and June 2007, but since then there has been no further capacity building. According to the Speaker, further training was planned to start in April 2008 but was delayed due to 'technical' reasons. Apparently a skills audit was conducted, which identified the specific capacity needs of the committees, although this was disputed by one official interviewed. The training was expected to take place before the end of 2008.

Resources

The municipality is currently grappling with the issue of paying stipends to ward committee members. After the March 2006 municipal elections the new council resolved not to give out-of-pocket expenses until an investigation was carried out into how other municipalities are dealing with the issue. According to the Speaker, a report is ready to be tabled to Council, which suggests different options for an amount for the stipend and how it can be administered. The suggestion so far has been to provide a stipend of R100 per month to each ward committee member, which will be dependent on members meeting certain obligations, such as attending meetings regularly.

The municipality has also recognised the need to provide administrative support to ward committees. It is currently investigating how to ensure that ward committees have access to office space with computers, telephones, fax machines and photocopiers. It is hoped to allocate resources for this purpose in the 2009/10 budget.

Another difficulty the municipality is facing is a relatively high rate of turnover of ward committee members, which was explained by members relocating or dying (the HIV/AIDS epidemic was reported to be having a visible impact).

Term of office

The term of office of ward committees is currently being changed from two to five years to align to the council term.

The municipality was one of the pilot municipalities for the roll-out of community-based planning (CBP) at ward level. However, since ward profiles and plans were initially developed in 2003, they have not been updated. There is a process underway to review the profiles and plans and to familiarise the new ward committees with them. However, as one official put it, the way CBP is currently functioning in the municipality is not the way it was intended. Instead of a focus on strategically linking ward plans with the IDP, the focus has been on initiating and funding small-scale community-driven poverty reduction projects.

Ward E

Ward E is located inland about 25km to the west of the main city in the municipality. One of the wealthiest areas in the municipality, in recent years it has seen a boom in upmarket townhouse complexes, retirement villages and golf estates. One of the most

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serious issues has become managing the rapid development that is occurring and the pressure it is having on roads and basic services infrastructure.

The ward councillor belongs to the DA and is serving his first term as a councillor.

Composition

The ward committee has nine members (it is missing the required chairperson of the Local Youth Forum). There are seven white members and two Indians on the committee. Six of the nine members are male. Two of the members are between 26 and 35, three are between 36 and 50, and four are over 50. Eight of the nine members have a tertiary qualification. Seven members are employed full-time, while one is employed part-time and one is a full-time parent.

Roles

The ward committee members in the focus group explained that they see their role as being the 'ears to the ground' in their respective portfolios, and then giving feedback to the ward councillor. One member stated that the committee is the 'officially recognised representative of residents (registered voters)'. The ward councillor sees his role as co-ordinating meetings, providing direction to the committee and facilitating requests to council.

Establishment

By the ward committee's admission, the process to elect the committee in November 2006 was not strictly procedural. The DA, fearing that the ANC would bus in its supporters for the elections (as it had allegedly done in a neighbouring ward) undertook an email campaign to mobilise its own supporters; according to committee members, they wanted to 'ensure that the committee was politically representative of residents'. As a result, almost all of the 300 or so people at the election meeting were white DA supporters. Arguably the result is that the committee elected is not racially representative of population of the ward.

Representation

Various sectors are represented on the committee, namely older persons (someone from a rest home), environment (chairperson of the local conservancy), business (local property developer) and churches. In addition a relatively poor community within the ward is represented by two members. Most of the ward committee members reported that they liaise with their sectors via email and word of mouth.

Meetings

The committee had its inception meeting in March 2007. According to the councillor and committee members, they are not sure what they are supposed to be doing, which they blame on a lack of training. According to the councillor, the committee has received no training whatsoever. He explained that a typical meeting is 'more like a ratepayers' meeting'. The major issues in the ward the committee reportedly focuses on are town

planning and zoning regulations and environmental issues (e.g. concerns about invasive alien vegetation, recycling and protection of grassland). In the poorer areas there is the range of development needs typical of disadvantaged areas. The ward councillor noted that the committee does not get specific requests for assistance from the community. According to him there are strong ratepayers' associations in the ward, which use their own means to take issues to council.

The committee has met regularly on a monthly basis except for a three month gap in 2008, apparently because the councillor failed to call meetings due to 'other commitments'. No minutes or reports on activities have been submitted to the Speaker because, as the councillor put it, 'no-one asked'. No public constituency meetings have been called since the committee was formed. As the councillor jokingly admitted, he's afraid to call a community meeting because the ward committee has not done anything to report.

Engagement with the IDP

It was reported that the committee has had some involvement with the municipality's 2007 IDP process. Members of the committee attended a workshop where they were asked to come up with a list of five priorities for the ward. However, neither the councillor nor committee members could remember off hand what the five priorities were. During a meeting of the ward committee with an official from the municipality's Community Participation Unit it emerged that the ward committee was unaware that its ward had a ward plan that was developed through a prior CBP process. More worrying was the fact that neither the committee nor the ward councillor were aware of equipment for ward upliftment projects that was purchased through the CBP programme during the previous ward councillor's term.

Support from the municipality

The committee complained that it doesn't get enough support from municipal officials – for example, the councillor explained that he tried repeatedly to get planners from the municipality to attend a ward committee meeting to discuss town planning issues in the ward but no-one responded to his requests.

According to the members of the committee interviewed, they bring issues to the ward councillor's attention but the councillor is largely powerless to do anything about them because, according to them, he is from an opposition party in the council. An example of an isolated impact the ward committee did have was that the municipality was going to develop a kick-about field on an environmentally sensitive piece of land. However, the field was relocated after intervention by the ward councillor.

Summary

The key challenge in Ward E is that neither the ward committee members nor the ward councillor understand their roles and responsibilities clearly. Much of this has to do with a lack of training from the municipality. There are also serious questions about the fairness of the election procedure and about the representivity of the committee and mechanisms for consultation with the community.

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Ward F

Ward F is one of the municipality's most rural, impoverished and largest wards. Like Ward E, it is also located inland of the city centre. The ward councillor is an ANC councillor who is currently serving his third term as a councillor.

Composition

There are ten members on the committee: nine black Africans and one white, while six of the members are female. Six are between 36 and 50, three are under 25 and one is between 26 and 35. Four of the members are employed full-time, four are unemployed and two are employed part-time. All ten were reported to have schooling up to matric. The membership of the committee has remained stable since its inception.

Roles

Both the ward councillor and his ward committee appear to have a clear understanding of what the committee should do. The ward committee members interviewed saw their role as 'looking after the community'. They are there to make sure every project implemented in the ward benefits the local community. They also visit members of the community and find out what their problems are and try to assist where they can. The councillor explained that he sees his and the committee's role as facilitating communication between residents and government – not only local government but also provincial and national government.

Establishment

Between 400 and 500 members of the community attended the meeting to elect the ward committee. The meeting was widely advertised in local newspapers as well as through posters and loud hailing. Voting for members was done by a show of hands. Both the ward councillor and the ward committee members interviewed insisted that party politics played no role in the election of the committee or its functioning.

Representation

The sectors represented on the committee include a ratepayers' association, transport, women's organisations and NGOs. Besides sectoral representation, there is also geographical representation, with each ward committee member representing one of the ten defined areas within the ward. According to the ward committee members, all members are known locally within their areas and community members regularly report problems to them.

In addition, the committee has sub-committees aligned to the five council sub-committees. Each sub-committee is led by a ward committee member, who feeds issues back to the ward committee.

Meetings

The ward committee meets fortnightly; the first meeting of the month is usually to register complaints and inputs from the community, the second meeting is to discuss

problems and solutions and invite officials if needed. Usually almost all members attend the meetings. According to the councillor two meetings had to be cancelled because a quorum could not be reached as members could not afford transport to attend the meetings. In rare instances where the councillor is unable to attend meetings, one of the other ward committee members chairs the meeting. Meetings are normally held at a centrally located crèche.

The committee calls public meetings every two months. The ward councillor organises transport for community members and organises with local businesses to sponsor food. In addition, the councillor convenes area meetings every week on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Attendance by the public at these meetings was reported to be good.

The secretary of the ward committee (a member of the committee) takes minutes at each meeting. The councillor compiles regular reports on ward committee activities and forwards them to the Speaker's office.

Key issues
The issues that are normally discussed at ward committee meetings include poverty, unemployment, education, welfare issues, HIV/AIDS and health, service delivery, crime and land.

Relationship between the ward councillor and the committee
It was apparent that there is a very good working relationship between the councillor and the ward committee members. The members reported that they were very happy with the support they receive from the councillor. As one member said, 'we are working together with the councillor. He doesn't take any decision without consulting us'. The members who were interviewed indicated that they are unclear about the role of the PR councillor.

Relationships with other role-players
The committee was also reported to have a good working relationship with CDWs, officials and local traditional leaders.

Functionality
The committee was perceived by both the councillor and the ward committee members interviewed to be functioning very well, although the need for further training for members was singled out. To date the committee has only received an initial two-day induction workshop. Members mentioned that they would like more training on how to help their communities. They also suggested it would be useful to learn how other ward committees operate. The ward councillor suggested that it might be useful to set up some kind of peer exchange programme for ward committees.

Support from the municipality
Besides training, ward committee members indicated that there was a need for them to be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses. Sometimes the municipality provides transport

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but often they have to use their own money. It was noted that sometimes members cannot attend meetings because they don't have money for transport. There was agreement that it would be desirable for the municipality to provide members with a stipend, which they could use to cover costs, for example cell phone air time. As the councillor said, 'the councillor gets an allowance, why not the ward committee?'.

Ward committee members reported that they are always available to the community. When emergencies arise, they phone or SMS each other and convene a meeting if necessary. One member explained that she is on the project steering committee of a water and sanitation project. She visits the project every day to check on progress. Another member recalled that she was doing her washing one morning when a member of the public called her to go and check on a broken water pipe.

Benefits

It was reported that the ward committee has brought about some tangible positive changes in the community. The example was given of the ward committee having received complaints that staff at the local provincial clinic were uncaring. The ward committee visited the clinic to investigate and devised a campaign to change public mindsets about the clinic. Out of this initiative also developed a door-to-door TB and HIV/AIDS drive, which ended up recruiting 350 volunteers. With the HIV/AIDS crisis having a serious impact on the local community, the committee has also been involved in raising donations of food and clothes for affected households. Another example given was that the ward committee also gets involved where children cannot pay school fees. They visit the school principals and negotiate for the children to be exempt from paying fees.

Engagement with the IDP

The ward committee has been involved to a limited extent in the municipality's IDP process. Members have attended some of the IDP consultation sessions, along with other ward committees. They have also been given material on the budget to read. In addition, they attended a meeting at City Hall where by-laws were discussed.

Summary

The ward committee in Ward F appears to be an example of a well functioning committee. Much of this can be attributed to an experienced and dedicated ward councillor. It is apparent that there is a very good relationship between the ward committee members and the ward councillor. The committee has an effective system for representing and consulting with the community within the ward. One concern, however, was the need for reimbursement of committee members' out-of-pocket expenses by the municipality. The need for more training was also emphasised.

PART 5

Discussion of findings

PART

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Are ward committees working? Insights from six case studies

Profile of ward committee members

The table below presents a summary of the main characteristics of the membership of the six ward committees. Four of the six committees have their full complement of ten members. There appears to be more or less even representation of men and women on the committees. In four of the six cases women outnumber men. In most (four) cases, the committees consist of only one race group, namely black Africans. In one case there are seven whites and two Indians and no black Africans on the committee. In most cases members are between 26 and 50. Only five members are under 25, suggesting that youth are under-represented on the committees. In most cases, most of the ward committee members are unemployed. Most committee members have an education up to matric level. Only one member was classified as disabled.

Table 1: Characteristics of ward committee members

	No. members	Gender	Race	Age	Employment status	Education level	No. disabled members
A	10	60% men	All black African	10: 26-50	employed and unemployed	?	0
B	10	60% women	All black African	4: 36-50 2: 26-35 2: +50	80% unemployed	6: Matric 1: Tertiary	1
C	9	56% women	All black African	2: <25 4: 26-35 3: 36-50	89% unemployed	3: Grade 7 6: Matric	0
D	10	60% women	All black African	3: 26-35 7: 36-50	90% unemployed	7: Matric 1: Tertiary	0
E	9	67% men	7 white 2 Indian	2: 26-35 3: 36-50 4: 50+	78% employed full-time 1 employed part-time 1 full-time parent	89% Tertiary	0
F	10	60% women	9 black African 1 white	6: 36-50 3: <25 1: 26-35	4 employed full-time 2 employed part-time 4 unemployed	10	0

In almost all cases there has not been any turnover of ward committee members. Where members have left the ward committees it has invariably been because they have relocated in search of work.

Roles and expectations

It appears that, contrary to the received notion that roles are unclear, most ward committee members and ward councillors have a reasonably clear understanding of what their roles are, and these are in line with policy and legislation (a clear exception however being Ward F). Typically, the primary role of ward committees is seen to be a communication channel between communities and municipalities, via the ward councillor. This would appear largely to be the role the committees are playing, to a greater or lesser extent. It was also clear, however, that many community members see ward committees as a structure that should take some responsibility for service delivery, as if they are an extension of the municipality. This is arguably a dangerous notion as it inevitably sets ward committees up to disappoint communities and threatens the credibility of the committees. Clearly there are also very high expectations of ward councillors as agents of delivery, with little apparent recognition or understanding of the limited powers ordinary ward councillors hold within councils. The outcome is that councillors typically become scapegoats for their municipality's inability to deliver services.

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of the limited powers ordinary ward councillors hold within councils.

Nomination and election processes

In most cases, the nomination and election processes appear to have been relatively unproblematic from the respondents' perspectives and more or less in line with the process envisaged in national guiding policy. Typically nominations for candidates to represent sectors and/or geographical areas were called for and community meetings were convened to elect members onto the committees. A show of hands was usually considered sufficient for the actual election. The one exception was ward E, where the process appeared to be deeply flawed and politicised.

Representation

A very important question is the extent to which ward committee members are representative of the communities and interest groups within their wards. In most of the case studies presented here, it is questionable whether representation is inclusive and

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Are ward committees working? Insights from six case studies

meaningful. While attempts have been made in the process of nominating and electing the committees to ensure that some level of representation of key sectors and geographical areas is achieved in the composition of the committees, the process of representation in most of the cases appears to be structurally inadequate. This is because the level of consultation between the members and their designated sectors/geographical areas is in most cases flawed or insufficient. Especially in the case of sectoral representation, the level of consultation with and participation of the broader stakeholder groups within the sector appears to be superficial. Part of the problem is that ward committee members have not been equipped with the necessary skills through training to be able to consult effectively with their wider sectoral communities.

Functioning

Of the six ward committees, arguably only two are functioning reasonably effectively, meaning that they are able to meet regularly and there is some sense of common purpose and achievement to their meetings and other activities carried out by the committees. While some of the committees have managed to be able to meet as regularly as every month, it is not always apparent what the value of these meetings is.

Politicisation

There is some evidence from the case studies of party political influence on ward committees in terms of the nomination and election processes and their functioning. In wards B and E especially, party politics clearly infringed on the establishment and functioning of the committees.

Influence on council decision-making

One of the more discouraging findings is how little direct influence ward committees appear to have on council decision-making. Much of this seems to be attributable to the lack of structured mechanisms for input from ward committees to be absorbed into council deliberation processes. The established reporting channel is that the committee gives input to the ward councillor, who then passes it on via reports to the Speaker, who then raises concerns from the ward committee with relevant portfolio committees or puts the issues for discussion on the council agenda. However, this does not appear to be happening in most instances. One problem appears to be that reports are either not submitted by councillors to the Speaker, or, if they are, they are not processed by the Speaker. It also does not appear that ward councillors feel authorised or confident enough to raise issues from their ward committees directly in council meetings.

An alternative reporting channel would be for ward committees to raise issues directly with portfolio committees, although the feasibility of this would need to be carefully

thought through as it might be perceived to undermine the role of ward councillors and the Speaker. Where ward committees have managed to get issues on the council agenda, for example in some cases through the IDP process, a major problem appears to be lack of funding or technical capacity for the municipality to then respond timeously to the needs and issues raised.

Support and resources

Confirming the findings of numerous other studies, an unambiguous finding of this research was the need for ward committees to be given more support by municipalities in order to become more effective. Training of committee members is arguably the first priority. In all cases, this was highlighted as something that both committee members and ward councillors lacked. Other resources such as stationery, transport and catering appear to be adequately provided by the municipalities but the issue of members being given some kind of allowance/stipend emerged as a critical issue, not only as it serves to reimburse them for out-of-pocket expenses but also because it is seen as a form of recognition of the contribution ward committee members make towards development in the municipality. Only one municipality, Municipality 1, actually provides stipends for this purpose, although Municipalities 2 and 3 are both planning to do so.

An unambiguous finding of this research was the need for ward committees to be given more support by municipalities in order to become more effective.

Role of ward councillors

The findings indicate that ward councillors have a central role in determining the effectiveness of ward committees. Where there are good relationships between ward committee members and the ward councillors, and where councillors are motivated and involved, the performance of the committee is greatly enhanced. Ward E is a good example of this. Conversely, where there is a poor relationship between the committee and the ward councillor, such as in Ward A, the functioning of the committee is detrimentally affected. It would appear that within the current arrangement, i.e. where ward councillors are the mandatory chair of ward committees and are responsible for ensuring that the committees meet, they have a critical influence on how well ward committees perform their roles and functions.

Relationships

On the whole, the case study ward committees have reasonably co-operative relationships with their ward councillors. Ward committee members mostly felt satisfied with the

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level of support they receive from their ward councillors. The one clear exception was Ward A where there appears to be a complete breakdown of the relationship.

In most cases the relationship between ward committees and other parties, such as officials, CDWs and traditional leaders, was reported to be good. Somewhat surprising, perhaps, was the finding that that were no significant tensions between ward committees and CDWs, as this is frequently raised in other assessments of ward committees. In general, ward committees also appear to have a good relationship with residents in the ward, although an important caution was noted in a couple of cases that the communities' faith in ward committees deteriorates the longer service delivery is stalled.

Special mention must be made of PR councillors, who mostly appear to have no relationship with ward committees. In most municipalities standard practice is that PR councillors are assigned to wards and to ward committees. The research shows that they are mostly invisible although they occasionally play a useful role (replacing the ward councillor when he/she is away).

PART 6

Implications and
recommendations

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Are ward committees working? Insights from six case studies

In this final part, some of the implications of the findings and recommendations for improving the functioning of ward committees and the value they can contribute to local participatory governance and development are drawn out.

1. The primary function of ward committees should be to act as a communication channel between communities and municipal councils, and vice versa

Ward committees should not be considered as agents of delivery or managers of development projects and funds (as provided for by the Local Government Laws Amendment Act) as they are structurally and technically not equipped to fulfil this role. For ward committees to act as effective communication channels requires a strong system of representation, both sectorally and geographically. It also requires that municipalities include in the terms of reference for ward committees or in their ward committee policies that communication is the primary function of ward committees. Furthermore, this role should be more effectively communicated to communities. The evidence suggests that there is a misunderstanding of the role of ward committees in terms of their being seen by communities as an extension of the municipality.

2. Ward committees should be more integrated into municipal IDP processes

A central component of the communication role of ward committees should relate to the municipal IDP and budget processes. Ward committees should be a key conduit for communication between communities and municipalities on community priorities and development strategies. In order to effect this, one requirement is for municipalities to make planning and budget information disaggregated to ward level available, and to package it in much more accessible and user-friendly formats, which ward committees can then engage with.

3. There need to be institutionalised mechanisms for communication between municipal councils and ward committees

Processes need to be institutionalised for input from ward committees to be channelled to key decision-makers within council, such as portfolio committees and Executive Committees. In this regard the role of the Speaker's office is very important and adequate capacity within this office needs to be put in place. The possibility of ward committees reporting directly to portfolio committees should also be explored.

4. The role of councillors is critical to the effective functioning of ward committees

Councillors are not only responsible for convening and chairing ward committee meetings but they are also responsible for channelling inputs from the committees through to council. It is critical for there to be institutionalised mechanisms to enable ordinary ward councillors to raise issues in council. How councillors understand their roles and those of the committee is also very important. Councillors should have a strong commitment to non-partisanship and participatory development. It is also important

that councillors understand a culture of participation. The findings of this study suggest that it is not necessarily undesirable for ward councillors to be the chairs of ward committees, as long as they have the necessary skills, motivation and enthusiasm to make the committee work effectively.

5.   Input from ward committees needs to be acted upon, otherwise they risk becoming discredited structures in the eyes of communities

Where it is clear that municipalities are unable to meet the demands of citizens that are channelled via the ward committee, this needs to be openly and carefully communicated back to communities, with reasons as to why it is so.

6.   Ward committees should be independent structures rooted within civil society

They should not be extensions of political parties and they should not be subject to the control or manipulation of ward councillors. Policy or legal measures might be options to discourage the unnecessary politicisation of ward committees.

7.   Ward committees cannot function effectively without receiving capacity-building training

It should be noted, however, that this is not the only determinant of the effectiveness of ward committees.

8.   Ward committees cannot function effectively without administrative and other support from municipalities

9.   Ward committee members should receive incentives for their work

Notwithstanding the important notion that service on a ward committee should be entirely voluntary, some kind of stipend that at least covers members' costs of participation is important, especially in contexts of poverty where committee members cannot be expected to absorb the financial costs of participating on the ward committee.

10.   There should be a national fund to support ward committees

This was mooted in 2003 by the Portfolio Committee on Provincial and Local Government following a study tour of municipalities. This fund should assist especially weaker municipalities to provide for capacity-building training, resources and stipends for ward committees.

11.   Ward committees should be democratically elected, representative structures

However, at the same time, there is a need for caution about thinking that ward committees are representative of communities – they represent certain interests, but can never be truly representative of everyone.

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Are ward committees working? Insights from six case studies

12. Ward committees should be accountable for their activities to the communities they represent and not only to councillors or municipalities

There should also be clear lines of responsibility and accountability between ward councillors, ward committees and community development workers.

13. Ward committees should complement, rather than detract from, other spaces for public participation in local governance

Ward committees should be seen as only one of a number of mechanisms and channels for public participation in local governance. Councillors and officials in particular should be cautioned against seeing ward committees as the only representative structure of communities.

14. A range of tools and approaches to participation should be promoted

A one-size-fits-all approach to community participation should not be taken. As far as possible, a rich web of participatory processes should be fostered. These can include, for example (Schmidt, 2008) community-based planning, citizen juries, area assemblies, online polls, radio talk programmes and citizen surveys. It is also important to recognise that different communities have different traditions and needs when it comes to participation. As Schmidt points out, poor communities need much more intense forms of support and engagement as part of generating economic, social and service development, while wealthier, better resourced communities need a different, less intense, mode of engagement. This also raises the question of whether all wards need to have ward committees. In some wards, where other effective structures for community participation exist, it may not be necessary for there to be a ward committee as well. However, this would require a change to Municipal Structures Act, which currently states that municipalities that choose to have ward committees must have committees for every ward (Section 73(1)).

15. Municipalities should have communication strategies to support ward committees

Municipalities should put as much information as possible at the disposal of ward committees about the functioning of the municipality and programmes and projects. Information needs to be carefully packaged to be as accessible as possible. This means that it should be written in appropriate language, translated into local languages where possible and should not use technical jargon. Municipalities also have the responsibility to communicate to citizens what ward committees are and what they exist to do.

16. Information sharing between ward committees should be promoted

Exchange visits should be set up between different wards within and between municipalities to highlight and generate information sharing about good and innovative practices.

Notes

1. The training programme was developed under the auspices of the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority and is registered with the South African Qualifications Authority as an NQF level 2 qualification.
2. The stipend is paid out quarterly to save administrative costs.
3. Age data for two members was not supplied
4. The research in Municipality 2 was carried out before these allocations were introduced.
5. Data on education levels was not available for two members

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Annexure 1

Checklist of
good practices

ANNEX

1

Are ward committees working? Insights from six case studies

The following checklist is intended as a tool to assist municipal councillors, officials and ward committee members to improve the functioning of ward committees.

Policy/legislation

Does your municipality have a policy on ward committees?

Does the policy stipulate how members are elected?

Do these procedures guarantee a free and fair nomination and electoral process?

Does the policy stipulate a procedure for reports from ward committees to the council?

Does the policy stipulate out-of-pocket expenses/a stipend for ward committee members?

Does the municipality have a communication policy that supports ward committees?

Composition/representivity

Do ward committee nomination and election procedures promote the equal representation of women?

Do these procedures ensure adequate geographical representation of all communities within the ward?

Do these procedures promote adequate representation of groups such as the youth and people with disabilities?

Are their mechanisms in place to ensure that ward committee members are not elected on the basis of their political party affiliation?

Do ward committee members consult adequately with the sectors/communities they represent?

Functioning

Are ward committees meeting regularly?

Are records of committee meetings kept?

Support from the municipality

Does the municipal budget make provision for funding the functioning of ward committees?

Are ward committee members and councillors receiving adequate training on their roles and responsibilities?

Does the municipality provide other kinds of support to ward committees, such as offices, communication equipment and stationery, transport and catering for meetings?

Ward committee input to council

Are there effective institutional mechanisms for ward committees to give input to council, either directly or through ward councillors and/or Speakers?
Is there adequate capacity within the Speaker's office to process input from ward committees?

Relationships

Are there mechanisms/interventions to ensure a good working relationship between ward committees, ward councillors, PR councillors, CDWs, traditional leaders and other individuals and organisations?

Other structures for community participation

Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that ward committees support and complement, rather than undermine, other structures for community participation within the municipality?
Besides ward committees, is there a range of channels, tools or approaches through which members of the public can participate in the affairs of the municipality?

Engagement with the IDP

Is there an institutionalised procedure for integrating ward committees into the IDP process?