




Enhancing integrated development planning in South African local government: The critical role of youth engagement in planning and implementation



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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the critical role of youth participation in planning and implementation with the purpose of improving the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). Local governments in South Africa are legally mandated to foster participatory development through IDP, which aim to address imbalances from the predemocratic era and improve socioeconomic conditions. Despite the democratic foundation of these policies, youth participation in IDP formulation remains markedly low. This discrepancy is particularly troubling given the substantial role that youth played in achieving democracy and the proverb that today's youth are tomorrow's leaders. The paper argues that the absence of effective mechanisms for youth participation has led to significant social deficiencies. The paper is conceptual and is grounded in social capital theory. The study uses a qualitative desktop research method, relying on existing literature. The findings reveal that the lack of youth participation in IDP contributes to various problems, including inadequate service delivery, violent protests, substance abuse, and social delinquency. It recommends the establishment of practical and inclusive mechanisms to better engage young people in the IDP process, thus addressing the current gaps and promoting more equitable development outcomes. Young people's ignorance and the lack of efficient and inclusive mechanisms to promote participation of youth have produced numerous social deficiencies. These problems hinder community development and social transformation. Therefore, this paper concludes that training programs, youth dialogues, and political education should be developed to improve youth understanding of local government processes.

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Introduction

Youth participation in community-related initiatives fosters confidence, instills a sense of belonging, and ensures that their perspectives are taken seriously. In South Africa, youth participation in governance and social development is guided by the National Youth Policy, the National Youth Policy for 2015–2020 is developed for all young people in South Africa. It focuses on rectifying past injustices and addressing the urgent needs and challenges of South African youth. This policy was anchored by the South African Constitution, the World Programme of Action for Youth, the African Youth Charter, and the National Development Plan (National Youth Policy, 2015-2020). Following the end of apartheid, South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 brought renewed focus on addressing historical injustices and enhancing service delivery, particularly for previously marginalized communities. The establishment of local government was a crucial step in this direction, with an emphasis on incorporating public participation in all spheres of society, including the youth (Matotoka, 2021; Asha & Makalela, 2020; Masenya, 2015). A key mechanism introduced to promote this inclusivity was the integrated development plan (IDP). As stipulated in the White Paper on Local Government (1998), the IDP is a tool and approach for developing local government. Furthermore, Section 152 of the Republic of South Africa's Constitution of 1996 emphasizes community participation, mandating that municipalities actively engage community members in the developmental planning process. In essence, IDP cannot thrive in the absence of community involvement.

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The IDP, described in the White Paper on Local Government (1998) as a municipal five-year plan, is designed to be both a strategic and a participatory tool. Its formulation involves various stages, including extensive community consultation, to ensure that the plan reflects the needs and aspirations of the local population. Moyo and Madlopha (2016) underline the importance of this process, noting that the IDP serves as a comprehensive guide for service delivery and development, which requires active participation of all community members, including youth. Dube, Mnguni, and Tschudin (2021) argue that public participation in local government is essential to achieve good governance. However, public participation in local government has encountered several challenges, such as the lack of youth participation in the planning and implementation of the IDP. This is concerning, given that the South African government is committed to providing opportunities for young people to participate in economic activities, which is crucial to building generational wealth and addressing the triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment. This can only be achieved through their active participation in the IDP.

This underrepresentation poses a significant challenge to effective service delivery and the development agenda. Research by Khuzwayo (2011) highlights that the lack of youth participation in service delivery projects undermines democratic constitutional imperatives, which are also enshrined in municipal regulations. The Municipal System Act 32 of 2000 notes the importance of including the local community within the municipality, working in partnerships with the municipality political and administrative structure to provide for community participation. The South African Constitution mandates local governments to encourage youth participation in IDP, since local governance is closest to citizens (Nkoana, Mmacheone, & Selelo, 2024; Makalela, 2018). However, research by Maenetja and Kgobe (2024) shows that municipalities, while positioned to act as developmental levers, still struggle to involve youth despite existing policies and legislative frameworks that encourage inclusivity. Typically, IDP planning participants are predominantly older adults, resulting in plans that may not fully align with the aspirations and needs of the younger demographic.

Corruption and poor governance in local government could contribute to the lack of youth participation in the IDP process. Furthermore, this disappointing turnout could be attributed to lack of political awareness and inadequate information on IDP objectives within municipalities. South African local municipalities are often criticized for being plagued by unviable economic and social development initiatives, leading to youth disengagement and exacerbating socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and poor service delivery. This disengagement can contribute to social unrest and delinquency (Kroukamp & Cloete, 2018; Motlhaolwa, 2016). Given South Africa's large youth population, there is substantial potential for increased youth participation in developmental processes. The current lack of participation undermines the principle of inclusive and participatory development (Makalela, 2018; Ngomane, 2017).

Young people are often actively involved in service delivery protests, and they can be key drivers of such unrest. However, they frequently do not participate in the planning and execution of IDP. This raises the question: Why are they primarily interested in violent activities rather than the peaceful processes that could prevent such situations? This paper aims to examine the role of youth participation in the planning and implementation of IDP, highlighting the need to increase youth participation. It will examine the factors that contribute to the low levels of youth participation and propose strategies to improve their participation in municipal development initiatives. Addressing these issues is crucial to improving the effectiveness of IDP and fostering a more inclusive approach to development, thus mitigating the risk of dissatisfaction and unrest among the younger population.

Literature Review

Evolving Dynamics of Youth Participation in South Africa

Before 1994, South Africa's development planning was deeply rooted in discriminatory practices, separate development, and segregation (Masenya, 2015). Despite this, the youth of that era were actively engaged in challenging the apartheid regime through defiance and protests, making their dissatisfaction with exclusion and alienation evident (Shai, 2016). According to Vuma (2021), the very discriminatory practices and segregation they opposed served as a major motivation for their remarkable level of participation. They recognized the critical importance of having a voice in developmental and governance issues affecting their lives, a lesson from which today's youth can draw valuable insights.

The promulgation of the South African Constitution after 1994 marked the beginning of a new era emphasizing inclusivity, decentralization of planning, and good governance (Nkoana, Monama, & Mokoale, 2024; Mokoale, 2017). The initial policy designed to address human development, public participation, and socioeconomic challenges in the post-apartheid era was the Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) (Gwija, Eresia-Eke, & Iwu, 2014). This was followed by initiatives such as the Youth Development Forum (YDF) (Naidoo & Ramphal, 2018) and strategies such as the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA), which aimed to empower youth and expand their opportunities (National Planning Commission, 2011). Despite these efforts, youth participation in governance remains limited. Shai (2016) observes a significant decline in active youth participation in local government matters since the 1999 democratic elections, while Olutola (2021) highlights the rarity of young people attending communal meetings discussing community progress and projects.

Despite numerous opportunities for youth participation in local governance, widespread ignorance among young people impedes socioeconomic progress (Makgamatha, 2018). The growing issue of resistance to participation persists, with ongoing debates about whether the government adequately supports and informs youth about available opportunities (Makgamatha, 2018; Shai, 2016; Keating & Melis, 2017). Although legislation and programs have been enacted to encourage youth participation, such as NYP 2020

and the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) providing support for young entrepreneurs, overall youth participation remains low (Nxumalo & Matsiliza, 2020). Given the significant youth population, their minimal involvement in local government affairs highlights the need to address the barriers to hindering their full participation.

Theoretical Framework

According to Sandefur and Laumann (2009), the evolution of the social capital theory was founded by Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman in 1976. Social capital theory is centred on the fundamental pursuit of forming strong and solidified, trusting relationships that embody a level of mutuality in understanding, shared deliberations, and actions (Sandefur & Laumann, 2009). Social capital theory emerged based on the principles of integrating principles of social cohesion and the overall linkage to socioeconomic challenges to create a conducive environment for groups of interest (Meso, 2017). Some have described social theory as a form of capital that produces public goods for a common purpose. This brings people of different groups, communities, and institutions together for the derivation of a common consensus that is synonymous with development (Mashamaite, 2023).

Social capital theory provides the fundamental elements required to promote youth participation to ensure the effectiveness of the development and implementation of IDP. This is because social capital theory creates a conducive environment for local government officials, the public, including the youth, to reach shared trust, norms, values, reciprocity, and effective collaborations in terms of developing and implementing IDP. This would reposition deliberations of all kinds of interests and injustices, such as political lobbying, mismanagement of resources, poor information distribution, and exclusionary practices, toward active participation and development of all groups, including youth (Mashamaite, 2023).

Social capital theory helps bridge various gaps such as lack of participation, trust, social cohesion, and effective collaboration within local government (Wirtz et al., 2018). Generational conflicts between youth and older generations in local government, manifested in the absence of youth in the development and formulation of IDP, would greatly be ameliorated through the social capital framework. The social capital framework can bridge gaps by creating bonds and linking outcomes towards a delineation wherein all parties, including youth, communities, public servants, and civil society, all reach a common goal (Malebana, 2021). This approach ensures that no single party benefits or triumphs at the expense of others. It also creates a path for the challenges of the community to be effectively evaluated to maximize its potential, as well as to resolve the youth delinquency issues and channel energies to improve the delivery of services. In this perspective, all groups of need in society would also be beneficiaries, for example, women's empowerment, empowerment of local livelihoods, and economic developments.

The Impact of Community Participation on Integrated Development Plan Implementation

Effective planning and implementation of IDP hinge on municipalities' ability to integrate diverse viewpoints and sentiments into development strategies and management (Meso, 2017). According to Makalela et al. (2021), municipalities are legally required to include various community groups and civil organizations in shaping planning and development priorities. Community participation is thus a cornerstone of the IDP planning process, and the Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 accentuates the importance of fostering such participation (Municipal Systems Act, 2000). This Act requires municipalities to create strategic structures that promote community participation, reflecting the democratic essence of local governance. To achieve the objectives of IDP planning, municipalities must establish effective platforms that allow diverse groups, including youth, to engage in local government and municipal affairs (Asha & Makalela, 2020).

The adoption and implementation of community participation approach is crucial for municipalities to realize the vision of "*The people shall govern*," as outlined in the Freedom Charter (Makalela, 2019). This approach is expected to address the challenges related to poor and exclusionary practices that hinder the successful implementation of IDP. Asha (2014) argues that inadequate IDP implementation often results from insufficient meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Contemporary methods of participation within municipalities are frequently ineffective, affecting the successful implementation of IDP (Monama & Mokoete, 2023). Critics argue that the disconnect between IDP plans and budgets, when treated as separate entities, contributes to implementation failures (Masenya, 2015; Makalela, 2019; Ngomane, 2017). For successful execution of the IDP, it is essential to integrate budgeting with planning processes (Kroukamp & Cloete, 2018). Youth participation should be actively incorporated into these processes, rather than being a passive or top-down approach that overlooks their perspectives. Unfortunately, the reality of meaningful youth participation in the implementation of IDP in many South African municipalities remains elusive. An effective integration of youth into IDP processes is necessary to enhance their impact and address community needs in a comprehensive way.

The Importance of Youth Engagement in Integrated Development Plan

Youth participation is a critical component of IDP. IDP are comprehensive strategies that outline the development goals and priorities of a specific area. By involving young people in this process, communities can benefit from their unique perspectives, energy, and potential contributions to local development.

Youth Participation and Vibrancy in Integrated Development Plans

Bureaucratic red tape often hinders the effective planning and implementation of IDP (Asha & Makalela, 2020). The bureaucratic system has had a detrimental impact on the younger generation, particularly those who were born around the year 2000, famously

known as the “Z generation. Raised in a rapidly evolving technological landscape, this generation possesses a vibrant and innovative energy. Integrating youth perspectives into IDP could help bridge existing gaps in service delivery, leading to solutions for the socio-economic challenges currently burdening local communities. This generational gap can lead to low youth participation and poor service delivery (Ibezim, 2019). This could be attributed to the traditional approach municipalities take in conducting their IDP processes, as young people often prefer to engage in daily activities through digital platforms. Municipalities should conduct situational analyses to understand local realities (Makalela, 2019). Youth participation can be crucial in identifying pressing community issues such as high unemployment rates, limited youth participation initiatives, and social unrest. By centering youth development, IDP can foster a shared vision and objectives among stakeholders, leading to more effective solutions (Ngomane, 2017). Youth participation can bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to IDP implementation, improving service delivery at the local level (Gwija, Erasia-Eke & Iwu, 2014).

E-Governance for Integrated Development Planning

E-Governance refers to the use of technology to improve government efficiency and citizen engagement (Bannister and Connolly, 2014). While its potential benefits are significant (Grigalashvili, 2022; Khanna et al., 2021), its integration into local government practices, including IDP planning and implementation, has been limited. Youth with their familiarity with technology can help modernize municipal processes and break down bureaucratic barriers (Olutola, 2022). Their involvement can signal a commitment to e-Governance, a crucial tool for 21st-century development (Grigalashvili, 2022; Mothlaolwa, 2016). Youth participation can also improve digital inclusion and improve communication between municipalities and citizens (Khanna et al., 2021).

Societal Transformational Elements in Integrated Development Plans

By involving young people in IDP planning, municipalities can incorporate their perspectives on community development and prioritize initiatives like sports and recreation activities. These programs can provide positive outlets for young people and help reduce harmful behaviours (Mothlaolwa, 2016). Youth development is a critical component of government and should be reflected in local government initiatives through collaboration with various stakeholders. Furthermore, youth participation can help address issues such as adolescent delinquency, substance abuse, and crime (Mothlaolwa, 2016).

Collaboration and coordination for integrated development plans

Youth participation in ward committees and consultation processes can foster a more balanced and inclusive approach to IDP development and decision making. By participating in these processes, youth can gain a better understanding of the components and institutions of IDP, breaking down narrow views (Makgamthata & Moikanyane, 2019). Collaboration and coordination among stakeholders are essential for successful implementation of IDP (Beyers, 2015; Asha & Makalela, 2020). Isolated efforts can lead to fragmented programs that do not align with municipal visions (Mojapelo, 2007).

Empowering Youth for Improved Service Delivery

Limited youth participation in community development meetings can hinder the effectiveness of IDP (Thabethe, 2022). Young people's participation in consultation processes is crucial to identifying community needs and improving service delivery. Youth empowerment can help foster a more inclusive and responsive approach to local governance. By taking an active role in decision making, youth can ensure that their voices are heard, and their needs are addressed (Shola, 2021).

Barriers to Youth Participation in Integrated Development Plans (IDP)

Youth participation in IDP is essential to ensure that the needs and aspirations of young people are integrated into local development strategies. However, several barriers often impede their participation. One significant barrier is the lack of political awareness. Many young people are not sufficiently aware of political dynamics, which is crucial for advocating for their needs and holding governments accountable for development initiatives (Ahmed-Gamgum, 2018). This lack of awareness can severely limit their participation in IDP. Limited access to information and poor understanding of local government processes also acts as a contributing factor that hinders youth participation. Despite the digital age, many young people are not well informed about IDP and their functions, which can lead to disengagement from the development process (World Bank, 2009; Shai, 2016).

Another obstacle is disinterest and misplaced prioritization. Many young people prioritize social media and other personal interests over community issues and local governance, leading to a low engagement in activities related to IDP (Vuma, 2021; Shai, 2016). This disinterest often manifests itself as avoidance of community meetings and reliance on protests as a form of expression. Gender discrimination also plays an important role in limiting youth participation. Patriarchal structures and historical gender biases contribute to male dominance in local government roles (Mokoele, 2013; Masenya, 2015; Ngomane, 2017). Young women, in particular, are often underrepresented in the development of IDP due to toxic masculinity and gender discrimination, which can discourage their participation (Masenya, 2020; Ijeoma, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial to improve youth participation and ensure that IDP are more inclusive and reflect the needs of the entire community.

Helping Youth Participation in Local Government (Integrated Development Plan)

Youth participation is a dynamic process that involves creating opportunities for young people to contribute their perspectives in ways that drive impactful decisions and improve both community and national well-being (Ahmed-Gamgum, 2018; Makgathama & Moikanyane, 2018). Engaging youth in public decision-making and local governance through a continuous, inclusive dialogue with adults and societal institutions is crucial in liberal democracies (Makalela, Masenya & Mokoele, 2021). However, efforts to integrate youth into the development and implementation of IDP are still nascent. Consequently, youth participation remains limited, as local government matters often reflect adult perspectives, overshadowing the needs and viewpoints of younger generations (United Nations Youth, 2012; Shola, 2021). Youth play a vital role in addressing contemporary challenges, particularly when using their diverse skills to advance community development (Beukes, 2021). Beukes (2021) argues that youth are agents of transformative change, capable of shifting the status quo towards positive outcomes. Historical evidence of youth-driven progress emphasizes the importance of fostering their participation in IDP (Shai, 2021).

The IDP is a key instrument designed to promote development by involving all stakeholders (Meso, 2017). Given that youth are important stakeholders, their inclusion in the development and implementation of IDP is essential (Thabethe, 2023). With youth aged 18-34 comprising almost a third of the population (17.84 million) in South Africa (Stats SA, 2019) and a substantial portion of Africa's population being under 35 years of age (African Youth & Governance Conference Initiative, 2015), it is evident that youth should have a meaningful role in maturing and shaping democracy and development strategies. Failure to engage youth effectively risks fostering long-term discontent and undermining future prospects (Wirtz, Daiser & Binkowska, 2018). Furthermore, excluding youth from IDP processes threatens future governance, as today's youth will be tomorrow's leaders. Therefore, integrating youth participation in local government is crucial to break cycles of turmoil and to promote positive change. As Ritts & Rutt (2024) highlight, the energy and vibrancy of youth make their involvement in local government particularly valuable for addressing current and future challenges. This study emphasizes the need to enhance youth participation in local governance to take advantage of their potential to shape a better development trajectory.

To increase youth participation in IDP processes, it is imperative to cultivate political awareness and participation. Local municipalities, in collaboration with civil society and the private sector, should prioritize the implementation of educational workshops and seminars on political literacy as a fundamental component. Establishing youth councils or forums can provide platforms for political discussion and help young people understand the impact of politics on community development (Le & Nguyen, 2021). Overcoming information gaps about IDP requires comprehensive campaigns using various media channels, such as social media, local radio, and community centres. Collaborating with schools to incorporate IDP-related content into curricula will ensure that youth are informed from an early age (Palm & Lantz, 2020; Nwokeocha, 2021). Training programs should be developed to improve the understanding of youth of local government processes, including budgeting and decision making. Mentorship initiatives connecting youth with experienced municipal representatives can further enhance their comprehension of IDP procedures (Ceric, Small, & Morrison, 2022; Goldner & Ben-Eliyahu, 2021). To address disinterest and misplaced priorities, it is important to raise awareness of the importance of youth participation in community development and IDP. Engaging youth in interactive events such as debates and town hall meetings can foster a greater sense of responsibility (Maemu, 2021). Finally, promoting gender equality through gender-sensitive policies and creating safe spaces for young women to participate in decision-making are crucial for encouraging broader female involvement (Lokot, Hartman & Hashmi, 2023). Establishing effective mechanisms for youth participation in IDP is imperative.

Research and Methodology

In pursuit of comprehensive unpacking and understanding of the research objective, the article adopted a desktop-based qualitative research methodology. This methodology consists of researching, examining, evaluating, and summarizing relevant academic literature from journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings (Mashamaite, 2023; Makalela, 2019). This format is in-depth in its nature; it also involves the synthesis of qualitative findings found from studies conducted from existential qualitative research outputs (Nkoana & Mashamaite, 2024). The article utilized an extensive review of the literature that covers youth participation and IDP, along with associated implications that hinder youth from making their voices and making significant contributions to the development and implementation of IDP. In this paper, the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles provided in Table 1 were applied, which examines how youth participation affects IDP in South Africa, drawing data from peer-reviewed journal publications, conference proceedings, and published dissertations. Data were also collected from scientific databases and sources such as Google Scholar, Science Direct, and University Library.

Table 1: Article Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Inclusion	Exclusion
Date of publication Article published from 2009 to 2023 enables rich data collection on the participation of youth, as well as its significance towards the planning and implementation of the IDP	Articles published before 2009 and articles not addressing the research problem and topic.
Article type original research, peer-reviewed articles, books, conferences, and published dissertations.	Unpublished articles and dissertations.
Language English articles	Other languages articles.
Article Relevance Article that addresses youth participation and IDP	Article not relevant to the research topic in question.

Source: Authors

Thematic analysis was initiated to achieve a robust qualitative analysis of the data gathered from the literature. Therefore, the study encompasses several themes that were established for a thorough understanding. Consequently, this analysis method was utilized as a crucial research instrument to pinpoint particular words, themes, or concepts in qualitative data, such as text. In striving to effectively fulfil the objective of the article, researchers diligently measured and scrutinized the frequency, importance, and relationships of specific words, themes, or concepts through content analysis. Some recommendations and conclusions were drawn to attribute significance to the themes formulated.

Findings and Discussions

A key finding of this study is the limited participation of youth in the development and implementation of IDP. This is attributed to various factors, including the youth's lack of awareness and the bureaucratic processes within local government that hinder effective public participation. There is a generational divide, where older people in local government often accuse young people of ignorance, while young people accuse older generations of exclusionary practices. However, this generational conflict masks a more widespread challenge, such as the underrepresentation of youth voices in shaping the developmental trajectories of their communities. This paper discovered that poor access to information about local government processes is a major barrier to youth participation. The absence of participation from youth is detrimental, as it leads to a lack of representation of the challenges faced by young people. This can contribute to increased youth delinquency and protests that may persist without resolution. Poor access to knowledge about local government processes is a significant barrier to youth participation. The development and implementation of IDP is often influenced by adult-centric perspectives and political agendas, rather than independently informed views from diverse groups, such as youth. To ameliorate these unpalatable circumstances, there is a fundamental need to empower youth to realize their full potential in the planning and implementation of IDP. This empowerment will allow young people to contribute effectively to development processes and ensure that their voices are heard in shaping the future of local communities.

Conclusions

The paper has identified several barriers to youth participation in IDP, including insufficient political awareness, ignorance, lack of information, poor understanding of local government processes, and gender discrimination. Addressing these challenges is crucial to improving youth engagement in the planning and implementation of IDP in South African local government. The National Youth Policy for 2015–2020 was developed to address the specific needs and challenges of South Africa's youth, building on Constitutional and international frameworks to promote inclusivity and developmental progress. Despite these efforts and the introduction of mechanisms such as the IDP, the participation of young people in local governance remains disappointingly low. This gap in participation not only undermines democratic principles, but also hampers effective service delivery and the realization of developmental goals.

Historically, South African youth have demonstrated significant involvement in socio-political activism, but this engagement has not translated into sustained participation in local government processes. The continued underrepresentation of young people in IDP planning and implementation reflects broader issues of political disengagement, inadequate information, and barriers to active involvement. This situation is exacerbated by challenges such as corruption, poor governance, and a lack of awareness about the IDP's objectives.

The resolution of these issues is crucial to improve the effectiveness of the IDP and to promote a more inclusive approach to development. Strategies to increase youth participation must focus on improving communication about opportunities, leveraging technology to engage younger generations, and creating platforms that resonate with their interests and needs. By doing so, South African local municipalities can harness the potential of their youth to drive meaningful change and address the socioeconomic challenges facing the nation. Only through genuine and sustained participation of young people can the principles of democracy and

development be fully realized, leading to a more equitable and prosperous future for all South Africans. It is possible to overcome existing barriers and foster a more inclusive and meaningful youth participation in local governance.

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