

Social Accountability Mechanisms in a Decentralised State: Exploring Implementation Challenges

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Abstract

This paper reports on research that examined the challenges encountered by the City of Tshwane in responding to citizen demands for social accountability. The research draws on data collected through a mixed-method approach in selected communities within the City of Tshwane in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The research established that a range of challenges hamper public officials' quest for social accountability mechanisms. These include not just a lack of political will or a lack of interest by the citizenry but also to a lack of the requisite skills and resources needed to carry out a full blown consultative and communication process.

Keywords: social accountability, service delivery, citizen participation

Introduction

The growing demand for quality delivery of basic services has seen communities in South Africa embarking on many service delivery protests as a way of demanding social accountability from state officials. Nonetheless, the concept of social accountability has not been fully embraced due to complexities around municipalities fully exercising their reporting duty to the communities they serve (Claasen, Lardies & Ayer, 2010; McGee and Gaventa, 2010). In their study, Gaventa & Barret (2010) admit that the applicability of social accountability in the public sector has grown considerably, although it has its own practical challenges. Their argument is premised on the notion that policymakers are aware of various fundamental questions that need to be answered when it comes to citizens' demand for social accountability. To this end, various arguments, questions and debates around social accountability emanate from the mixed records of successes and failures of this approach in various public sectors globally (McGee & Gaventa, 2010). The failure by scholars to provide conceptual clarity for social accountability is evident, making it difficult to contextualise intervention strategies. In his observation, Schouten (2011:2) opines that social accountability programmes seem to be influential in areas of perilous statehood due to the shortage of formal

structures of governance. Carmago and Jacobs (2013:13), however, differed distinctively when they argued that citizens' demand for social accountability emanates from poor administrative capacity that impoverishes communities and leads to underdevelopment.

The World Bank (2011) advises that the demand for social accountability is hinged on a number of factors that include, *inter alia*, a favourable socio-political environment, enabling legal frameworks, state support, institutional capacity and strength of civil society, as well as the institutionalisation of social accountability initiatives (Ackerman, 2005; Blair, 2011). In the absence of the aforementioned, demanding social accountability from accounting authorities can be a challenge, which results in poverty and inequalities in communities as a result of poor service delivery (Fox, 2014; Sarker & Rahman, 2014). In South African municipalities, upholding social accountability has become a challenge for many local authorities due to weak understanding of social accountability and reluctance to account to communities on how public funds are utilised (Carmago & Jacobs, 2015; Brinkerhoff & Wetterberg, 2015). Drawing from these arguments, therefore, the research reported on in this paper responds to the following questions:

- Do the City of Tshwane officials understand the concept of social accountability?
- What are the obstacles they encounter in upholding social accountability?

Theoretical framework: New Public Management (NPM)

The demand for social accountability in South Africa is informed by the New Public Management approach that has since been developed to address the service delivery challenges affecting local municipalities. The transition from the old bureaucratic public administration in South Africa into NPM brings about a new governance model for running the public service. The political transformation in South Africa enabled the restructuring of state bureaucracy in the early 1990s (Naidoo, 2015).

Various aspects underpin the NPM paradigm and these have an influence on how government departments in South Africa are expected to exercise social accountability within the NPM paradigm. These include: strategic approach, management within the administrative framework, focus on results, improved financial management as well as the relationship with politicians (Hughes, 2003). The NPM model assumes that officials need to exercise direct accountability to citizens. The concept is premised on the notion that citizens as clients have the right to demand accountability and public managers are required to respond to their needs. This idea has roots in the traditional public administration and has been modified under the NPM model when it speaks to the Results-based Management (RBM) model. Under the RBM model, a coherent and strategic planning and management-based framework founded on learning and accountability needs to be established in a decentralised environment. This idea corresponds to the organisational learning theory, which stipulates that an organisation is ever-growing to meet the demand of citizens. The NPM model aims to improve the management and efficiency of public managers through accountability (Sarker, 2006).



The NPM focuses more on efficiency, disregarding the traditional public administration principles that speak to equality, fairness, equity and control, among others. The fact that it ignores these aspects makes scholars wonder if it can influence the present gap in terms of state accountability to communities (Christensen & Laegrei, 2014). Nonetheless, NPM reforms disregard solidarity as they elevate an enlightened citizen who is able to demand accountability, hence its narrow focus on individuals sparks more questions than answers (Andrews & Van de Welle, 2013).

This view in some ways contradicts the aims of social accountability as it is premised on the understanding that citizens and civil society organisations need to collaborate to demand accountability from the public officials. The lack of social inclusiveness in the NPM model defeats the purpose of citizen engagement in social accountability as the aim is to integrate all concerned communities to speak in one voice, which is fundamental for attracting government attention. Nonetheless, citizen participation is enabled under the NPM where social accountability mechanisms can be used to engage the public officials on service delivery matters (Hughes, 2003). In line with this thinking, South Africa's White Paper on Transforming Public Service delivery reiterates that "... the Public Service cannot develop a truly service-oriented culture without the active participation of the wider community, including the private sector and citizens themselves" (RSA:1997).

Contextualising Social Accountability

Malena and McNeil in the World Bank (2010:1) define social accountability as "the broad range of actions and mechanisms beyond voting that citizens can use to hold the State to account, as well as actions on the part of the government, civil society, media and other societal actors that promote or facilitate these efforts". The World Bank (2004) explains further that such mechanisms are demand-driven programmes backed by the State, civil society and citizens. The triple relationship, if well-coordinated, can enhance social accountability and increase service delivery. Claasen & Alpin-Lardies (2010:3) elaborate that social accountability is "about how citizens demand and enforce accountability from those in power". This definition is largely concerned with citizen-led forms of accountability and claimed political space in-between elections.

The demand for social accountability is increasing following previous studies (Ackerman 2005; Foresti *et al.*, Malena *et al.*, 2004; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz, 2006), which attempted to conceptualise social accountability in growing democratic institutions. Further attempts to understand and assess the effects of social accountability on various government service delivery programmes were made by (Claasen, McNeil & Muvuma, 2006; Novikova, 2007; Sirker & Cosik, 2007). These studies interrogate transparency, accountability, and participatory budgeting among public entities to assess efficiency. Other studies (Gaventa & Barrett 2010; Gaventa & McGee 2010; McGee & Gaventa 2010; Rocha *et al.*, 2008) examined the growth and effects of social accountability in public institutions. They assessed how leaders in organisations conduct their communication with citizens who are the end recipients of the services offered. This article draws recognition from the critical context that seeks to shape, make and break social accountability mechanisms in the South African local government context (Levy, 2014).

Mechanisms used in Social Accountability Processes

Various social accountability mechanisms are used by citizens to demand accountability in service delivery from local municipalities. Basheka and Mubangizi (2012) examined citizen – driven mechanisms of fighting corruption by comparing principles and process in Uganda and South Africa and conclude that constructive engagement between citizens and government, should be aimed at improving performance in the use of public resources to deliver services, enhance people’s welfare, and protect individuals’ rights. Further Basheka and Mubangizi (2013) considered opinions from a survey of respondents from Uganda’s four regions. The findings identify the critical success factors for mainstream citizen participation in procurement processes and on this basis, suggestions on how these could be operationalised are made. There are thus a number of studies in this regard. However, this paper focuses on some of the mechanisms, which include, inter alia, oversight committees, izimbizos, integrated development plans (IDPs), ward committees and most popular, public protests.

Oversight Structures: Committee System: Choice between Section 79 and Section 80 Committee

Social accountability in South Africa is exercised through oversight structures as provided by Section 79 and 80 of the Structures Act. The Act stipulates that the Council must make decisions whether or not portfolio committees will be established using the given legislation. The generic requirements for the establishment of committees are legislated in the Act. The role of oversight committees is to assist the Council with oversight on how municipalities operate. The Municipal Structures Act further requires a municipality to establish committees when there is a need or signs that it will be efficient, and the powers of that committee are delegated by the municipal council to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the powers and functions. Section 79 and 80 serve different purposes and they report differently to different entities. More importantly, the oversight committees are the one that enhances municipal capacity to conduct oversight. The rationale is that the mayoral committee is not a committee of the council and do not have the right to conduct meetings on vital council matters without disclosing the contents of such meetings and opening it up for public scrutiny. Furthermore, section 33 of the Municipal Structures Act allows the establishment of committees to ensure the smooth running of municipal affairs. Based on this discussion, it can be deduced that oversight committees in local government in South Africa play a pivotal role in overseeing that municipal officials do not abuse the powers given to them and they exercise transparency and accountability when executing public duties. The committees assist citizens who intend to demand social accountability from the municipalities as the committees can investigate and assess any key weaknesses or corrupt acts that may compromise the effective delivery of services.



Izimbizos

Izimbizos, introduced by Thabo Mbeki, the former president of the Republic of South Africa, are platforms where senior government officials and public managers conduct meetings with ordinary people from the local communities (Venter, 2007). Sikhakhane and Reddy (2011:93) point out that this form of citizen participation is fundamental as the government is taken to the people who are the beneficiaries of the elected officials that represent each community. The significance of *izimbizos* lies in the fact that citizens got the chance to ask officials about the nature and strategy of service delivery in their communities. Makgoane, as cited in Van der Waldt (2007:38), holds that *izimbizos* have since gained popularity among the citizens as all criticism is screened, isolated and responded to in order to curb individuals from misleading other citizens or accusing the government of underhand dealings. At *izimbizos*, citizens constructively engage Government in fruitful debates that spearhead the economic development of local communities. Nevertheless, the success of *izimbizo* as a social accountability mechanism is determined by citizen participation in policy development to ensure that local government responds to citizens demands and is accountable and transparent to the public (Theron, 2005:64; Buccus and Hicks, 2008). The ward councillor, as Van der Waldt (2007:38) perceives, should ensure that information is widely disseminated to communities on the need to participate as *izimbizos* since this is the enabling platform for demanding accountability from local municipalities. Citizens should, therefore, hold local government officials accountable for their actions in service delivery. It can be argued from this discussion that *izimbizos* provide an enabling platform for a citizens to engage public officials, however, citizens' participation is imperative to make *izimbizos* function well for effective service delivery.

Ward Committees

At the grassroots level, the demand for social accountability in South Africa is championed by ward committees, which came into existence in 2001 as principal mechanisms for community participation in local government affairs. Ward committees are believed to be powerful political tools for mobilising community support and improving the capacity structures of community forums (Mazenda & Masiya, 2018). However, the significance of ward committees as social accountability mechanisms is somehow underrated as their influence in holding the state accountable seems less influential (Thornhill & Madumo, 2011). Whereas one may wonder why ward committees are claimed to be doing minimal justice to demanding social accountability, the reason might be the fact that cultural diversities and little faith in ward councillors are the contributing factors. Existing information from the Department of Local Government (DPLG) in 2007 showed the establishment of ward committees in six of the nine provinces of South Africa (Gauteng, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Northern Cape, North West and Western Cape). The lowest rate of ward committees being established was in the Western Cape, which constitutes 66.4% with 105 wards not featuring these committees. Free State's establishment was at 84.7%, with Mpumalanga establishing committees in all wards except one. These previous statistics show

the implementation of ward committees as social accountability tools to represent the people in communities, although many communities perceive them as either useless or dysfunctional.

Social Audits

The Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) (2013) describes a social audit as “a monitoring process through which organisational or project information is collected, analysed and shared publicly, and investigative findings are shared and discussed publicly.” As social accountability tools, social audits have been widely used, mainly in developed countries, to enable citizens to engage public officials on how they spent public money. Ringgold, Holla and Srinivasan (2012) posit that social audits are effective intervention strategies because they involve face-to-face interaction between citizens and service providers.

In South Africa, very few studies have been conducted to assess the use of social audits when demanding social accountability from officials. An example of where a social audit was conducted was in Khayelitsha in Cape Town, where the audit was done by the Social Justice Coalition, in partnership with HSRC and the National Development Agency in 2015. The audit was meant to establish the perceptions of local residents to foreigners or what triggers xenophobia. The findings from this audit revealed gross dissatisfaction among residents, as basic services were in a bad state. The residents raised grievances such as lack of toilets and clean water, inadequate accommodation and schools, as well as poor health facilities. The audit showed the eagerness of citizens to participate in surveys, although they anticipate something in return.

Service Delivery Satisfaction Surveys

The World Bank (2017) describes service delivery satisfaction surveys (SDSSs) as quantitative assessments conducted to assess government performance and service delivery based on citizen experience. SDSSs often depend on collected data on a wide range of topics such as citizen perceptions of elected officials and perceptions of citizens on the level of service delivery. SDSSs have been previously used in many countries to monitor the quality of basic service delivery. For instance, in South Africa in 2016, the Public Service Commission (PSC) conducted an SDSS to assess the perceptions and satisfaction levels of citizens in many sectors. The survey assessed knowledge and competence of service providers and rated the value for money on services delivered.

The findings of the South African PSC survey reflected that among public officials, the value of money was not clearly understood. This lack of understanding was indicated by the service delivery backlogs (PSC, 2016). The World Bank (2017) further points out that citizen satisfaction surveys have been carried out in many African countries, 130 using the Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) or the Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire (CWIQ). Governments, civil society organisations or private sectors may conduct these surveys often to accelerate the delivery of services.



Factors that may Affect the Adoption of Social Accountability Mechanisms

The success of social accountability mechanisms in South African municipalities is dependent on various enabling factors that can work for and against the capacity or will power of State institutions to account to the citizens. These have been elaborated below.

Lack of Skills and Competence

The success of social accountability mechanisms depends on the capacity of institutions to implement mechanisms such as social audits or public expenditure tracking (Hansen, 2013). Service providers, including government actors in South Africa are expected to exercise social accountability, although competence is often lacking among public officials (Munzhedzi, 2016). Political will and capacity often determine the implementation of social accountability mechanisms as citizens may want to engage the State and service providers without success due to reluctance to account for their actions (Melena, Forster & Singh, 2004). However, caution needs to be exercised as citizen groups and other civil society organisations (CSOs) may lack the capacity themselves to be accountable to a local government due to ideological or political differences (Batanon, 2015; McNeil & Melena, 2010). To ensure that social accountability mechanisms become effective, citizen participation in social accountability mechanisms such as participatory budgeting is fundamental. Citizens can utilise such a platform, especially at local government level, where Integrated Development Forums (IDP) can debate concerns on service delivery. As a tactical method to increase state accountability, Agarwal & Van Wicking (2011:8) hold that a performance-based reward system is necessary for developing performance standards and codes of conduct. Incentivising public officials can be subject to debate, although it can be instrumental in enhancing social accountability and willingness to deliver quality services. The effect of not incentivising public officials was witnessed in Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality in the Free State Province in South Africa for their financial year 2014/2015 where about R996 million was lost in fruitless and wasteful expenditure as a result of poor performance and general managerial incompetence (Gerick, 2016:4). Drawing insights from these arguments, therefore, incentivising public officials to account to the public may not be a sound idea as corruption is still rampant, particularly at local government level.

Political Interference

The interference of political forces in the running of local municipalities deters citizens' demand for social accountability. This was confirmed by Cameroon (2003), who describes the politics/administration disputes as detrimental to the development of local municipalities and delivery of services at large. A widely debated issue in South Africa, political interference cannot be entirely divorced from the day-to-day running of local municipalities. Svava (2001) has a different view as he highlighted that conflicts that occur in local municipalities have adverse effects on social accountability and municipal service delivery (Cameroon, 2003:6). Although legislation defines the role of political office-bearers and administrators, overlapping and interference is the

main bone of contention that results in service delivery backlogs. The disputes that often occur between the two offices of the municipal manager and mayoral office creates factions and derails service delivery in communities (Nealer, 2007). Political infighting over high municipal positions (Nengwekhulu, 2009) and mismanagement of available resources result in corruption and ultimately poor accountability to communities (Cameron, 2010). Drawing from these assertions, Mafunisa (2013) argues that interference of politicians, for example, in supply chain management decision-making processes, disrupts the office of the municipal manager to effectively adhere to proper supply chain regulations.

Corruption and its Effects on Social Accountability

Du Plessis and Breedt (2013:2) affirm that corruption in South Africa has grown dramatically and manoeuvred its way into the three spheres of government, leading to increased government expenditure and erosion of the moral fabric of local communities. Pillay (2004:589) and Ristey (2010:348) argue that corruption has flourished due to institutional weaknesses or poor design of state departments. This led Munzhedzi (2013:284) to criticise the wasteful expenditure of taxpayer's money every year in the hands of government institutions. In many cases, the lack of transparency and accountability in local municipalities especially lead to citizens, mistrust and in some cases public demonstrations. Upholding social accountability becomes challenging whenever corruption flourishes. McNeil and Malena (2010:197) and O'Meally, 2013:8-12) found that social accountability mechanisms are being affected by a lack of transparency, accountability and poor leadership, which discourages citizen groups, oversight groups, public or ward committees to participate and hold the state accountable. To regain credibility and legitimacy, government institutions need to conduct research and identify key areas of weakness that discourage accountability and engage relevant stakeholders through networking and capacity building on the way forward to enhance social accountability for effective service delivery in communities (World Bank, 2011).

Poverty and Unemployment

In the World Bank Report (WDR) (2004), it was revealed that the global state of basic service provision in states has declined to constrain the poor in communities to attain an average living standard. Batanon (2015) asserts that some countries have undertaken measures to mitigate poverty and promote human development, although inadequate resources act as a barrier. Levy & Walton (2013) lament the limited access to resources, inequitable distribution of wealth, poor infrastructure and corruption as barriers to social accountability and improved service delivery. In South Africa, the legacy of apartheid, as analysts and commentators believe, left irreparable damage on many black communities due to spatial development planning of the apartheid era. Nengwekhulu (2009:344) argues that the post-1994 Mandela government could have done something to equitably redistribute wealth, however, corruption, incompetence, poverty and inequalities hindered the transition process into forming a democratic local government. Recent corruption cases in South Africa involving state capture mention popular names such as Former



President Zuma and the Gupta family, among other high profile government people. The instituted commissions of inquiry such as Zondo and Mokgoro indicate the damage corruption and lack of accountability have done to ordinary citizens in South Africa. Social accountability in local municipalities is at risk as corruption and fraud have created citizens' mistrust of state institutions (Moloi, 2012). Arguably, therefore, the State failed to account for services delivered, which has had devastating consequences on the poor people who would lack the basic services, let alone the voice to hold the State accountable (Wild & Forestri, 2013).

Methodological Issues

The paper draws on data that was collected from five communities in a mixed-method approach within the City of Tshwane in the Gauteng Province of South Africa.

Participants

The paper triangulated various data collection techniques that included questionnaire surveys, interviews and documents. This paper draws on data acquired from questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews and document sources. The paper employed a systematic sampling technique to choose participants who respond to questionnaire surveys from selected communities within the City of Tshwane. The recruitment and selection of participants included all races and started from the ages of 18 to 65 years. The purposive sampling technique was used to identify participants from the selected five departments within the City of Tshwane. These 20 participants were interviewed based on their knowledge of social accountability and its effects on community service delivery.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire survey was designed to examine the effectiveness of social accountability mechanisms used by citizens to demand service delivery in the City of Tshwane. Two broad themes were explored in the questionnaire to obtain an in-depth understanding of the use of various social accountability mechanisms to demand services by communities. The first theme focused on the perceptions of citizens on the use of social accountability mechanisms. The second focuses on the effectiveness of the identified social accountability mechanism towards improving service delivery in the communities governed by the City of Tshwane. The respondents were asked their opinions on the social accountability mechanisms to assess if their lives have been improved or not, or if the City of Tshwane responded to their demands or not. The data collection instruments were a five-step Likert scale where respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement/satisfaction on the use of social accountability mechanisms (1=Not effective at all, 2= Moderately effective, 3= Effective, 4= Moderately effective, 5=Very effective). The Cronbach's coefficient was 0.70. The questionnaire contained open and closed-ended questions where respondents were able to express themselves regarding social accountability mechanisms and their effectiveness in demanding service delivery.

Data Collection Procedures

In this research, questionnaires, surveys and semi-structured interviews were administered simultaneously. Firstly, the researchers distributed questionnaires to 270 participants drawn from selected communities within the City of Tshwane. Secondly, the researchers interviewed 20 participants drawn from five departments within the City of Tshwane. These were public officials who hold senior positions and have accountability authority. The entire data collection process took about a month to complete and permission to conduct the study was granted by the City Manager of the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality.

Data Analysis

Since the respondents were drawn from various communities in the City of Tshwane, the responses were based on various responses from close-ended questions in the questionnaire for the residents in numerous communities governed by the City of Tshwane. The data analysis procedures for quantitative assessments were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Windows version 21 based on the responses from various respondents. Descriptive statistics are used to explain the basic characteristics of the data in the research (Gerber-Nel et al., 2005:2004). Frequency distribution, standard deviation and mean, median and mode scores were some of the descriptive statistics used in this paper. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed verbatim and presented in themes following study objectives.

Results and Discussion

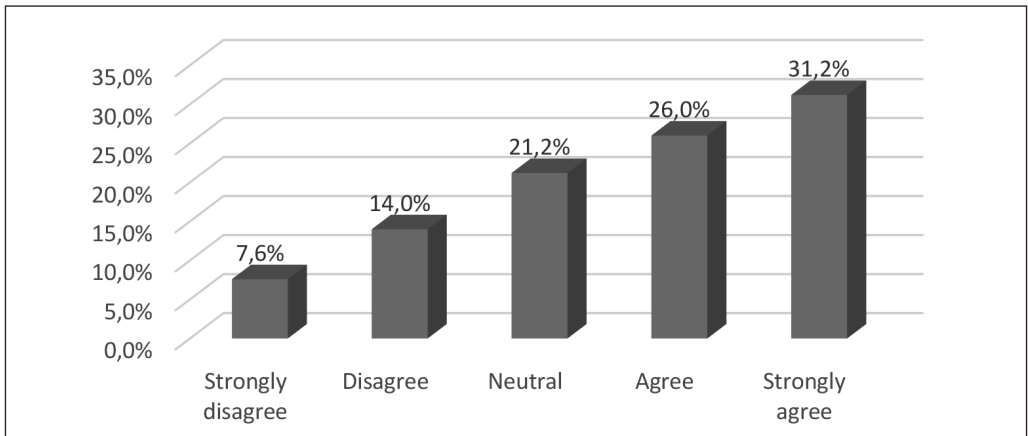
This section discusses the results, interprets and analyses the quantitative and qualitative data collected from both citizens and municipal officials in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. Various themes were derived from the research objectives to guide the discussion on data.

Public Official's Response to the Grievances of People in Service Delivery

Public protests for basic service delivery are rampant in South African municipalities. In the City of Tshwane, these are normal challenges that emanate from municipal citizen relationships that are punctuated with low levels of communication and feedback strategies.



Figure 1.1: Municipal Response to Citizen Demands



From the above graph, the respondents were asked on whether officials do not listen to their grievances or address service delivery queries in their communities. Of those who participated in the study, 31.2% strongly agreed that municipal officials do not listen to their grievances on the need to improve social accountability. About 7.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed and about 21.2% of the respondents remained neutral. Comparing these percentages, it shows that a significant number of respondents are not satisfied with the manner in which the municipality responds to their grievances, which may imply that feedback on what transpired at either *imbizos* or public forums takes a long time.

Findings from key informant interviews revealed that in an attempt to implement social accountability in various communities, the City of Tshwane encountered many obstacles that compromise the effective delivery of services. In some situations, residents took to the streets to protest against delays or unavailability of services. In communities such as Hamanskraal and Mamelodi and some parts of Pretoria, violent community protests became rampant as citizens accused the municipality of corruption and failure to exercise transparency and accountability. One official laments that:

When we run our campaigns where we address issues such as cable theft. These challenges do not reflect our negligence but a human error on the side of citizens. Since we are at the core of service delivery people tend to blame us although some of those challenges are beyond our capacity. Some citizens cause a stir for political mileage which is a challenge we may not be able to solve. Community-based forums are often conducted where people engage the municipality on some service delivery concerns.

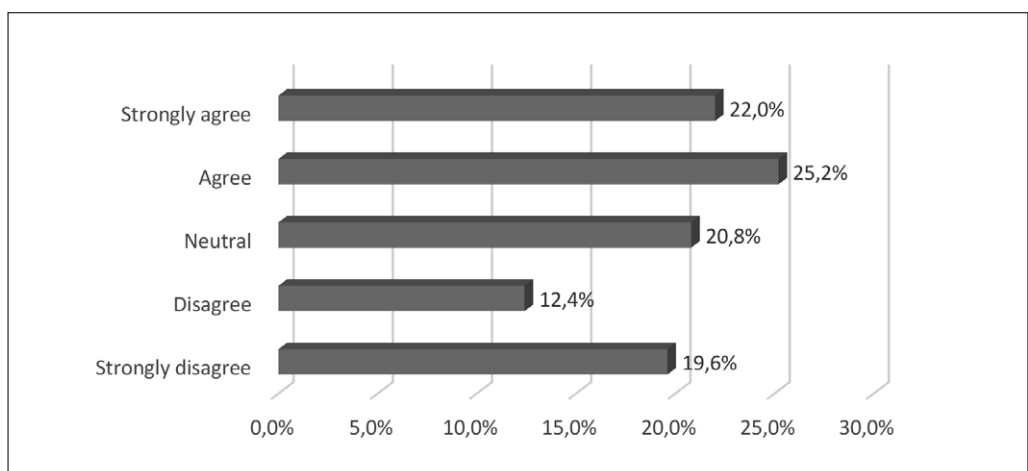
Drawing insight from the assertions, social accountability in the municipality was not effectively exercised as communities took a violent route to force officials to account for their actions in

service delivery. Such a scary scenario brought about by ineffective communication between the municipality and communities tends to ignite public protest that sometimes degenerates into criminality through looting and destruction of public infrastructure. The citizens argue that delays or failure by the municipality to inform citizens on the current state of service delivery creates a situation of discontent. Findings revealed further that public demonstrations in some cases do not have anything to do with social accountability as some unscrupulous citizens seize the opportunity to engage in some criminal acts under the guise of poor service delivery. Drawing from these findings, it can be argued that municipal officials could not entirely take the blame for not providing feedback to citizens as resources are not always at their disposal and the communication channels are often distorted, either due to incompetence or lack of goodwill among elected community representatives.

Municipal's Limited Financial and Human Resources to Implement Social Accountability Mechanisms

A study conducted by Hickey and King (2016) in Uganda, India and Brazil shows a common thread, suggesting that implementing social accountability mechanisms require access to adequate human and financial resources. In South Africa, the demand for social accountability by communities is limited by a lack of political will but also by a lack of resources required by municipal officials in giving account for their actions (Nengwekhulu, 2009; Khale & Worku, 2013). The ability to communicate technical and sometimes complex implementation issues, the ability to communicate widely and to a detailed level is often lacking as is access to appropriate communication channels. All this requires financial and human resources.

Figure 1.2: Municipal's Limited Access to Human and Financial Resources



The bar graph shows that 25.2% of the respondents who participated in the survey agree that the municipality does not have enough human and financial resources to conduct social accountability, whereas 19.6% of those respondents strongly disagree that communities themselves are reluctant to initiate social accountability programmes due to perceived negative perceptions of municipal responses to demands for accountability. Findings from key informant interviews revealed that in most cases, citizens are not aware of the availability of innovative opportunities that they may tap into to increase social accountability. As a result, public officials are blamed for a lack of transparency and accountability. The participants pointed out that there is a need to increase awareness in communities served by the metro as this can help citizens to understand how local government works and where to report in case they are disgruntled about a certain service. Nonetheless, the municipality aims to exercise accountability to the people through the proper delivery of good and services. One key informant noted that:

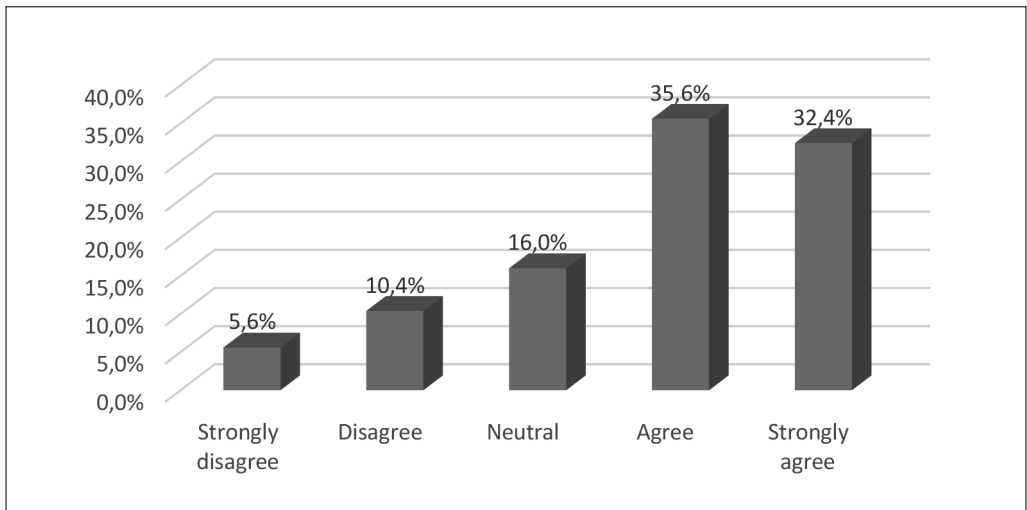
Increasing access to both human and financial resources is key to exercising social accountability in the communities we govern. However due to other service delivery demands our municipal finances are somehow limited to reach all the communities and provide feedback on the manner we spent public money rendering services.

These findings concur with a study conducted by Mfene (2013:17), which revealed that to enhance social accountability, municipalities must be capacitated with developmental requirements that include extensive human and financial resources.

Corruption and Poor Governance in Social Accountability Mechanisms

In their studies, Mafunisa (2013) and Public Service Commission (2013) revealed that corruption is the scourge that has destroyed the capacity of local government to exercise accountability (Thornhill, 2012). The graph below shows the opinions of citizens on the state of corruption and how it affects their participation in the social accountability processes.

Figure 1.3: Corruption and Poor Governance in Social Accountability



From the graph, a question was posed to respondents on whether corruption and poor governance discourage social accountability in communities. Of the respondents who participated in the survey, 35.6% agreed that corruption is the root cause of misusing resources that target social accountability programmes. This may be the reason why citizens do not want to engage officials in the manner in which they deliver services. Only a few of the respondents (10.4%), however, disagreed that corruption and poor governance discourage social accountability. About 32.4% of the respondents strongly agreed that corruption and poor governance affect the implementation of social accountability programmes and disrupt citizens to engage officials in social accountability mechanism that aim to improve service delivery. Meanwhile, 16.0% of the respondents who participate in the survey remained neutral on whether corruption or bad governance discourage citizen participation in social accountability. These findings provide a departure point of analysis as they revealed that a significant number of respondents do believe that corruption and poor governance affect the potential of the municipality to exercise social accountability in the communities it serves.

Key informant interviews reflected that corruption in local government has escalated to the extent of compromising service delivery. One official lamented:

In our department, corruption has been tolerated for a long time and no one is being held accountable. If you try to raise your head to talk about corruption issues you can be either isolated in municipal meetings or fellow officials may plot your downfall. There are very powerful political voices behind corruption, for example, in the procurement systems, government tenders are being manipulated where they are granted to relatives and friends. Nobody is being held accountable as long as you are affiliated with the ruling party.



Another participant added:

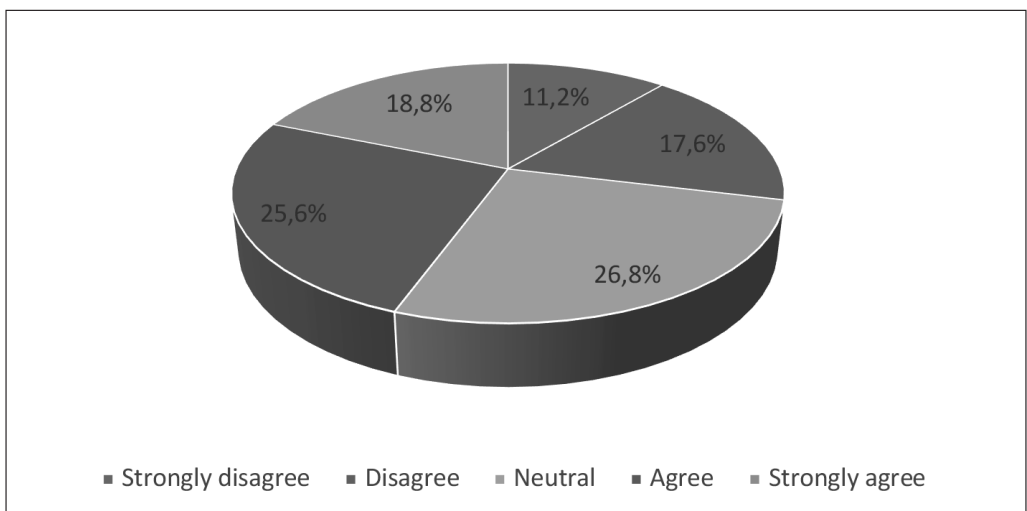
Talking about corruption raises my emotions as in some cases, the national government does what they call money dumping. This is when the excess budget is allocated to local government for use in forms of tenders and these funds are always abused by the powerful forces. Citizens, in this case, have no say in holding officials accountable as their voice is unheard unless in[a] few cases when the internal auditing picks [up] some issues of corruption.

These findings concur with a study conducted by Du Plessis & Breed (2013), which revealed that corruption in South African municipalities has reached alarming levels and has made the lives of ordinary South Africans much harder as services are not efficiently delivered in communities. In their study, Masilone & Dinntwe (2014:181) concurred with the findings, arguing that corruption has become a complex societal ill that the government as to contend with. Given these arguments, it could be deduced from the assertions that citizens are reluctant to participate in social accountability mechanisms due to corrupt actions of the municipality, which do not adequately provide feedback on how public money is being spent on service delivery.

Influence of Political Environment and Social Accountability

The World Bank (2011) and Devajaran, Kheman & Walton (2014:29) suggest that social accountability in South African municipalities has been eroded by political patronage, which is associated with heavy bureaucratic structures. These structures have no desire to account to citizens, which is a step backwards towards achieving social accountability.

Figure 1.4: Politics and Social Accountability



The pie chart above shows that 25.6% of the respondents who participated in the survey strongly disagree that the political environment is a barrier to exercising social accountability. This can be attributed to the freedom of speech and association enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa 1996. About 18.8% of the respondents strongly believed that the political environment indeed has an effect on social accountability. Nonetheless, 26.8% remained neutral on whether politics have a say in the way municipal officials exercise social accountability in communities. This percentage may represent those citizens who lack the means or are reluctant to participate in any political movement in their communities.

Key informant interviews reflected that political interference when rendering services is another challenge faced by the municipality. The political differences can be a challenge as politicians tend to override officials, which is a challenge to effectively implement social innovation programmes. Van de Walle & Jilke (2013) assert that ideological disposition and partisan ideology can trigger citizens to participate in social accountability or not as supporting government policies may affect the benefit or outcome from engaging officials, for instance, in participatory budgeting. Findings from key informant interviews further revealed that citizens have limited capacity to hold officials accountable for service delivery despite the abundance of social accountability mechanisms. The researchers probed further as to whether citizens can effectively hold officials accountable, taking into consideration the political factors that always influence or drive service delivery. The municipal official responded:

Yes, they can and they have the law on their side. Citizens themselves have the duty to play in society to improve service delivery not relying on government. For instance, when a community went on a rampage to protest for services by burning schools, roads they may hinder social accountability as the officials have to sit down and plan again on which service to render first based on priority. So, citizen action sometimes disrupts social accountability and socio-economic development. The government needs to raise awareness of citizens in terms of service delivery. They must not destroy the existing infrastructure but demand services in a responsible manner.

Drawing from these assertions, social accountability in the City of Tshwane is often hindered by political interference that disrupts or distorts citizen action during service delivery protests, which delays decision-making. The destruction of infrastructure by angry citizen proves to be a challenge to the municipality, which often does not have enough human and financial resources to restore such broken infrastructure. Also, such violent communities are not conducive for the officials to go and conduct public forums with the citizens and map a way forward on which services to provide.

Conclusions

This paper focuses more on the challenges that confronted the City of Tshwane from becoming an effective service provider through the exercising of social accountability. Drawing from the



analysis of findings, the researchers noted that a myriad of factors such as corruption, limited skills, political interference, lack of compliance with legislation and manipulation of recruitment systems adversely affect the capacity of the municipality to exercise social accountability. The analysis of literature, however, shows not just a lack of political will or a lack of interest by the citizenry but also to a lack of the requisite skills and resources needed to carry out a full blown consultative and communication process. To increase social accountability in service delivery matters, the City of Tshwane needs to provide more awareness on the importance of citizen engagement of municipal officials. Such participation by citizens in social accountability mechanisms can help to bring municipal officials to account for their actions in service delivery. The participation of citizens in social accountability can be influential through the use of the already existing digital platforms (WiFi hotspots, social network platforms, Facebook, Twitter and the municipal website). These modern information communication technology (ICT) innovations can be utilised effectively to exercise accountability to communities at the same time enabling communities to voice their concerns in terms of service delivery. Therefore, citizens need wide engagement and enlightening on how social accountability mechanisms such as social audits and citizen-based monitoring can be utilised to bring officials to account for their actions in service delivery.

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