

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN POLICY AND PLANNING PROCESSES: THE CASE OF QACHA'S NEK, LESOTHO

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on a study that explored citizen participation in the planning and policy processes in Lesotho with specific reference to Qacha's Nek. Qacha's Nek is one of the districts classified as a remote mountain area of Lesotho and is characterised by a low population density, and in most cases, can be viewed as predominantly rural with a need to develop and focus on policy development and planning. In Lesotho, citizen participation has been encouraged by the different governments since the era of Moshoeshoe in 1824. Since then, Lesotho has gone through many changes and different styles of government until local government was formally established in 2005. Since 2005, one of the main objectives of local government is to promote citizens' participation in decision-making, planning and the implementation of developmental programmes. This article supports the theoretical framework that citizen participation in policy and planning processes is important, since it is through citizen participation that government may be rendered accountable and responsive to

the needs of the local community. To determine the current level of citizen participation in Qacha's Nek, interviews were conducted. The research found that, although citizen participation is currently taking place, it is limited and mostly undertaken by the community to get a reward. Although the main purpose of this article was to determine the level of citizen participation in Qacha's Nek, it also aims to make recommendations to improve citizen participation that could be relevant and beneficial to any community.

INTRODUCTION

Although the history of citizen participation can be traced back to ancient Greece, for contemporary democratic governments the concept gained profound importance during the 1960s. During this time, theories relevant to citizen participation received significant academic attention, indicating that citizen participation is a requirement meant to ensure that citizens have a voice in public decisions. According to Bekker (1996:29) "the phenomenon of participation in the public affairs of democratic

governments is a well-established concept". The role and significance of citizen participation is not only encouraged at national elections, but is also enshrined in many constitutions, thereby, making it a constitutional right of every citizen even beyond elections. This view is supported by Phago (2008:238) who states that the participation of community members in governance matters (in all spheres of government) is not only required, but is an important right for all citizens. Matsiliza (2014) states that the principle of participation by communities in decision-making entails that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process. In addition, Mello (2010) regards citizen participation as a process that allows ordinary citizens the opportunity to exercise power over decisions that affect them. Citizens are the main beneficiaries of government activities, decisions and policies; it is, therefore, important that they should always be consulted even if, according to Mello (2010), they don't want to participate. Linking to this, Brynard (1996:2) writes that "to a greater or lesser extent the shaping of public policies is always influenced by public opinion and participation by the public in matters which they believe will affect them directly".

This article, therefore, views citizen participation as important since, firstly, it is through citizen participation that government may be rendered accountable and responsive to the needs of the local community. Secondly, citizen participation is important since it promotes the deepening of democracy. Thirdly, citizen participation

ensures continuous interaction and communication between government and citizens. Citizen participation is viewed as important not only by authors, but also by a number of countries, including Lesotho and South Africa. Lesotho has a long history of viewing citizen participation as important. It is against this background that this article aims to determine the current level of citizen participation in Lesotho, with specific reference to Qacha's Nek. Apart from determining the current level of citizen participation in Qacha's Nek, this article also provides a background as to why this research was undertaken, an explanation of the methodology used, an overview of the history and development of citizen participation in Lesotho, as well as the role of local government in citizen participation in Lesotho.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Apart from the fact that Lesotho has a long history of citizen participation, this research was also, firstly, selected since Lesotho has gone through many different stages of political rule and instability. Kapa (2013) states that the country has moved forward and established a democratically elected coalition government that promotes regular peaceful elections and can be viewed as a rarity on the African continent. Secondly, Lesotho, unlike many developed and industrialised countries, remains a developing country where three-fourths of citizens live in rural areas and engage in subsistence agriculture, therefore, giving a unique view

on citizen participation and the importance thereof in a rural and remote developing country. Qacha's Nek specifically was earmarked for this research, since it is an example of one of the districts in Lesotho that is classified as being in a remote mountainous area and is predominantly rural, representing the conditions that the majority of citizens in Lesotho live in. Thirdly, this area was chosen, because the local government in Qacha's Nek is perceived by the community to be active in promoting citizen participation, and can be viewed as an example of how other rural and remote areas in developing countries can also benefit from including citizens in planning and policy processes. Lastly, this area was selected due to the interest, convenience and accessibility to the researchers of this article.

Since the community in Qacha's Nek view the local government as active in citizen participation, it was the aim of this article to test this view. The main research question guiding the research was, therefore, to determine whether citizen participation in Qacha's Nek, Lesotho, was indeed taking place and at what level. The research objectives included getting a better understanding of how citizen participation developed in Lesotho, understanding why citizen participation is important in Lesotho, and to determine how to improve citizen participation in Qacha's Nek, if need be. The research was qualitative in nature and, firstly, attempted to provide a literature overview of the most topical books and journal articles relevant to citizen participation. Information about local government and citizen participation

was also collected from official documents, for example, policy papers, acts, bills and research documents. Secondly, interviews (see data collection) were conducted with different and diverse groups in Qacha's Nek, who provided valuable information concerning citizen participation in this area. As such, the reading and analysing of texts and interviews can be seen as the main research methods used in writing this article.

The findings of this research will not only benefit citizens in rural areas as to how to participate in government policy and planning processes, it can also benefit any government in a developing country that wants to involve citizens in government processes.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LESOTHO

According to the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics (2011), the Lesotho population was 1 880 661, with only 24 percent of the population residing in urban areas. The rest of the population stays in remote rural areas such as Qacha's Nek.

In Lesotho, citizen participation has a long history dating back to the era of Moshoeshoe I (1824-1868). During this time, public gatherings and the chief's court (*khotla*) took place regularly and were characterised by considerable freedom of speech, whereby all men (women were not allowed) could express their views on issues of national importance, freely and openly.

Between 1820 and 1867, Lesotho was faced with the challenges of war from other tribes, such as the Zulus and also from the Boers. This forced Moshoeshe I to seek protection from Britain. In March 1868, the country became a British protectorate known as Basutoland, and its present-day borders were established. During this time, public gatherings were no longer effective as mechanisms for fostering citizen participation. A growing population and transforming society affected public gatherings and conduct. Public gatherings became too demanding, as many aspects had to be considered. In addition, the introduction of tax by the colonial government forced many Basotho men to migrate to South Africa in search of jobs to enable them to pay tax. According to Weisfelder (1974:95) "massive, regularized migration of Basotho to jobs in South Africa eventually destroyed the everyday, face-to-face communication and sense of communal participation".

In the late 1940s, massive changes took place in Africa, especially in countries that had been colonised. Gill (1993:202) states "calls for self-determination and equality were heard across Africa and in Lesotho as well". This state of affairs changed the political feelings and ambitions of commoners and chiefs. Likewise, the colonial government was affected by the political environment of the time. However, in this new context, the colonial administration could no longer stand up against the new expectations of Basotho leaders, chiefs or commoners. In 1959, the Colonial government (Britain) enacted the *Local Government Proclamation, 1959*,

No. 52 as a legal base for the establishment of district councils. According to Mapetla and Rembe (1989:22), district councils were established as statutory bodies to perform the following functions:

- To act as an avenue for popular participation.
- To serve as an electoral college for representation in the National Council.
- To act in an advisory capacity to the National Council in matters concerning local affairs.
- As local authorities, they were vested with extensive powers to make by-laws, manage local finances and carry out various responsibilities related to agriculture, livestock and maintenance of bridle paths and selected roads, fisheries, public order, health and trade.

As the first function of the district council indicates, these councils were created to act as an avenue for popular participation. During the early days of district councils, Lesotho experienced improved participation by commoners in national affairs. Therefore, district councils became strong mechanisms through which citizen participation was instituted during the time before independence.

In 1965, Lesotho held the first national election and the country received its independence on 4 October 1966, under the rule of the Basotho National Party (BNP) (Pule, 2002:173). Major changes occurred swiftly after independence, which greatly changed the colonial setup of the country. One of the first things the new government

did was to suspend local government structures known as district councils, and these councils were finally abolished in 1968 (Pule, 2002:174). District councils were dismantled by *Government Notice 8 of 1966* and the *Local Government Repeal Act of 1968*, respectively (Kapa, 2010:10). In addition, the councils were too costly for the BNP government, especially with regard to the payment of staff salaries and wages. These councils were also largely dominated by the opposition party, the Basutoland Congress Party and, as such, they were seen as a threat to the government of the Basotho National Party.

On 4 January 1970, the second general elections were held (Pule, 2002:174). The outcome of this election was different from that of 1966, since Basotho people voted for the opposition party in large numbers. The result surprised many people, especially the members of the ruling party, since they expected to remain in power. Gill (1993:221) writes:

Although the Prime Minister was shaken by this election defeat, he took the initial step to hand over power. However, after receiving some strong words from his Minister, Maseribana Peete, he suspended the Constitution and declared a state of emergency on 30 January 1970. (Gill, 1993:221)

Following this, the political system in Lesotho changed dramatically. According to Kabemba (2003:5), this marked the beginning of a one-party government, which was

characterised by repressive and undemocratic rule, whereby the BNP government maintained control of the state from 1970 to 1986. Citizen participation was undermined to the extent that some citizens, especially of the opposition parties, were imprisoned when they attempted to exercise their freedom of speech. Lesotho was under an authoritarian regime until 1985. However, the government still made attempts to instigate participation in communities. Local structures that encouraged and demanded citizen participation were created, for example, village development committees and district development committees. However, these committees never really became effective as structures and institutions for local planning. They lacked expertise and funds to plan, they lacked technical and managerial capability, were largely dominated by public officials and depended on central government (Mapetla & Rembe, 1989:33-34).

The political development and dispensation in Lesotho, in late 1985, remained intolerable, repressive and violent. On 1 January 1986, South Africa put in place a massive border blockade, which allowed little traffic to move between South Africa and Lesotho. This state of affairs was followed by the rising of political unrest, tensions and violence. Finally, on 20 January 1986, Radio Lesotho announced that there had been a military takeover (Pule, 2002:189). During the military regime, two important developments regarding the creation of enabling structures for participation were instituted. According to Kapa (2010:10), the Maseru City Council (MCC) was established under

the *Urban Government Act of 1983* and development committees under the *Development Committees Order No. 9 of 1986*, which dealt with local institutions and chiefs as they bore implications for citizen participation. The most important components of this Order in terms of this research, were the bodies that it established. These were the Village Development Committees (VDC), the ward committees and the district development committees. Generally, the military government made commendable strides with these structures or committees, as they became mechanisms for allowing citizen participation. As Kapa (2010:9) comments:

Because every village in Lesotho had its own VDC, offering scope for the people to have a better and direct input in issues affecting their lives, the Lesotho local government structure under the military regime was a better popular participation maximisation... (Kapa, 2010:9)

The VDCs were the grass-roots mechanisms that could enable the participation of ordinary citizens in development activities and notably in planning processes. The VDCs had the potential to stimulate and allow for mass participation, since every adult inhabitant could attend. Therefore, VCDs, as a participation structure, were simple as they ensured that citizens took part from the level of the village where the chief would chair the meeting. This system resembled the traditional form of authority that Basotho people knew and respected from pre-colonial times, because the institution of chieftainship was historically regarded as a symbol of unity

(Mothibe, 2002:28). Another important impetus was that the VDCs were predicated on a legal framework. In this respect, citizen participation was not an issue of discretion, but was mandatory, as the village development committee had the legal mandate to stimulate local participation (Kabemba, 2003:24).

Shortly after the introduction of multiparty politics in 1993, the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) government introduced several reforms. One was the abolition of development councils, which had been created by the military junta after it took power in 1986. Despite this move, earlier in its political manifesto, the BCP government had indicated its intention to introduce local government. This point is illustrated by the following excerpt from the manifesto, which states:

The BCP is convinced that true development and good governance require grass-roots involvement in both planning and decision-making. To that extent, the BCP government shall (a) ensure the establishment of councils at districts, Constituency and village levels and (b) facilitate a democratic relationship between the central and local governments. (The BCP, 1993:7)

The BCP government was faced with a myriad of political conflicts after it took over government. This led to some delays in the full implementation of permanent local government. However, the BCP remained adamant in establishing the local government structure. In 1997, preparatory developments

for local government were implemented. Subsequently, Parliament enacted the *Local Government Act of 1997*. According to the Lesotho Year Book (2005:58), this act served to provide for proper local government. In 1998, another change in government occurred. The government in power was the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) after it had won the elections. The LCD was a breakaway party from the BCP and, as a result, it continued with the original plan of putting local government in place. After the LCD came into power, the country faced political instability and violence that were linked to the elections. Despite this political crisis, the LCD government continued to pursue the introduction of democratic local government and enacted the *Local Government Elections Act of 1998*. This Act provided guidelines as to how local government elections should be held, in terms of the electoral model, as well as other issues related to local government elections.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN LESOTHO WITH REFERENCE TO CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Two important institutions were responsible for ensuring that local government became a reality in Lesotho. These were the Ministry of Local Government and Chieftainship and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). These two institutions were given the task of implementing the two pieces of legislation meant for local government. According to the Lesotho Year Book (2008:76), the Ministry of Local Government was responsible for the administration of the *Local*

Government Act of 1997, while the IEC was largely responsible for the administration of the *Local Government Elections Act of 1998*. One notable point is that, unlike in 2005, local government was implemented through formal election processes under the leadership of the IEC. A new democratic local government was established formally in April 2005, with one-third of all council seats reserved for women. Local government in Lesotho was established to achieve certain objectives and purposes that included:

- deepening and widening public access to the structures of government.
- bringing services to the people, thereby improving service delivery.
- promoting people's participation in decision-making, planning and implementation of development programmes, which gave the electorate greater control over the development process.
- promoting equitable development in all parts of the country through the distribution of human, institutional and infrastructural resources (Government of Lesotho, 2003:2).

In terms of these objectives, local government was meant to bring government closer to the people, thereby allowing the people to develop their communities themselves. In this process, the people were expected to participate in decisions concerning plans and to take part in the implementation of development projects and programmes. This had to ensure equitable development across the country. Two pieces of legislation, namely the

Local Government Act of 1997 and the *Local Government Elections Act of 1998*, played an important role in this regard. Although citizen participation was not clearly spelt out in these Acts, the concept of citizen participation was linked to local government. However, in the document, "Programme for Implementation of Local Government in Lesotho" (Government of Lesotho, 2003:2), citizen participation was regarded as one of the objectives of local government in Lesotho. Citizen participation was encouraged and promoted by the *Lesotho Constitution* and *Lesotho Vision 2020*. Section 20 of the Constitution provides for participation in government, while the Vision 2020 policy document provides, in relation to participation, that:

"Lesotho will have a well-established system of local governance with full ownership and participation of the majority in decision-making and local development. In order for local government to be effective, citizen participation in the planning and policy process has to be encouraged, as this is critical in determining the development in communities." (*Constitution of Lesotho*)

Given the importance of citizen participation in local government, participation can take place in three different ways. Firstly, citizens can easily participate in local structures, such as the community council, since the council is close to them. Citizens can participate in this council either as ordinary individuals through their organised associations, or as members of non-governmental organisations. Secondly, citizen participation can take place

at public gatherings organised either by the councillor or the chief. Public gatherings are considered the best places at which citizens can participate and enhance proper functioning of local government. Councillors are also expected to share plans with the citizens at public gatherings, as well as to provide citizens with feedback on whatever progress is being made on the implementation of plans (Government of Lesotho, 2003:18). Thirdly, citizen participation can take place in local government through various committees established in local government. In these committees, citizen participation is expected in terms of providing input and making suggestions. An example is the District Development Coordinating Committee, whose main purpose is to coordinate and integrate all the district development plans from the councils and the line ministries, and to review progress on implementation of council plans (Government of Lesotho, 2003:20).

From the above, it can be concluded that citizen participation in local government in Lesotho is viewed as important, and provided for, within local government structures, namely the community councils and the district councils. Since citizen participation is being provided for through legislation and various structures, the question remains whether citizens are indeed participating in these processes.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN QACHA'S NEK

To determine whether citizens are indeed participating in planning and policy

processes in Qacha's Nek, interviews were conducted. Firstly, an overview of the data collection strategy and process that was followed during the interviews will be provided. This will be followed by the presentation and interpretation of the data collected during the interviews.

Data Collection

Interviews were selected for this research, since they provide for clarification on aspects not understood by interviewees. Additionally, interviewees do not have to be literate and, generally, the response rate for interviews are higher than for questionnaires. Interviewees were selected from a sample, because they represented different and diverse groups in Qacha's Nek, who could provide valuable information concerning citizen participation in local government activities. A total of 26 individuals were selected for interviews and all 26 agreed to be interviewed. Although this sample might seem small, it is worth remembering that Qacha's Nek is a small rural community. Consent was voluntary and informed. Ethical guidelines and practices were followed throughout the interview process. Comprehensive interviews were conducted with the following categories of people in Qacha's Nek representing the community, government and NGOs: five Local Councilors (LC), one Community Council Secretary (CCS), one Urban Council Secretary (UCS), one District Council Chairperson (DCC), one District Council Secretary (DCS-01), one representative from a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), two representatives

from the Transformation Resource Centre (TRC), two representatives from Development for Peace Education (DPE), one Community Council Chairperson (CCC), one Urban Council Chairperson (UCC), five District Development Coordinating Committee members (DDCC), and five ordinary citizens in the community, as well as two members representing the Academic and Research-Based Institutions (ARI).

For the purpose of analysis, the questions for the interviews were determined beforehand and all interviewees were asked the same questions. All the interviewees answered all the questions. The analysis below is presented in such a way that the aim for asking each question is also provided.

Findings and Interpretation from Interviews

Interviewees were, firstly, asked about their understanding of citizen participation. The aim and objective behind asking this question were to get a general and conceptual understanding of citizen participation. The respondents provided different responses with regard to this question.

Firstly, some respondents indicated that citizen participation is about citizens influencing the decisions that government makes at any level of government. According to one of the respondents:

Citizen participation is about or rather a process where citizens are allowed to take part in the decision-making processes

that range from policy-making, drafting of plans and even in the implementation of such processes with the purpose of influencing the decisions the government makes. (Respondent 6)

The majority of respondents understood citizen participation as a continuous process, whereby citizens are allowed and given a chance to take part in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. From the interviews, it could be concluded that citizen participation was understood to be a democratic right, a continuous and interactive process, where citizens take part in the decision-making processes, such as policy and planning formulation and implementation, with the purpose of influencing government to bring those services that are needed to communities.

Secondly, interviewees were asked whether citizen participation is important or not. Most of the respondents indicated that citizen participation is indeed important. According to one councillor:

Citizen participation is important in two senses. Firstly, it fosters responsive service delivery by the government in that the government will bring the services the citizens have demanded. Secondly, citizen participation ensures that the developments the government brings to the communities are sustainable and it helps the government to avoid white-elephant projects. If people have not participated in the planning and policy process,

whatever the government decides to bring to the people may end up as futile development, as people may destroy it. Therefore, in many respects, citizen participation is important. (Respondent 1)

According to another respondent:

Citizen participation is important in that it enables the citizens to air and place their communal needs and problems with the government, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, it enables the government to communicate policy and plans to the citizens. In other words, it enhances communication between the government and the citizens. (Respondent 19)

All the respondents viewed citizen participation as important, in that they felt it enables the government and the citizens to communicate on matters of development. This indicates that even when citizens stay in rural and remote areas, they still view participating in government activities as important.

Thirdly, respondents were asked whether local government can enhance and propel citizen participation. The aim of asking this question was to find out if local government can be a proper avenue for enhancing citizen participation. All the respondents interviewed indicated that local government can indeed enhance and propel citizen participation even in rural remote areas. According to one of the respondents:

Local government can easily facilitate and enhance citizen participation, since the government is closer to the people than central government and, as such, it is for citizens to meet local authorities as central government is too far away from them. This means, when government is closer, citizens will be at liberty to contact the councillors any time, mostly because they stay with them in the communities. (Respondent 17)

All respondents agreed that indeed local government can propel and enhance citizen participation, since local government is closer to the citizens than central government. This also indicates the importance of developing local governments in rural and remote areas to communicate with citizens and to help with development.

Fourthly, respondents were asked whether citizen participation was taking place at that time, especially in Qacha's Nek. The aim of asking this question was to find out whether citizen participation in the policy and planning process was taking place in Qacha's Nek at the time of the research. Most of the respondents indicated that citizen participation was taking place in Qacha's Nek, although not fully, and that it was taking place due to certain factors. According to one councillor from the Qacha's Nek urban council:

Citizens do participate in government, but they participate solely in policy implementation where they are employed in projects. They only participate when

they know that they are going to be paid. In cases where they are called to attend meetings for policy formulation or to make plans, citizens are normally reluctant to participate. Sometimes, citizens do participate in the planning process where their representatives call for a public gathering with the assistance of the local chief. During the public gathering, citizens will give representatives their mandate and the representatives take the mandate to the councils. This means, in this sense, they do participate. (Respondent 14)

Another councillor interviewed indicated that citizen participation does take place, but not under the free will of the people. According to him:

Citizens do participate in local government, even though it is not a free and pure participation. They participate mostly in project implementation, especially when they know that they are going to be paid. Sometimes, they attend the public gatherings when they have heard that possibilities for work are very high. This means that it may not be wrong for one to think that participation in Lesotho, and particularly in Qacha's Nek, occurs because of the consideration of material reward or incentives being involved. Normally, citizens participate in areas such as land reclamation and forestry projects, road building and soil conservation projects. These are the areas where the government has made it a policy that citizens be paid. (Respondent 1)

It was concluded by all respondents that some degree of citizen participation in Qacha's Nek was taking place, although the majority of citizens felt that citizen participation needs to be improved and indicated that they did not participate. There were some reasons why this was the case. For example, some respondents mentioned the reluctance of citizens to participate, since they did not see the value, while some mentioned the unregulated and meddlesome involvement of central government in local affairs. Therefore, to ameliorate this situation, there is a need for extensive education of citizens on the importance of voluntary citizen participation.

Fifthly, respondents were asked whether the structure of local government and the mechanisms for ensuring citizen participation were enough to foster participation. The aim in asking this question was to find out whether the structure of local government in Lesotho, at the time of the study, assisted or restricted citizen participation. The majority of the respondents agreed that the structure did not inhibit or discourage people from participating. According to one respondent:

The structure of local government is good, since it does not prohibit citizens from participating in local government. In terms of the structure of Lesotho's local government, people are at liberty to consult with their representatives, since they are residing together in the villages. This means the structure is good. (Respondent 8)

All respondents agreed that the structure of local government in Lesotho was not a problem. This means, in as far as citizen participation was concerned, that the local government structure offered enough space and opportunities for citizens to participate. This indicates that, if structures and processes are put in place for citizen participation in remote and rural areas, it can result in citizens participating in government processes and working towards their own development.

Question six asked respondents whether the legislative framework covering local government adequately addressed the issue of citizen participation. The aim of this question was to find out whether the respondents knew about the legislative frameworks covering citizen participation, and whether such legislative frameworks addressed citizen participation. The responses seemed to show that the legal framework was not a major issue, because it did not restrict citizen participation in any way. However, respondents agreed that there was a need to improve the local government acts in relation to citizen participation. According to Respondent no.7:

The law or policy is not the problem, because there is nowhere in any law where citizens are forbidden to participate. People in Lesotho do not care about local government. The law may be clear or vague; they have no interest in the law. So, for me, it is about people understanding and being willing to play their role in local government; that is, how, why and when to participate. However, there is a need to

revise and improve the legal framework to fully bind the local councillors, and the municipal or community manager to solicit public input before the policy or plan is finalised by the council. We need a detailed procedure that directs, in a clear manner, how the public or citizen has input in a certain plan. (Respondent 7)

These sentiments were echoed by other respondents as well, and it was concluded that the legislative frameworks did not adequately address the issue of citizen participation in local government. This means that there was a need for legislative frameworks to be revised and improved, so that the issue of citizen participation could be adequately addressed.

Question seven asked whether citizens were aware of the policies that promoted citizen participation in Lesotho at the time of the research. The purpose of asking this question was to find out whether citizens knew about, or were aware of, the policies that promoted citizen participation in Lesotho. The respondents were divided on this question. Some stated that citizens were aware, while others said they were not aware. One respondent mentioned that citizens had been made aware at public gatherings where most community issues were discussed (Respondent 19). The same sentiments were shared by Respondents 20 and 21. In contrast to this, other respondents indicated that citizens are not aware. One respondent stated that:

Citizens are not aware of the policies that promote citizen participation in my

community council, because things, or whatever takes place in local government, are dictated from the top and citizens are always left not knowing whether the action the local government takes is policy-directed or at the discretion of the central government in local government. Even those who participate do so because they are forced to, because they want the material rewards after participating. (Respondent 2)

It is, therefore, acknowledged that there were some who were not aware of these policies. This means that, at the time of the research, there was still a need for citizens to be made aware of policies that promote citizen participation in local government. Furthermore, central government should allow local government autonomy to ensure that free and fair participation of citizens can occur regularly.

Question eight asked whether citizens viewed their right to participation in local government planning and policy processes as something important. The purpose of asking this question was to find out whether citizens understood the right to participation as being important. There were many and varied responses to this question. Some respondents said citizens took their right to participation as something important, while other respondents presented the opposite. According to one respondent:

Citizens regard their right to participation as something important. This is reflected in their attendance at various public gath-

erings that are held in the community. Many citizens, in my place, attend public gatherings and are active in the policy formulation and implementation processes. In the event that the council implements any activity without their concern and knowledge, they always petition the council. This is an indication that indeed citizens take their right to participation as something important. (Respondent 23)

The same sentiments were reiterated by one of the councillors who said:

Indeed, in my community council, citizens view their right to participation in local government as important. One cannot attempt to implement any policy without having consulted the citizens. However, not all citizens are aware of their rights, because some just do not care, and one can conclude that these citizens may, sometimes, not be aware or rate their right to participation as important. (Respondent 22)

It can be concluded that the majority of citizens viewed their right to participation in local government as something important, despite some citizens still not understanding or caring about this right. This indicates that most citizens, although staying in a remote and rural area, still want their voices and opinions heard.

Question nine asked about the challenges that were present when citizens participated in the planning and policy processes in local

government. The aim of asking this question was to find out what factors impeded the process of citizen participation. This question revealed that there were many challenges that apparently bedevilled citizen participation in Qacha's Nek. According to one councillor:

The challenges that face the local government process in Lesotho are the very challenges that hinder citizen participation in Lesotho. The main challenge is the issue of autonomy. The fact that most decisions are still made, imposed and dictated by central government is a challenge to citizen participation. The second challenge is that local government in Lesotho has been implemented along political party lines. This issue has rendered local government amenable to political conflicts, in that, instead of battling for political policies and developments in local government, citizens often battle with party political issues. Thirdly, conflict between chiefs and councillors is another issue. (Respondent 1)

The level of understanding and training of the councillors was another pertinent challenge facing local government and citizen participation. According to one citizen in Qacha's Nek:

The level of understanding and education of some of the councillors in local government is a major challenge. This is because some of the councillors do not understand their roles and responsibilities pertaining to citizen participation and

local government in general. This situation is further complicated by the fact that most of the documents are written in English and, as such, it becomes difficult for some councillors to understand them. So, there is a need for the councillors to be thoroughly trained, so as to make them competent enough to manage and perform their work. (Respondent 2)

It was stated by most respondents that local government was encumbered with serious challenges. At the time of the research, issues such as autonomy, training and understanding and party politics remained the major challenges facing and inhibiting citizen participation in local government.

Question ten asked respondents how citizen participation in the policy and planning processes in local government in Lesotho could be improved. The purpose of asking this question was to give respondents an opportunity to express their opinions on this matter. Almost all the respondents earnestly indicated that something had to be done to improve citizen participation in local government. According to one of the citizens in the Qacha's Nek urban council:

If we want to make citizen participation a reality in Lesotho, there is a need for comprehensive political education where different segments of citizens need to be educated and sensitised. The government imposed local government without clarifying certain important things, such as the role of citizens and civil society organisations, the role of

non-governmental organisations, and the responsibilities of the councillors and of central government. (Respondent 4)

These sentiments were echoed by one member of the District Planning Unit (DPU) and the District Development Coordinating Committee (DDCC) who argued:

The citizens and the councillors need to be educated on the importance of citizen participation in local government. There is a need, also, to train the councillors, since most of them still do not understand their roles and responsibilities. (Respondent 3)

Apart from political education, respondents felt that there was a need for central government to refrain from meddling in local government affairs; that is, central government should give the local government autonomy. According to one respondent:

As part of improving citizen participation in local government, the central government should allow the local people the autonomy to decide on the plans and policies that are specific to their communities. Currently, the involvement and meddlesomeness of the central government discourages local participation, in that it imposes plans on the local communities and this prevents the citizens from making their own plans. (Respondent 2)

The sentiments about training, that political education should take place and that the involvement of central government in local

government should be reduced, were echoed by councillors and citizens.

CONCLUSION

The research, on which this article is based, found that citizen participation is important and indeed has a long history in Lesotho. Citizen participation is, in addition, beneficial for citizens even in rural and remote areas, since it provides them with an opportunity to have their voices heard and to be part of the decisions that are being made. Citizens can become responsive and responsible by

making use of citizen participation, in that they will promote development in their own communities.

Although the research revealed that citizen participation was indeed taking place, and was viewed as important, it was often plagued by challenges such as a lack of knowledge. Citizens would also, mostly, participate when they were being rewarded for their participation. Political education and citizens' sensitisation on the importance of citizen participation in Qacha's Nek, Lesotho, could assist in solving this problem.

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