



Exploring the Contribution of Civic Engagement in Community Development Initiatives
in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality

Research Dissertation

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Dearest siblings. This is a testament that with hard work, dedication discipline it is all possible. Let this be a reminder that the dusty streets we grew up from do not define us and that no dream is unattainable. I hope that with this dissertation you will be inspired, not just to reach this level but also go beyond this!

DECLARATION

Declaration

I, Nsubuga Hope Dorcas, declare that **“Exploring the Contribution of Civic Engagement in Community Development Initiatives in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality** is my own work, based on my own efforts, analysis, and findings. I have appropriately acknowledged all sources used in this study. This dissertation is submitted to the University of Mpumalanga, in fulfilment of the degree Master of development studies and has not been previously submitted by me for any examination at this or any university.

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Signature

Date

Abstract

Civic engagement, as a fundamental aspect of development practice, plays a crucial role in promoting community development and securing livelihoods, especially for the poor in communities. However, literature on the contribution of civic engagement to community development is finite. Therefore, the purpose of this research study was to explore the contribution of civic engagement towards community development initiatives. This study adopted exploratory research design. It was grounded in the interpretive paradigm as its foundation. This study was qualitative in nature as it sought to understand the experience of its participants. Convenience and purposive sampling procedures were used to sample a total of fifteen (15) participants. Twelve community members were conveniently sampled, and three municipal officials purposively sampled. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews and analysed using the thematic procedure. This analysis was framed through the social capital theory and Arnstein's ladder of participation. The findings of this study revealed that civic engagement has the capacity to empower community members. However, because there is a disconnect between how municipal officials and community members view civic engagement, it undermines the impact of civic engagement in community development. This is a result of the distinct modes of civic engagement, i.e., formal and non-formal civic engagement. Furthermore, it was revealed that formal channels such as community meetings represent formal civic engagement. From these findings, this study recommended that formal channels of engagement should not be tokenistic in nature as they exclude community members from being actively engaged. Therefore, there should be a shift towards achieving citizen power because when these formal channels fail to yield the desired outcomes, protest action rises together with non-formal civic engagement in the form of community-led initiatives. Furthermore, this study recommended that when community-led initiatives arise, they should receive financial support or capacity building support to ensure its effectiveness towards community development initiatives.

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Chapter 1: Orientation to the Study

1.1 Introduction and Background

This study explored civic engagement towards community development initiatives using in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality in Mpumalanga Province as a case study. Literature highlights that civic engagement is a collective action used to address issues of a community through active participation characterised by social capital (Hyman, 2002; Angwaomaodoko, 2024). Moreover, Adler and Goggin (2005) argue that civic engagement can be perceived as how citizens or community members participate and engage in the life of their community to improve the living conditions of all individuals within a community. Thus, this indicates that civic engagement is a continuum, an expansion from the private sector to the formal public sector (Gaby, 2017; Katsonis, 2019). This means that civic engagement is a process that starts with individuals acting in their personal lives, such as volunteering or participating in community projects for community development (Ekman and Amna, 2012; Lopez and Baya, 2025). As people become more involved, their engagement expands to the public sector, allowing them to advocate for social issues that affect them and participate in local government (Ricciardelli, 2018). Furthermore, it is often inspired and motivated by the need to be responsive to problems individuals or communities face because of their lived experiences that nudge them in the direction of wanting to contribute towards tangible change (Korich and Fields, 2023). From this perspectives, it can be argued that civic engagement is a form of political and non-political activism that requires a combination of skills, knowledge, and values to facilitate this process (Ardoin et al., 2023) This is central for community development as it contributes to cementing shared responsibility and purpose among community members, which in turn shapes the community's future (Angwaomaodoko, 2024).

Globally, civic engagement has undergone a significant shift from its traditional emphasis on formal political participation, most notably voting toward a broader spectrum of activities that include non-political forms of involvement such as volunteering, neighborhood initiatives, and grassroots organising (Ekman & Amna, 2012; Park and Hong, 2024). These non-political activities play a critical role in holding governments accountable and ensuring that public officials remain responsive to the communities they serve (Ekman & Amna, 2012). As a result, informal modes of

participation, such as community-driven protests, grassroots mobilisation, and local volunteer programmes, have expanded considerably, particularly in contexts where citizens seek to address community concerns and improve their overall quality of life (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015; Uster et al., 2025). Formal or institutionalised civic engagement, on the other hand, includes structured involvement in local planning processes, participation in public service delivery, organising community events, and contributing to community development projects (Uster et al., 2025). The literature further illustrates that these formal participatory mechanisms vary significantly between Western and non-Western contexts (Mbava and Dahler-Larsen, 2019). For example, Western countries such as the United States rely heavily on city council meetings and public hearings to ensure that the public has access to decision-making forums (Moore & Caporale, 2023). Similarly, countries like Sweden and Germany have well-established institutional spaces that facilitate regular citizen engagement in local governance (Gizan, 2021).

In comparison, non-western contexts belonging to the global South, for instance, in South Africa, formal civic engagement can be observed through the involvement in local governance, attending municipal meetings and voting (Sutcliffe and Bannister, 2020). In 1996, the South African government introduced different platforms, including the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), as a strategic five-year plan and tool for development in local government. The aim was to guide municipalities in their planning, development and decision-making processes, especially in service delivery, with local people at the center of it (Asha and Makalela, 2020; Mamokhere and Meyer, 2022; Makumu and Malambo, 2024). An important tenet of the IDP is civic engagement in the form of public participation, which is perceived as central to the planning and decision-making processes at the local sphere of government (Makumu and Malambo, 2024; Ouwencamp and van der Walddt, 2024). Public participation is a response to the disconnect between local government and its constituencies (Piper and von Lieres, 2008). This has been further promoted by different legislatures and frameworks, including Chapter 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA), 1998 White Paper on Local Government and the Municipal Systems Act (MSA) of 2000, among others (Nwezi and Sibanda, 2023). For example, to fulfil this mandate local government to establish different structures, such as ward committees or community development forums to promote public participation by interacting with communities and integrating their inputs in local governance practices (Hofer et al., 2024). Furthermore, according to Piper and von Lieres (2008), these participatory spaces such as mayoral forums, *Izimbizo* (Interactive

discussions) are where most public participation and consultation is promoted at the municipal level. These examples demonstrate how civic engagement is institutionally embedded in South Africa. However, the institutionalised participatory spaces in South African municipalities have been a daunting task hence, there has been a rise of nonformal civic engagement in the form of grassroots community led social movements, community-based organisations and civil society at large to address social ills at a local level. (Mahole, 2012; Makumu and Malambo, 2024).

Existing studies on civic engagement have explored various aspects of this topic. For instance, a study by Adler and Goggin (2005) conceptualises civic engagement from a democratic practice. While Putnam (2000) argues how civic engagement is shaped by social capital that is found within groups. Other studies have explored the determinants and motivations that propel individuals to be civically engaged (Moy et al., 2005; Carpini, 2006; Arvanitidis, 2017). Other scholars such as Digdoyo et al., (2024) and Wyber et al., (2021) have focused on the importance of civic education and knowledge required to meaningfully participate in civic activities. Several studies have highlighted key barriers to facilitating civic engagement, including limited participation by community members, inadequate resources, resistance to organisational or institutional change, and ineffective leadership (Lalitha, 2023; Schatteman, 2014; Golovatsky and Nyatina, 2019; Kisusu and Tongori, 2022; Stoecker and Witkovsky, 2023; Okeyo and Omutoko, 2020). These challenges collectively indicate that, while the importance of civic engagement is widely recognised, practical implementation often faces structural, organisational, and social constraints that hinder meaningful citizen involvement. However, few studies have attempted to understand civic engagement and community development within the same context (Matole et al., 2023; Hadijah, 2025; Leach et al., 2025). Although civic engagement has a positive impact on community development, there has not been adequate literature that explores its contribution towards community development initiatives. This missing gap in the literature creates an opportunity for this study to explore the contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives.

1.2. Problem Statement

Globally, civic engagement is widely recognised as an essential mechanism for promoting active citizen participation and strengthening community structures (Gilmore et al., 2020). However, the reviewed literature reveals a persistent lack of recognition regarding the significant contribution that civic engagement makes toward community development (Cadano, 2023; Brady et al., 2020).

This challenge is also evident in South Africa, where, despite the provisions of the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, which mandates community participation in local governance levels of meaningful civic engagement remain low (Chu and Shen, 2017). The absence of civic participation undermines community development which weakens social cohesion and civic responsibility which weakens participation in local government affairs (Sekatle, 2022). These gaps are reflected in the deteriorating living conditions experienced in many communities, including in Kanyamazane, where poverty, unemployment, and inadequate access to basic services persist (Maphanga, 2022). The lack of engagement has also contributed to the escalation of protest actions, as communities increasingly resort to extra-institutional strategies to voice their concerns (Whelan and Lyons, 2005; Battaglini, 2017). Such protests, often triggered by service delivery failures, can lead to environmental disruption, bodily harm, and damage to public infrastructure (Damoah, 2023). The resulting destruction further delays development, as municipalities must first repair damaged infrastructure before addressing pressing community needs (Yende, 2023; Maria, 2020). Given these challenges and the limited empirical attention to how civic engagement contributes to community development at the local level, particularly in under-resourced areas, this study seeks to explore the role and contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality.

1.3. Research aim and objectives

1.3.1. Aim

The main aim of this study is to:

- Explore the contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality.

1.3.2. Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify and describe civic engagement activities that foster community development in Kanyamazane.
- To analyse factors that contribute to low levels of civic engagement in community development in Kanyamazane.

- To explore the challenges and benefits associated with promoting civic engagement activities in communities in Kanyamazane.

1.4. Research Questions

1.4.1. Main research question

The main question that guides this study is:

- What is the contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality?

1.4.2. Sub-research questions

The sub-research questions that emanate from the research questions are:

- What are the factors that contribute to low levels of civic engagement in community development in Kanyamazane?
- Which civic engagement activities or initiatives foster community development in Kanyamazane?
- What are the challenges and benefits associated with promoting civic engagement activities in communities in Kanyamazane?

1.5. Definition of Terms

1.5.1. Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is portrayed as a reflection of citizen ownership of community and development, emphasising the role of community members in defining their needs and priorities (Dang et al., 2021; Park and Hong, 2024; Smallwood et al., 2024). It creates a sense of ownership of community development initiatives or projects, the interface is to solve a community's problem, and through the decision-making process, civic engagement is a catalyst for building collaborative efforts where community members feel valued as it enhances the decision-making process (Arkedis et al., 2019; Owuondo, 2024). For this study, civic engagement will be understood as a process that involves addressing local concerns by actively involving community members in the development process, and their participation in the development driving force.

1.5.2. Community Development

Community development is a multi-dimensional and collaborative process aimed at enhancing the overall quality of life and well-being within a specific geographic context (Powell et al., 2024). It involves a wide range of activities that address environmental, social, and economic challenges faced within the community while simultaneously promoting inclusivity and empowerment (Nyamari, 2024). Furthermore, community development involves supporting agencies such as the government and community cooperatives that help community members identify issues and collectively form action for issues facing the community (Hassan, 2022). It also values local knowledge and wisdom to solve local issues effectively (Hassan, 2022; Uzoh and Ekechukwu, 2024;). For this study, community development will be understood as a holistic and collaborative process that aims to improve the quality of life within a community.

1.6. Brief Research Methodology

The aim of this study was to explore the contribution of civic engagement towards community development initiatives in Kanyamazane township, in Mbombela Local Municipality. To achieve this aim, the researcher adopted an explorative research design, to explore and obtain clarity about what is being studied (Chawal and Sondhi, 2011). Therefore, this design was deemed suitable because the contribution of civic engagement towards community development initiatives has not been extensively explored (as per the literature). This research was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm, which considers humans as different from numerical or physical phenomena, as humans create meaning from their experiences (Flick, 2017). This paradigm was adopted because the researcher wanted to understand the subjective experiences and meanings that individuals attach to their involvement in civic activities that contribute to community development initiatives (Hadijah, 2025). A qualitative research approach was adopted because it intends to approach, understand, describe and explain a social phenomenon through analysing communication shared with the researcher, which has an exploratory nature (Flick, 2017). Two non-probability sampling methods, namely, convenience and purposive sampling, were used to recruit twelve (12) community members and three (3) municipal officials, respectively. The data collection method and procedures that were followed were semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview schedule. This is because this study was participant-oriented, which allowed the participants to freely express their thoughts and experiences in their own words in a conversational manner with the researcher. Data were analysed using a thematic analysis technique to amplify participants'

responses to identify, analyse, and report patterns observed in the data collection process as per the argument by Braun and Clarke (2006) (See chapter 5). Ethical considerations are concerned with the principles that govern a researcher's conduct behaviour with the aim of protecting human participants in research, and the following were considered: obtaining ethical clearance from the university and gatekeepers' letter from the municipality, the right to consent, confidentiality and anonymity and privacy and data security (See chapter 4 for detailed explanation). To ensure quality data, different methods such as credibility, language and trustworthiness were used.

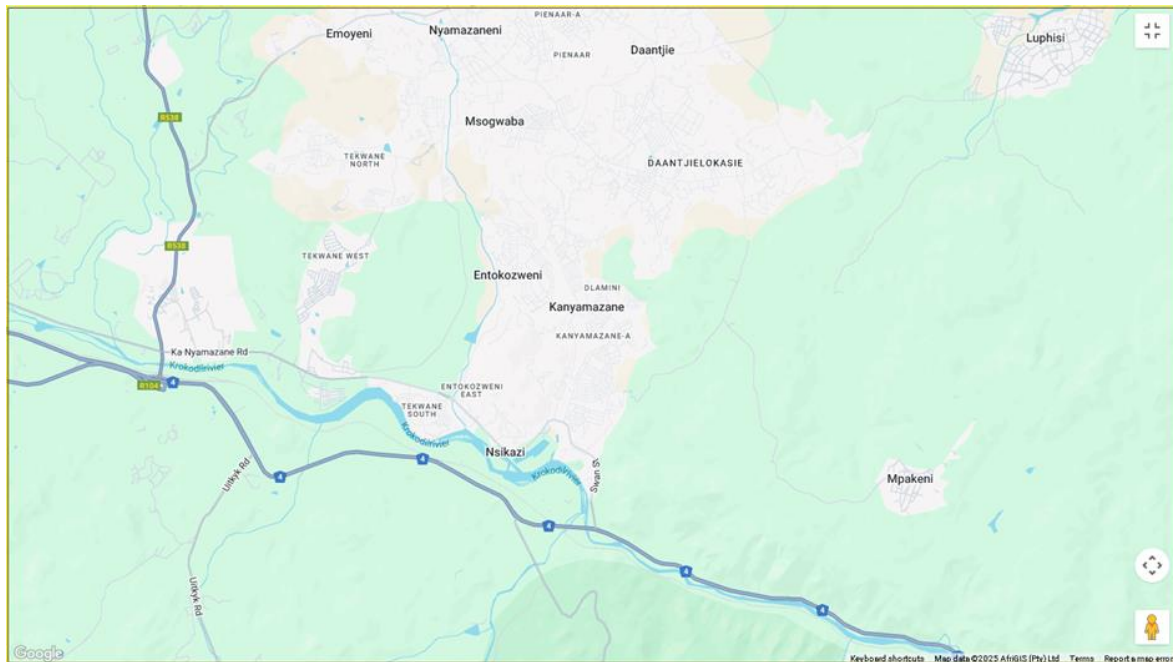
1.7. Significance of the Study

The study is significant because:

- It provides a framework through the developed research questions. Academically, this research study has the potential to contribute to the existing body of knowledge about civic engagement and community development.
- The real-world implication of this study is to provide evidence-based guidance on how civic engagement and community development should be integrated to achieve development outcomes for community development workers and policymakers.
- This research study also has the potential to enhance current ways of engaging community members through their active participation in development initiatives and facilitating social cohesion to create a sense of belonging and shared responsibility in engaging in issues that affect communities.

1.8. Study Area

This study was conducted in Kanyamazane, a township that is under the jurisdiction of the Mbombela Local Municipality. It is a Category B municipality situated in the Mpumalanga Province and forms part of the Ehlanzeni District. The Municipality is situated in the Northeastern part of South Africa within the Lowveld sub-region of the Mpumalanga Province.



Picture 1.1 : Kanyamazane Map

Source: Google Maps (2025)

The geographic coordinates of the Municipality are 25.4° South and 30.9° East (City of Mbombela Draft IDP Review, 2025). According to StatsSA Census Survey (2022), the Mbombela municipal area had a total population of 81 8925 with a relatively young population (15-34 years) that makes up 56% of the total population. Furthermore, according to the Mbombela IDP, the socio-economic profile of the area is as follows: It indicates that the Human Development Index (HDI) currently stands at 0.66 which indicates a medium level of development. Despite this, the municipality grapples with significant socio-economic challenges. The poverty rate has risen from 41.9 in 2010 to 44.3% in 2023, and income inequality remains high, with the poorest 40% of households accounting for only 7.2% of total income. Educational attainment of the national senior certificate has increased. However, tertiary education remains relatively low with only 9.2 of the population obtaining post matric qualifications. The area also faces the challenge of unemployment, with the general rate at 31.8% and youth unemployment at 46.8%. Given the socio-economic profile of Kanyamazane, its youthful population, levels of poverty, unemployment and education it was an

appropriate context to explore the contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives as civic engagement in the form of public participation is perceived as central to the planning and decision-making processes at the local sphere of government (Makumu and Malambo, 2024).

1.9. Outline of Chapters

Chapter one: Orientation to the Study

The chapter provides an introductory background of the research study through the problem statement and proposed research questions and objectives. The chapter provides the definition of key terms used in the research study and provides the significance of the study the study. It also briefly presents the research methodology that was used to carry out the study

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The chapter presents the reviewed literature focusing on the theme including the historical overview of civic engagement and community development, making sense of civic in pre 1994 and post 1994 South Africa, the benefits and challenges of civic engagement towards community development and the strategies for effective civic engagement.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The chapter presents the theoretical frameworks that have been adopted, namely, the social capital theory and the citizen ladder of participation framework. The chapter discusses each theory and explains how the theories can be used to complement each other to achieve objectives of the study.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

The chapter discusses the research design, paradigm and approach that is adopted in the study. it also presents a discussion on the target population and sampling procedure that the study adopted. following this, the chapter also discusses the data collection methods and process, data analysis techniques adopted, thematic analysis. The chapter also presents the ethical considerations and data control measures that were considered to conduct the study.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation and Analysis

The chapter presents the research findings that were gathered from the semi-structured interviews The findings are gathered under the themes and sub-themes that emerged from them

Chapter 6 Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

The last chapter of the study presents the discussion, conclusion and the recommendations from the study findings.

1.10. Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an introductory background of the research study by explaining what civic engagement and community development are and how they relate to one another. This chapter presented the identified research gap in the literature on how globally there is a growing acknowledgement of the vital role civic engagement plays in fostering community development for sustainable livelihoods in communities. There is, however, a lack of recognition of civic engagement and community development. This chapter also provided a brief overview of the methodological procedures followed to conduct the study and a description of the study area. Finally, it described the significance of the study and an outline of the organisation of the research study. The following chapter presents the reviewed literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The preceding chapter established the foundation for this research, presenting the orientation and introduction to the study, the background, and the motivation for this study. Therefore, this chapter explores the literature around civic engagement and community development. It begins with a critical examination of studies on the history of civic engagement and community development, highlighting its significance in democratic and local communities. This chapter also examines the benefits and forms of civic engagement in community development. It further discusses the challenges that are encountered when trying to facilitate civic activities in communities. Thereafter, it explores strategies to promote civic engagement in community development initiatives. Additionally, it discusses the South African legislative framework that advocates for engagement and addresses responses to the lack of engagement in community development initiatives. Lastly, it summarizes the key points discussed throughout the chapter.

2.2. Conceptualisation of Civic Engagement

Civic engagement is a broad set of practices and attitudes of involvement in social and political life that converge to strengthen democracy and is applied in various contexts, ranging from business to community development (Margaret Banyan, 2018). The work of Putnam (2000) has been criticised for its definition of civic engagement, which centres on concepts such as social capital. While civic engagement and social capital are closely linked, they do not equate (Stolle and Hooghe, 2005). Other works, such as Adler (2005), have discussed civic engagement as ways in which citizens participate in the life of the community to improve the conditions and help shape the community's future. There has been parallel definitions of civic engagement, proving it difficult has proven among scholars because of the lack of unity in the meaning, with some ranging to broad definitions such that it means working to make a difference in the life of a community and adopting a combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivations towards change, going beyond political engagement to also include community building initiatives (Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).

Civic engagement can manifest in relationships with communities and at institutional levels, including the local, provincial, and national levels. Delineating in three forms: a direct service

which involves volunteering; advocacy shown through activities such as protesting or boycotting for a socio-political cause; and political participation. Likewise, Westheimer and Kahne (2008) assert that civic engagement can be categorised into three overlapping categories: action, justice-oriented, and participatory citizenship. These categories involve responsive citizens who engage in community acts, either individually or as a group; take leadership roles to combat injustices that affect the community's social-political well-being; and become involved in the political process to address community issues. The foundational assumption is that intellectual and action-oriented involvement creates social and political bonds within a community. Through engagement, citizens can see themselves as an integral part of the community, which strengthens social ties among individuals. Free and safe spaces for civic engagement are the cornerstone of a vibrant and inclusive society, as they allow individuals to shape public decisions that affect their lives and transform local communities to devise innovative solutions for the issues they face. However, as engagement has increased over the years, it has become a daunting task, with real constraints, because it requires time and resources. Many communities lack the social and political institutions needed to structure effective civic engagement (Margaret Banyan, 2018).

As people partake in different expressions, it is important to further understand civic engagement into distinct typologies, formal and non-formal civic engagement (Lynggaard and Boje, 2025). The truest definition of formal civic engagement is that it allows ordinary people to participate in politics (Sanha, 2023). Formal or political engagement is the active participation of individuals or groups in the political process by expressing their views and beliefs. Therefore, to make meaningful representations of their ideas and opinions, people need to politically engage themselves (Sanha, 2023). The significance of political engagement is to foster democratic development, ensure that political systems are responsive to the desires and needs of citizens, promote social cohesion and unity among citizens, promote transparency in government, which assists in holding government accountable for its actions, inform policymakers of policies they enact and to promote overall stability in a country (Chanda and Chitondo, 2024). To make meaningful political engagement, it can take different forms, such as voting, participating in protests, attending rallies, contacting elected officials, or joining political campaigns (Chanda and Chitondo, 2024). Political civic engagement is manifest and is considered all actions directed at influencing governmental decisions and political outcomes (Ekman and Amna, 2012). It has to do

with the wishes of ordinary citizens to influence politics and political outcomes in all decisions that affect public society. Voting is a quintessential democratic behaviour, yet it is a novel act for those in new democracies, particularly for groups that were under colonialism or one-party rule. (Delkat, 2017).

Interestingly, non-formal or civic engagement as a community service is described as a voluntary activity performed by community members to improve a community and society. Commitment to community service is dependent on intrapersonal and environmental factors (Hoffman et al., 2010). Intrapersonal factors are often associated with an altruistic attitude towards community development, a compelling need to give back, and active involvement in activities that give meaning and worth to a community. While environmental factors are associated with realistic limitations individuals in communities face, such as limited time, financial resources, and inadequate social resources, which undermine the efficacy of community services undertaken (Hoffman et al., 2010). Therefore, civic engagement as collective action is a broad set of citizen-driven actions to facilitate community change, an important tool for empowerment that creates positive change in communities where individuals are in groups, share an interest, and work together to achieve it (Carbone and McMillin, 2018).

2.3. Historical Overview: Civic Engagement in Community Development

After the collapse of communism, support for civil society with independent agencies became the core of the donor community's blueprint, and civic engagement became a catchphrase within the international aid community, embracing civil society as a political remedy to democratise societies (Encarnación, 2002). This pathway picked up momentum, especially in the United States, after 9/11 and after the United States invaded Iraq, when building civil society in the Middle East became a core element of democracy building efforts that were meant to serve as a panacea to radical Islam (Becker, 2023). This increased interest in civil society across borders led to a national campaign that sparked public purposes and civic mission of research within universities and higher education (Becker, 2023). A book sponsored by the American Council on Education in 2000 on civic responsibility and higher education lamented the growing disdain for civic engagement and sought to encourage colleges and universities to promote the moral and civic values of their students, which would eventually flow into larger society (Becker, 2023). This movement extended far beyond the United States: in 2005, twenty-nine presidents and vice chancellors issued

the Talloires Declaration (Hollister et al, 2012; Hoyt and Hollister, 2014). This declaration called for strengthening the civic roles and responsibilities of our institutions, which committed signatories to expand civic engagement and social responsibility programmes in an ethical manner through teaching, research, and public service (Hoyt and Hollister, 2014). Therefore, civic engagement gained prominence because it was heavily influenced by educational institutions, which have had a significant role in shaping national identities, advocating for advancing citizens' critical thinking skills, which would benefit individuals and societies for the common good (Astin et al., 1999; Brand, 2010; Kahne et al., 2016; Kraft, 2023).

2.4. Civic Engagement in Democratic Societies

Civic engagement reflects what people want and who they believe should govern them (Barrett and Zani, 2015). Through civic engagement, local government and its municipalities are kept under scrutiny and are actively monitored to ensure that citizens are protected against the arbitrary exercise of power (Barrett and Zani, 2015). It also ensures that decision-makers are not dishonest and corrupt and enables public authorities to make better-informed decisions (Masenya and Mthombeni, 2023). Civic engagement can be a platform to share dialogue between communities and authorities. When community members do not communicate their views to authorities and decision-makers, they deprive those authorities and decision-makers of vital information needed to reach informed outcomes, especially for marginalised and disadvantaged groups, which will not meet the needs of the people (Brady et al., 2020). Civic engagement fosters citizen participation because citizens are the most qualified to judge what is in their interests (Brunton et al., 2017). Therefore, participation should be active. Decisions need to be made with the active involvement of those whose lives will be affected and bound by them. Thus, if citizens are not involved, the decision lacks democratic legitimacy. However, participation has been controversial because actively participating in the decision-making process can require specialised capacities (Barret and Zani, 2015). Some scholars argue that community members often lack the knowledge, competence, and expertise needed to make well-informed decisions. The implications are then reaching incoherent judgments and decisions in attempts to direct the course of community development initiatives (Rios et al., 2024).

Formal civic engagement is a traditional route through which local government can interact with local communities through formal channels such as public consultations and ward committees

(Reutener, 2015). All these forms aim to improve how local governments serve communities. African countries have different variations of how local government reaches the people. In Kenya's constitutionally mandated public participation processes, Ghana's district assembly structures, and South Africa's IDP with local people at the center of local government decisions as it affect people at a local level (Kwado, 2012; Citizen TV Kenya, 2025; Makumu and Malambo, 2024; Ouwencamp and van der Waladt, 2024). However, civic engagement in the global south also extends beyond formal institutional processes to include non-formal activities. For instance, in the South African context, community-led organisations have a unique experience in working with communities because of their connections, which enable them to better respond to community needs. Their importance was more recognized during the COVID-19 outbreak, during which most of them were responsible for COVID-19 responses by conducting awareness-raising and conscientisation about COVID-19 (Mbokazi, 2020). Another example of non-formal civic engagement manifests in grassroots movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo (The Residents of the Shacks). The movement was not founded by non-governmental organizations, had no political affiliation, received no donor funding, and was created autonomously (Pithouse, 2009). It is a movement of the poor in South Africa that was created in response to the ill treatment of shack dwellers, as they routinely face eviction, violence, and are deprived of access to basic services (Gill, 2014). Such forms of civic engagement are especially important for marginalised groups whose voices are typically excluded from the decision-making processes to promote people-centered development.

The above section discusses the importance of civic engagement in democratic societies. Civic engagement is not just a procedure but is a tool to uphold democratic values. In governance, it presents an opportunity to ensure that government is accountable, transparent, and people-centered, responding to the needs of the community (Barrett and Zani, 2015). This means that people's participation is central to all of this. However, participation is layered and is not always inclusive, as different factors can influence the decisions and motivations to be civically engaged. This raises the question of whether uneven participation can unintentionally marginalise others (Brady et al., 2020). Therefore, civic engagement in democratic societies should be supported through efforts such as capacity building to ensure that communities are empowered not only to meaningfully participate in civic activities but also to participate meaningfully in their communities (Lynagaard and Boje, 2025). The examples presented from the Global South indicate that civic engagement is

indeed not only confined to formal spaces such as public consultations and a ward committee, but also extends to include and recognize in informal grassroots-driven and community-led initiatives as other forms of participation. Ultimately, democratic societies need both institutionalized forms of participation and community-led initiatives to address socio-economic issues.

2.5. Civic engagement in South Africa: Pre-1994

The literature review highlights that during the pre-1994 era, South Africa was characterised by an oppressive system of segregation called apartheid, which limited opportunities and participation of Black South Africans (Marutlulle, 2022). As a result, this suppressed how black South Africans could organise themselves to have political expression or a voice in legitimate formal channels. With such restrictions in place, civic engagement manifestations were a result of resistance, which were rounded up through community mobilisation and informal structures that operated in opposition to the Apartheid government. It is in this broader context that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) began to emerge through civic associations, sanctioned political and religious groups, trade unions, youth movements, and community development forums, not as development actors but as vehicles for advocacy and political resistance (Robins, 2008). Therefore, when NGOs began to emerge, it was natural that the Apartheid South African government was wary of them, as they represented a form of associational life beyond the state's control (Davids and Theron, 2014). In this period, South Africa had neither a coherent, formal public policy nor any legislation that defined government policies towards NGOs. Consequently, civic engagement created an enabling environment or a set of practical conditions necessary for non-governmental actors to access information, express themselves, associate and organise, and participate in public life (Davids and Theron, 2014). This is because their emergence reflects a broader global trend: civic engagement tends to strengthen when state incompetence, corruption, and repression threaten human development (Lupin, 2022).

In response to the rapid emergence of this associational life through civic engagement, the apartheid government promulgated a myriad of laws to control the funding it received, which also dictated the activities they took part in. However, South Africa did have the common law and statutory tradition, which did not hinder or consciously support the formation of NGOs. It was then that the government promulgated a myriad of laws to control NGOs' activities and funding. These NGOS often defied the government's top-down, racially people-centered approach to development

(Davids and Theron, 2014). Therefore, when NGOs began to emerge, it was natural that the Apartheid South African government was wary of them, as they represented a form of associational life beyond the state's control.

The above section presents how civic engagement operated during the pre-1994 period. This period was characterised by the exclusion of the majority of South Africans (Marutlulle, 2022). This means they did not have formal participatory spaces to influence governance issues. As a result of this exclusion, civic engagement was operationalized through associations such as civic associations, trade unions, and NGOs, among many others. Such associations provided participatory spaces for black South Africans to collectively organize and challenge the status quo. Therefore, associational life in this era meant that civic engagement could not be developed through formal channels; it emerged informally, representing resistance to the Apartheid government. This emergence was met with wary eyes by the Apartheid government because they operated outside of the state, threatening their authority. Thus, a myriad of legislation, especially those that influenced how funding for such associations was received, was promulgated to monitor and curb the influence of this associational life, as it served as a platform for the mobilization and participation of Black South Africans in the absence of formal channels (Davids and Theron, 2014). Therefore, civic engagement in this era was framed through repression and ultimately represented that if the state denied creating formal participatory channels, they would be included. Alternative forms could arise through protests and community-based organizations.

2.6. Civic engagement in South Africa: Post 1994

In 1994, the grand political transformation of South Africa to replace the apartheid system of institutionalized discrimination was transformed into a democracy (Kibet and Fombad, 2017). This system of governance represented a shift from using civic engagement as a means of resistance to institutionalized participation (Grobler, 2010). For the first time in South Africa, millions of citizens, especially the black majority who were denied this right, were now able to cast votes for the party they wished to govern them (Maphunye, 2015). This was the African National Congress (ANC) party running the magic vote in the elections, with a 62.2% win out of nearly 19.5 million South Africans voting out of approximately 22.7 million eligible voters, marking an estimated turnout of about 86.9%. Such voter turnout can be seen as more than just an indicator of how citizens choose the leader of their country, but also a critical aspect of formal civic engagement

(Jubit, 2023). This is because voting in that first democratic election was a concrete exercise of political agency, restoring dignity, affirming citizenship, and establishing a new social contract in a society emerging from decades of oppression (Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), 1994). Since 1994, voter registration and voter turnout, although high, have been decreasing over the last few years (Tshifhumulo et al. 2023). A decline in this form of civic engagement, a key democratic practice, raises questions about democratic accountability and durability, which have indirectly and directly ignited restlessness among citizens, manifesting in protests (Runciman, 2016). This erosion of civic engagement has both direct and indirect consequences, often fueling public frustration and restlessness that manifest in the form of protests. Importantly, declining participation signals a weakening civic contract, where citizens feel increasingly disconnected from formal channels of engagement.

Further, beyond voting as an important part of civic engagement, community-led social movements that were suppressed during apartheid have emerged as significant in post-1994 South Africa (Steyn and Ngwenya, 2015). For example, different scholars, including Battaglini (2017) and Sajó (2009), posit that constitutional democracy and the right to informal civic engagement. This can manifest in various forms, including boycotts and protests, which reflect the inherent need to uphold democratic principles, ensure accountability, and empower citizens to participate in democratic governance (Battaglini 2017; Sajó 2009). In South Africa, under Section 17 of the South African Constitution (1996), everyone has the right to assemble, demonstrate, picket, and present petitions peacefully and unarmed. Therefore, the right to protest in South Africa is a significant democratic expression because protests are seen as a function to aggregate and disseminate information (Battaglini, 2017). While this means that protests provide a platform for people to come together and share information regarding their issues, where they organise themselves to voice their concerns and demands to make a stronger case for their cause (Steyn and Ngwenya, 2015). Nonetheless, this form of civic engagement has grown to be disruptive and, at other times, violent, with roads barricaded, tires being burnt, and the destruction of government buildings such as libraries, schools, and clinics (Runciman, 2016). Civic engagement appears to be an important factor influencing whether to participate in both (non) violent protests (Swart et al., 2020). It often arises when formal participatory spaces such as ward committees, public meetings, or Integrated Development Plan (IDP) consultations do not respond to the needs of the

community (Matloga et al., 2025). In this way, protests become an extension of civic engagement (Lynggaard and Boje, 2025).

In addition, non-political civic engagement is closely linked to the interaction between poverty and inequality, which influences the likelihood of volunteering and the sense people make of their participation (Seabe, 2014). Understanding this interaction is important because volunteering often is hailed as a means of supporting democratic and participatory principles. In the South African landscape, volunteering is a form of expression that embodies the Ubuntu Philosophy. Ubuntu is based on the Afrocentric concept of Africanism (Omodan and Dube, 2020). It is a Zulu word which means ‘humanity’ (Tshifhumulo et al. 2025). It is further reflected in the expression ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’, which loosely translates as a person being a person through other people. The philosophy has principles that identify with humanness, mutual respect, mutual learning, and common goals for the upliftment of the community (Kotze, 2024). When people volunteer, they reify the values of Ubuntu that link individuals through brotherhood and sisterhood (Swanson, 2007). Ubuntu is born out of the philosophy that community strength comes from community support that is achieved through community support (Bobo and Arkhust, 2019). The decision to volunteer is, to a certain extent, determined by the actions and behaviours of others (Tshifhumulo et al., 2025). As a result, volunteering will require social capital, solidifying social embeddedness and the degree to which individuals are integrated into their communities (Seabe, 2014). This embeddedness is important for civic engagement, as it reflects how individuals participate in collective action outside formal participatory spaces. Through volunteering, people can make significant contributions towards improving living conditions; therefore, developing their civic engagement through volunteerism (Marta, Pozzi, and Marzana, 2010). Moreover, many forms of volunteering in South Africa take the form of community-led initiatives, such as community development, health, and sports, in which communities mobilise themselves to address local challenges (Seabe, 2014). These initiatives show that non-political civic and active, organised and collective action that promotes a sense of ownership and empowers the individuals involved as they influence development from the ground (Dang et al., 2021).

These two types of civic engagement can be further placed into participatory spaces. The ‘Participatory spaces movement’ began to gain momentum in the late 1990s. Space for change is one of the prompts for a growing need for spaces that bring about change (Miraftab, 2004). It is a

platform where citizens can meet and deliberate on issues that affect them. These created spaces for change are a mechanism that enables citizen engagement. Spaces for change are a vehicle for development interventions supporting transformative participation (Connor, 2004). Invited and invented spaces are a full arena in which citizenship and participation occur. Invited spaces for participation are a top-down approach whereby citizens are invited to participate in a space opened by an authority or institution. In contrast, invented spaces are a bottom-up approach and are initiated by citizens (Smith, 2012).

Invited spaces are the ones occupied by those at the grassroots level and non-governmental organisations that are made legitimate by donors and governmental organisations. While invented spaces are also occupied by the grassroots and claimed by their collective action, the difference is that they directly confront authorities and the status quo (Miraftab, 2004). Invited participatory spaces are responsive and accountable, increasing dialogue between the government and citizens to ensure local demands are heard and considered when producing solutions that solve citizens' problems (Aiyar, 2010). Participation through invited spaces has created a platform for citizens to scrutinise, monitor, and assess the performance of their interactions with state actors, thus strengthening accountability from state actors.

From Miraftab (2004), we learn that invited participatory spaces can be opportunities for the people or their representatives to come together with those who represent public authorities. The other form of this space involves complex, multi-stakeholder institutions that include civil society, the private sector, government, donors, and lenders. A challenging perspective associated with invited spaces of participation is that these spaces are never neutral because of the dynamic of power relations between citizens and authorities. Even the most well-equipped middle-class average man can struggle with articulating themselves in such settings because of the obvious unequal power relations between citizens and representatives of authorities. This is reflected mostly when authority figures have a different vision from citizens, which can impact how the deliberations in these settings are handled.

In contrast, invented citizens initiate participatory spaces. This is a reaction towards dissatisfaction with the current invited participatory spaces because they do not respond to citizens' cries. While invented spaces are more responsive because participation among citizens is key, this does not transform into influencing policy; rather, the emphasis is to empower individuals to actively

engage in their development (Berry et al., 2024). Citizens create participation through invented spaces to challenge the influential matters that concern them and find possible solutions through citizens themselves (Smith, 2012). Through invented spaces of participation, citizens engage beyond formal processes, which fosters traces of legitimacy and valuing local knowledge and decision-making in community development initiatives (Berry et al., 2019). These spaces expand grassroots activism beyond survival strategies. Invented spaces of participation are crucial in engaging socially disadvantaged groups as they are more responsive, ensuring the effectiveness of participation in community development initiatives.

The above sections present how civic engagement operated in post 1994. This presents a shift from how South Africans related to government. The transition from resistance because of being excluded to having formal participatory spaces created that were inclusive for all the people (Kibet and Fombad, 2017; Marutlulle, 2022). For instance, in post 1994 the first democratic elections were held (Maphunye, 2015). This was a symbol of reclaiming identity and sense of belonging within governance structures (IEC, 1994). However, over the past few years, there has been a gradual decline of voters to turn out as the expectations of citizens are not met in these formal participatory spaces (Runciman, 2016). This indicates that there has been a gap between the ideals of democracy and the lived realities. Furthermore, when formal participatory spaces fail, they give rise to protests as an alternative form of being civically engaged (Steyn and Ngwenya, 2015). This further means that civic engagement extends from an invited space of participation to invented spaces of participation. Furthermore, non-formal civic engagement observed in community-led initiatives represent high levels of organising collectively and acts of solidarity to address their own issues. Therefore, civic engagement in this dawn of democracy in South Africa is layered as individuals can participate in formal participatory spaces and when these spaces fail, they can turn to informal participatory spaces.

2.7. Legislature Supporting Civic Engagement

2.7.1. White Paper on Local Government

The foreword by the Minister for Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development at the time to the White Paper on Local Government (WPLG) described South Africa as a country given the opportunity to transform local government in the post-apartheid era through community

participation (WPLG, 1998). This opportunity allows local government to operate independently but interrelated and in partnership with local stakeholders to carry out their distinctive functions and status in building and supporting democracy and promoting socioeconomic development at a local level to remedy its dysfunction (Tshishonga, 2021). According to the WLGP (1998), the central responsibility of municipalities is to work together with local communities to find sustainable solutions to meet the need of the people and improve their quality of life. Therefore, municipalities act as Developmental Local Government (DLG), which is a commitment to working with communities and groups within communities to meet the social, economic, and material needs and standards of living (Khanyile, 2014). Additionally, the WPLG (1998) suggests that as municipalities serve as developmental local government they are characterised by four functions, which are critical aspects of civic engagement and community development:

i). Maximising social development

The WPLG (1998) states that municipalities are responsible for the empowerment of marginalised and disadvantaged groups as a critical contribution to social development. This is particularly important because social inclusion and inequality persist in most communities because of social exclusion and income inequality due to structural barriers such as race, gender and geography (Staden et al., 2023; Kakwata, 2024). This is also characterised by the legacy of apartheid, elevated levels of unemployment, and limited access to quality education (Kakwata, 2024). In this regard, it is therefore why municipalities bear the obligation of rectifying this and addressing socio-economic issues through maximising social development (Maleka, 2012). When municipalities rectify this ill, it attempts building responsiveness to community issues and building their trust. This is particularly important as it enables civic engagement and empowerment, which enables the marginalised and disadvantaged groups to become active members of their communities. (Manoharan et al., 2022; Mutambik et al., 2023).

ii). Integrating and coordinating

The WPLG (1998) states that within any local area, there are many actors of development. Therefore, developmental local government must create a vision for how all these actors are to work together to create prosperity within said area. This is because poor coordination among these actors can undermine development efforts (WPLG, 1998). This is expected that since local government is the closest to the people, collaboration about addressing community issues is a

continuous process (WPLG, 1998). To achieve this, effective communication across all collaborators is important which has been proven difficult as it remains one of the challenges municipalities face with limited spaces for communication and engagement (Public Affairs Research Institute, 2025). This disconnect perpetuates a sense of distrust, poor attendance in community meetings and limits chances for engagement and collaboration (Public Affairs Research Institute, 2025). Furthermore, rising perceptions of corruption, citizen apathy and a breakdown in the social contract between municipalities and its constituencies has been on the rise across South African municipalities (Public Affairs Research Institute, 2025). Such relationships between municipalities and communities give rise to the manifestation of civic engagement through protests have seen a surge in the numbers because communities do not feel integrated to the local development process and their failure to be responsive to community needs.

iii). Democratising development, empowering and redistribution

Municipals play a central role in promoting democracy and can do a lot to support individual and support individual and community initiatives and direct community energies into projects and programmes that bring uplift the community (WPLG, 1998). Democracy does not automatically benefit the poor as they face socio-economic and sociopolitical disadvantages. As a result, this has led to the understanding that democratisation alone is insufficient. Marginalised groups must be included in democratised systems. There is a gap in civic engagement for poor and minority individuals, even if they live in communities grappling with deteriorating socioeconomic conditions that would benefit from greater civic engagement (Nath, 2012). The engagement of poor communities in civic engagement is particularly vital in South Africa for two reasons. First, nearly half (49.2%) of the adult population of South Africa lives in poverty, according to the South African Department of Statistics (Edington, 2021). As a result, large portions of the South African population are affected by poverty in their daily lives and would benefit from increased civic engagement that increases access to communal resources, greater skill-based knowledge, and overall improvements in existing communal practices. them accessible (Matuku, 2014; Kaseke Edington, 2021). Therefore, it is important for municipalities to respond and take it upon themselves to create strategies to include the poor and their ability to organise as a collective, empowering and redistributing resources to the poor (Manor, 2004).

iv). Leading and learning

A developmental local municipality should position itself as a visionary policymaker that seeks to mobilise resources to meet basic needs and achieve developmental goals (WPLG, 1998). Leading and learning by municipalities plays an important role as it has the primary function of implementing programs and safeguarding the welfare of their citizens. Therefore, effective governance relies heavily on the competence and leadership skills of individuals in public sector institutions (Siswana, 2007). It involves making information, decisions, and processes open and accessible to the public (Widjaja, 2025). Accountability complements transparency which holds public officials responsible for their actions and decisions. This is an important aspect as it builds trust between municipalities and the communities as inclusive governance encourages citizen engagement and participation in decision-making processes (Widjaja, 2025). Accountability and transparency promote enhanced trust in civic engagement activities in community development, which encourages active participation in civic engagement (Jaurino et al., 2019). Governments are increasingly recognising the importance of involving the public in shaping policies, programmes, and services to ensure they reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of the population to learn what they need and how to respond to those needs (Baxter et al., 2023).

Moreover, the WPLG recognises the linkages between development, delivery and democracy to continuously engage with citizens and active participation is characterised as being voters, people who express themselves in before, during and after policy development processes and partners involved in the mobilisation for development. According to Nwezi and Sibanda (2023), the WPLG, laid the foundation of subsequent legislature that advocates for local government, most notably the Local Government: The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, Act 32 of 2000 (see below).

2.7.2. Local Government: Municipal Systems Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000

Under Chapter Four (4) of the local government legislation, each municipality must develop a community participation system (Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000). Community participation is a fundamental aspect of the new local government system as it emphasises active engagement in planning, service delivery, and performance management (Petunia and Selepe, 2020). This ensures that for an effective line of community involvement, municipalities must develop a culture of community participation to engage local communities by utilising mechanisms, processes, and procedures (SALGA, 2013). This includes clear communication of information regarding

participation, public notice of municipal council meetings, admission to public meetings, and guides that facilitate engagement (Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000). Therefore, community participation systems must be developed so that they can be used to engage with the community regularly through the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), which is a five-year plan that the local government is required to compile to determine the development needs of the municipality (Asha and Makalela, 2020; Mamokhere and Meyer, 2022). Despite this obligation towards communities, municipalities sideline the community in the decision-making process, giving attention to issues that community members deem irrelevant or not currently a pressing concern for them (Petunia and Selepe, 2020). This is a direct reflection of the failure to engage community members in dialogue that shapes the pace at which community development occurs (Ndou, 2018). Furthermore, the lack of engagement creates the impression that politicians and members of parliament do not serve the communities they claim to represent, but instead their own interests (Modiba, 2020). This gap between mandated participation poses implications for civic engagement, as trends show that when there is a disconnect between government and community members and how they engage with each other (Mongae, 2025). Consequently, South Africans are more likely to find other modalities such as bottom-up, localised and informal channels to civically participate and altogether abandon formal participatory spaces (Mongae, 2025; Sekatle, 2022).

The section above discusses the South African Legislature that operationalises civic engagement in communities. The WPLG represents a shift in how local government interacts with its people. It emphasises that DLG commits to making participatory governance a priority so that communities can shape their development outcomes (Tshishonga, 2021). It is a call for municipalities to work with communities and not for them. Such civic engagement becomes a tool to hold local government accountable. However, there seems to be a gap between this vision and practice. When participatory spaces such as involvement in the IDP processes, public meetings, and ward committees are established. The assumption is that civic engagement can occur naturally. This disconnect in engagement is reflected when solutions do not prioritize local responses. Similarly, the MSA operationalises civic engagement by making community participation mandatory, ensuring that local government is responsive and accountable to communities (Asha and Makalela, 2020; Mamokhere and Meyer, 2022). However, there seems to be a gap between this vision and practice as failure to meet this obligation has caused communities to turn to protests and community organising when they are excluded from participating in governance issues

affecting them (Petunia and Selepe, 2020; Ndou, 2018). This is contradictory as case studies across South African municipalities indicate that communities are often sidelined and participation is a check list activity. This disconnect in engagement is reflected when solutions do not priorities local responses This presents that civic engagement in South Africa is context specific as it requires more than legislature to be sustainable.

2.8. Determinants of Civic Engagement in Community Development Initiatives

2.8.1 Demographic factors

Demographic attributes such as age, gender, ethnicity and access to education influence the willingness to join and participate in civic activities in communities (Moy et al., 2005; Putnam, 2000). For instance, older individuals are more likely to be involved in addressing community issues as compared to their younger counterparts because the latter group has shallower roots in their communities and is more likely to be less informed about local issues (Carpini, 2006). The resources at personal disposal such as access to education influence whether individuals are civically engaged or not (Chu et al., 2025). Educational levels are related to motives of civic participation such that those who are educated are more likely to be civically engaged in both formal and non-formal activities and trust in institutions (Barrett and Pachi, 2019). In addition, Murshed and Sabate (2025) argue that personal resources such as access to education can take two forms; affluent and educated people are more likely to participate in civic activities than less well-off and less educated individuals because time and money are required to participate in such activities (Murshed and Sabate, 2025). Education increases awareness about local issues, which lowers barriers to participation because it allows individuals to be aware of public issues (Murshed and Sabate, 2025). The educational impact extends beyond the provision of knowledge about local issues, but it also builds a sense of efficacy and attachment to the community which is critical to sustaining civic duty and activities (Arvanitidis, 2017).

2.8.2. Ideologies

Social values, political ideologies, religious beliefs, and life attitudes influence how an individual civically engages (Grillo, 2010). Religion has positive attributes as it influences individuals' motivations to be civically engaged as it promotes the beliefs of doing something (Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Lewis et al., 2013). Concurrently, social networks contribute towards motivations

to be civically engaged as a platform for sources of information and encouragement to civically participate (Lewis et al., 2013). Additionally, prosocial values such as altruism, trust, and sociality reflect on civic engagement through how individuals interact with one another in terms of extending grace tolerance, and cooperation in civic activities, which are all expected to increase civic involvement (Arvanitidis, 2017; Marinovic, 2025). This is because the social structures that people believe in and belong to influence their perceptions on the efficacy of civic engagement in community development initiatives (Dang et al., 2025). Social responsibility cements commitments to contributing towards society with the purpose of improving their community (Bartole et al., 2023). Furthermore, people become civically engaged because of the combination of various factors related to personal attributes, values, and influence from family and friends (Arvanitidis, 2017). The motivation to be civically engaged is intensified by the relationships individuals have with their families. Family plays a significant role in routing the participation in civic activities, a transmission of civic participation in social and political activities (Muddim et al., 2019).

2.8.3. Economic Factors

Another important determinant is economic forces which display the importance of material worth in promoting civic engagement in community development initiatives (Karki, 2024). Each person must have an equal standing and equal voice towards systems that influence daily living. However, the economic resources dictate the extent to which individuals participate in civic engagement activities (Levin-Waldman, 2013). The higher income that is earned is directly proportional to participation in civic engagement, the higher the income, the higher the civic participation (Nittitornyada et al., 2024). This relationship is in this way because economic resources provide the means for individuals to access and participate comfortably in civic activities (Chu et al., 2025). The economic standing of individuals provides means to access civic activities such as contributing to organisations or attending community meetings as it gives the individual the autonomy to decide how they would like to civically participate (Nittitornyada et al., 2024). Furthermore, economic forces influence the type of activities individuals participate in, the higher the income, individuals are more likely to have flexible working hours and better social networks that make it easier to access civic activities which enhance the ability to influence political and social processes (Arvanitidis, 2017).

The above section discusses the determinants of civic engagement that influence individuals to participate in civic activities. These factors explain that civic engagement is not random, but structural and socioeconomic factors are interplayed whether individuals are civically engaged (Moy et al., 2005; Putnam, 2000). For instance, when individuals are older, educated, and financially well off, they are more likely to be engaged. This indicates that people with better social standing are at an advantage and are more likely to participate in civic activities (Carpini, 2006). What this means then is that those in the lower classes are more likely to belong to the marginalised groups and not be civically engaged. The determinants also indicate that being civically engaged is also influenced by altruism and attachments people have to their communities (Arvanitidis, 2017; Marinovic, 2025). When people feel connected to a larger group, it creates a sense of belonging and are exposed to information and their participation in civic activities can bring about change in the community whereas individuals who are not altruistic are more likely to be isolated and this limits their participation in civic engagement activities. Therefore, understanding these determinants clarifies why one would participate in civic engagement and highlights that for civic engagement to be more inclusive, the disparities in terms of socioeconomic standing need to be addressed so that more people are civically engaged.

2.9. Benefits of Civic Engagement in Community Development Initiatives

2.9.1. Improved Public Services and Quality of Life

Civic engagement is a platform to elicit information and ideas from citizens, supporting public service enhancement and defending public interest (Mongae, 2025). It improves and strengthens the legitimacy of government in the eyes of citizens and accountability and governance (UNDP, 2016). It enhances the effectiveness of service delivery and considers indigenous and traditional knowledge (Ncube et al., 2025). Civic engagement supports partnerships with local community organisations, cultural institutions, and diverse community leaders to enrich civic education experiences. Involving families and community members in the learning process, inviting them to share their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives (Borhan, 2025). Through civic engagement, empowered community members can hold government officials accountable for community needs and expectations, and improved public services can be attained through the government's responsiveness to engagement held with community members (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff,

2011). It has positive outcomes economic involvement and civic participation (Jordan and Krumnow, 2014). Those who are civically engaged are less likely to experience disconnection from education and employment. This is important so that important it supports marginalised people to benefit from the opportunity to meaningfully participate. Individuals who civically engaged build skills and personal and professional networks (Jordan and Krumnow, 2014). Increased participation in civic and service organisations produces higher levels of economic opportunity for communities. Civic engagement maintains the viability of democratic society and promotes positive outcomes for those who participate.

2.9.2. Accountability and Transparency

Transparency empowers communities through free flow of information such that they have access to information owned by the government that concerns them. This act of transparency increases trust in government and builds closer relationships between government and the communities they serve (Adiputra et al., 2018). When local government subscribes to the principles of accountability and transparency, this builds better responsiveness to communities as leaders give an account of the activities they undertake (Elundu et al., 2025). This is particularly important because accountability and transparency are crucial components of civic engagement in community development initiatives, as it is aimed at improving local conditions, which can lead to increased community participation (Arkedis et al., 2019). Similarly, an empirical study by Fachrulla (2024), reported that governments that report higher level of accountability are more likely to experience high levels of community participation in governance issues. Not only does it increase community participation, but it also fosters informed participation in development initiatives (Ouwencamp and van der Waldt, 2024). When communities are well-informed, it is easier to make well-informed decisions that can have a positive outcome (Wheler and Root-Bernstein, 2020). Accountability and transparency promote enhanced trust in civic engagement activities in community development, strengthening the relationship between community members and local authorities, and encouraging more active civic engagement (Jaurino et al., 2019). Furthermore, transparency and accountability go hand in hand as it increases the access to public information in the decision-making processes, and when information is openly available it decreases chances for acting misappropriately and increases accountability (Zein and Septiani, 2025). Additionally, it promotes efficient resource allocation, preventing wasteful resource mismanagement which can allow the

prioritisation of resources according to community needs and general tracking of how community resources are being used to best serve the people (Nelda, Safelia and Erwati, 2023).

2.9.3. Social Cohesion

The building blocks for sustainable social cohesion in communities are that it is based on social trust, reciprocity, and concern for community well-being by community members (Carlos and Lynch, 2021). Social cohesion is concerned with community and neighbourhood as a concept that encompasses five elements. These elements include having common values and civic culture, social order and social control, social solidarity and reduction in wealth disparities, social networks and social capital, and place attachment and identity (Bhandari and Yasunobu, 2009). The basis of these elements is to provide a support system among community members to which they belong, which facilitates the order of community development initiatives (Hasan, 2022). Similarly, Wan et al. (2021) posit that social cohesion is a result of positive interactions and relationships among individuals in neighbourhood settings, emphasising acceptance and belonging among community members. Social cohesion promotes community-led efforts and community building (Carlos and Lynch, 2021). The significance of social cohesion in engagement is to contribute to building resilient, empowered, and sustainable communities that address challenges collectively and ensure that community development initiatives thrive for the long term (Adabanya *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, it fosters a sense of belonging and enhances public consciousness, which is important in civic engagement. Cooperation, communication, and consultation between community members and institutions that they interact with (Mlambo and Mpanza, 2024). Social cohesion implies that government acts to ensure the continued integration of marginalised individuals into the civic community (Beauvais and Jenson, 2002).

2.9.4. Empowerment

Empowerment signifies a paradigm shift towards collaborative work and partnerships for communities and is a process that occurs in communities and organisations, involving active participation, critical reflection, awareness, and understanding of social and political structures (Perkins, 2010). Furthermore, it involves gaining access to and control over important decisions and resources with a focus on creating an environment in which individuals and communities can engage; thus, empowerment emphasises a collective action because of shared values and interests

to improve communities (Perkins, 2010). Empowerment for in civic engagement signifies a progression of choice to aspiration for change to conviction and to action against social sanctions that keep communities in the poverty cycle (Karki, 2024). Therefore, empowerment is influenced by internal and external factors that vary from trust and motivation to social and political contexts (Raj, 2024). In the context of civic engagement, empowerment plays a central role in enabling communities to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. When individuals and groups feel empowered, they are more likely to contribute their perspectives, creating a transparent government, accountable and one that responds to community needs, which strengthens the impact of community development initiatives (Rijal, 2023; Hofer et al., 2024). Empowerment encourages communities to be able to organize, access resources and advocate for change in making civic engagement an actionable tool that promotes transformation (Dushkova and Ivlieva, 2024). Additionally, empowerment enhances social cohesion by encouraging collaboration among community members and between communities and institutions (Speer et al., 2001; Heaton, 2024). When civic engagement initiatives are shaped to include empowerment strategies such as capacity building and participatory planning, communities are likely to sustain participation in civic activities (Mubangizi, 2025; Shen et al., 2025).

2.9.5. A Sense of Ownership

By participating in civic engagement activities, individuals gain a sense of ownership and responsibility towards their communities (Chician, 2024). This causes a deep-rooted attachment to own community and is strongly associated with community members' sense of responsibility for improving their place and with their willingness to contribute to their community's well-being with this civic responsibility mediating the positive effect of trust and civic engagement (Anguelovsk, 2013; Dang et al., 2022). Furthermore, civic engagement reflects a sense of responsibility, shared ownership, and a commitment to contributing to the well-being of the community (Lynggaard and Boje, 2025). By participating in civic activities, individuals not only express their perspectives and values but also play a role in shaping the policies and decisions that impact the broader community (Brady et al., 2020). The outcome of civic engagement experience is determined by how an individual perceives their level of civic responsibility to their communities, and this encompasses of three important factors which are their connection to the community, awareness of the need of the community and civic efficacy (Bird et al., 2023). Connection to the community is characterised by the interconnectedness of oneself to the

community, which leads to a certain level of awareness of the needs of the community (Klitkou et al., 2022). When these two factors are at an interplay, the level of civ responsibility upon an individual influenced how they perceive civic efficacy which is a mindset that an individual possesses that they should address existing community needs (Bird et al., 2023). For instance, the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) on Wednesday, 29 July 2022, launched a nation-wide citizen responsibility campaign, “Asisho! Let’s Say It!” (SALGA ,2022). The aim of this campaign is to inspire action to educate members of local communities about their duties and obligations towards the social and economic upliftment of their local areas by paying for municipal services rendered (SALGA, 2022). Such campaigns encourage sense of ownership and civic responsibility from community members.

The above section reflects on the benefits of civic engagement in community development initiatives. Firstly, the perceived benefits of civic engagement on improved public service and quality of life interest were presented (Mongae,2025). This simply means that when individuals are civically engaged, they can hold local government accountable in delivering services to them through the consultation processes facilitated through community meetings which have the potential to improve their quality of life (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2011). This is linked to how local government conducts itself in communities through transparency (Wheler and Root-Bernstein, 2020). When this happens, there is a flow of information to community members which enables them not only to be civically engaged but make informed decisions because they have access to information that can direct their engagement (Zein and Septiani, 2025). On the other hand, social cohesion as a benefit of civic engagement emphasises that a sense of belonging is created by participating in civic activities through the ties they have in the communities. This is very important as they influence how often one should participate in civic engagement activities and if this participation would be sustained (Hasan, 2022). As a result, it is important that individuals have a sense of ownership of these activities as it encourages civic responsibility by being aware of what is happening in the community and act by coming up with solutions to address community needs (Anguelovsk, 2013; Dang et al., 2022). When communities’ members take such actions, they become empowered to be active participators in civic activities for their development.

2.10. Challenges in Promoting Civic Engagement in Community Development

2.10.1. Lack of Participation

Low levels of participation in civic engagement and community development are influenced by socioeconomic factors such as age, gender, education, and income (Ajaps and Obiagu, 2020). The lack of participation in civic engagement in community development leads to stagnation in development (Park and Hong, 2024). Without active involvement from community members, the rate at which development occurs is significantly slowed down. The lack of participation hinders social progress, limits innovation, and weakens sustainable development efforts in communities (Lalitha, 2023). When community members are not actively engaged in initiatives aimed at improving their communities, it negates community development, as this stifles the flow of new ideas that can be used to improve the longevity of development efforts in communities (Skhosana, 2024). Lack of participation in civic engagement in community development initiatives reduces the quality of projects implemented as they are not aligned with the community's needs and aspirations (Kusmayad, Wen and Jatmikowati, 2024). The lack of participation from community members in civic engagement in community development initiatives leads to a disconnect from community members' realities (Jones, 2023). This leads to reduced local support, potential antagonism, and hindered sustainable growth in communities (Iqbal *et al.*, 2023). The lack thereof of civic engagement in community development leads to coercive resource mobilisation, weak government accountability and limited community power in decision-making and project evaluation processes (Sutiyo and Maharjan, 2017). This is caused by ineffective bureaucratic leadership, communication and education which hinders efficient community progress and involvement (Sutiyo and Maharjan, 2017; Doran, Tafalas and Rulinawaty, 2024).

2.10.2. Lack and Resource Constraints

Access to resources is one of the most important necessities for effective civic engagement in community development (Hidaja, 2025). However, there is a wide gap in accessing resources needed to promote civic engagement in community development (Oyewo, 2024). The lack of resources hinders civic engagement in community development as it disrupts the capacity-building and participation efforts of community members or those affected by a community issue that is being addressed (Oyewo, 2024). The lack of resources restricts how best development initiatives can be approached, making it difficult to mobilise and empower communities in their development

efforts (Limaki, 2024). Furthermore, the deprivation of resources reduces civic obligation, especially for those who belong to low-income strata and have low levels of education (Bonomi Bezzo and Jeannet, 2023). Resource constraints significantly impact the effectiveness of civic engagement in community development, as it can even hinder the beginning of the development initiatives as well as the sustainability of those few initiatives that manage to lift off the ground. Challenges such as lack of financial means and financial dependency limit the quality of development, scale, and self-expression initiatives, which play a role in unsustainable and short-lived development programs (Schatterman, 2014; Golovatsky and Nyatina, 2019; Kisusu and Tongori, 2022). Other constraints in promoting civic engagement in community development such as the inability to effectively delegate resources, especially financial resources and the lack of equipped capacity facilitators to direct the path that can be chosen to reach the full potential of civically engaged individuals (Brady et al., 2020).

2.10.4. Ineffective Leadership

Leadership is identified as an important function towards achieving the aims and objectives of a group (Iheriohanm et al., 2014). This signifies that local leaders responsible for the facilitation of civic activities in community development should be equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to lead communities in their development efforts (Hains et al., 2020). Civic engagement mediates its critical role in enhancing trust and alliance between communities and leaders to ensure transparency, accountability and responsiveness to local people (Nadeem et al., 2025). The lack of leadership ethics and moral behaviour in local government is still a dominant problem in South African municipalities (Dirk, 2018). Unfortunately, this is a hurdle for local leaders as they are not development-oriented, have no respect for the law, and are corrupt (Dirk, 2018). These negative attributes associated with local leaders impede their ability to ensure effective and sustainable civic engagement in community development (Mamokere, 2024). As a result of ineffective leadership, leaders are disorganised, make decisions in isolation, and do not maximise on resources at their disposal (Okeyo and Omutoko, 2020). Ineffective leadership in civic activities in community development struggles to coordinate development efforts, which leads to failure and confusion within community development initiatives (Shetunyenga, 2023). Ineffective leadership shows common obstacles such as or will for genuine participation. Furthermore, bureaucratic inertia and rigid structures in local government continue to contribute to the failure of municipalities to engage with local communities which undermines their

importance in civic engagement (Mudzusi et al., 2024). As public participation is a center of civic engagement, when formal participator spaces fail to incorporate community experiences it reflects how institutional mechanism often fails and falls short in facilitating meaningful participation.

Above are the presented challenges of civic engagement in community development initiatives. Structural and socioeconomic status such as education and the income of individuals affects whether individuals participate in civic engagement activities (Ajaps and Obiagu, 2020). When individuals are in the short end of socioeconomic mobility, they are unlikely to participate in civic activities (Karki, 2024). This restricts the number of ideas that could be exchanged to address community issues (Skhosana, 2024). When community members do not participate in civic engagement leads to a disconnect in the activities that are implanted which leads to their failure because the beneficiaries of these activities do not support them (Jones, 2023). Another challenge is the lack of resources, which limits and causes a disruption in how individuals civically participate. Furthermore, power conflicts shape civic engagement. When municipal officials exert their power onto community members, this discourages participation in civic engagement activities as community members may feel discouraged because they are taken for granted and their input have no real-life impact (Gyan and Ampomah, 2016). When this kind of relationships are present, community members may shrink themselves and feel disengaged. This is closely linked to ineffective leadership; civic engagement is a mediating role in promoting a level of trust between those in power and community member (Nadeem et al., 2025). When this is violated lowers the levels of participation in civic engagement. Moreover, ineffective leadership imposes decisions on community members, and when they realise this, they withdraw from actively participating in civic engagement activities.

2.10.3. Power Relations and Conflict of Interests

Inequalities in power structures stem from social mobility, disparities, and resource distribution, and community-driven development initiatives often overlook existing power dynamics, which run a risk of creating elite-based power structures in engagement and development (Khan and Short, 2021). This oversight results in certain individuals gaining disproportionate influence and control over the decision-making process, which perpetuates power inequality and imbalances in development, undermining the need for equitable participation among all members who are involved (Gill et al., 2023). Unequal power relations significantly impact civic engagement and

community development, undermining the effectiveness of participatory practices (Khan and Short, 2021; Gill *et al.*, 2023). As a result of power dynamics, conflicts often arise due to different interests among stakeholders, which can hinder effective engagement in community development (Gyan and Ampomah, 2016). For instance, professional actors such as those from municipalities must navigate interpersonal and organisational tension for constructive dialogue (Ohmer *et al.*, 2022). At times, these differences cannot be straightened out, which affects the overall direction of development initiatives. These power dynamics directly shape who participates in civic engagement and whose voices influence community development outcomes. When certain individuals are dominant in the part of the decision-making processes, others become marginalised and their involvement is limited (Bell and Reed, 2002). This weakens the core purpose of civic engagement, which is to ensure meaningful involvement in the decision-making process (Hadijah, 2025). When power is imbalanced between formal institutions and community members, it causes a reduction in participation as it discourages individuals who feel their contributions hold little weight or even have no impact (Aucamp and Lombard, 2018). This not only suppresses community ownership but also leads to development interventions that fail to reflect local needs. Conversely, where power relations are intentionally balanced through transparent processes, inclusive dialogue, and community-led structures, civic engagement becomes more equitable and impactful (Sibanda and Lues, 2021).

2.11. Strategies to Encourage Civic Engagement in Community Development Initiatives

2.11.1. Civic Education and Awareness

Civic education and awareness promote critical thinking and empower community members to act against socioeconomic issues that affect them (Ballard *et al.*, 2016). To ensure that communities are actively involved and participating in civic activities that contribute towards community development, they should be civically educated and aware of their potential impact on community development (Mayer, 2017). Civic education, knowledge, and awareness encourage civic engagement in community development by enhancing community members' knowledge and understanding regarding key issues that affect the community (Digdoyo, *et al.*, 2024; Wyber *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, civic education and awareness significantly increase advocacy for community issues by community members and overall engagement for community development (Ardoine *et al.*

al.,2023). It encourages civic responsibility, promoting active and responsible citizenship and democratic participation of community members in development (Digdoyo et al., 2024). It teaches individuals in a community the importance of having the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that are necessary for positive community development outcomes (Mirra, 2022). Beyond individual empowerment, civic education and awareness strengthen collective capacity by enabling communities to engage institutions from an informed position (Kashkana, 2025). Global South case studies show that structured civic education initiatives can contribute to more inclusive development outcomes, for example, in Kenya, community civic education programmes implemented through the Uraia Trust provides civic education and empowers Kenyans to realise their constitutional right to public participation and hold their government accountable (Citizen TV Kenya, 2025). Similarly, in India, grassroots civic awareness campaigns led by local NGOs have enhanced participation in village development committees, ensuring that marginalised group can influence community priorities (Bhardwaj, 2025). Such examples show that civic education does not only inform but also mobilises communities for sustained participation. Civic awareness also helps counter misinformation (Jila et al., 2024).

2.11.2. Dialogue and Mobilisation

Dialogue is a deep, challenging, responsive, and enriching conversation held among members of interest to raise awareness among different groups about community realities (Doornbosch et al., 2024 F). To raise awareness among different groups about community realities. The importance of dialogue in engagement for community development is to establish creative action among people (Westoby Peter, 2014). Actors in such dialogues often include community development practitioners, communities, community-based organisations, and municipal officials from local government (Fourie and Der Walddt, 2021). Effective engagement involves all actors actively participating in the dialogue regarding community issues such that trust is built among actors involved and ensures that diverse perspectives are incorporated in community development practices, which buttresses the need to facilitate collective action for transformation (Westoby Peter, 2014). Furthermore, dialogues lay the groundwork for listening to community needs, which can make it easier to mobilise people for their development (Fourie and Der Walddt, 2021). Mobilisation serves as a cornerstone of ensuring that community members understand their own roles and responsibilities towards enhancing community impact and reflects citizens' ownership

of community development (Matole *et al.*, 2023). In addition, dialogue creates an environment where communities can openly criticize power dynamics and negotiate shared priorities, which is essential in contexts where marginalised groups are often excluded from formal decision-making processes (Maddaloni and Sabini 2022; Saaida, 2023). Such open communication spaces strengthen transparency and accountability between communities and institutions (Woro and Supriyanto, 2013). Moreover, sustained dialogue helps shift engagement from once-off consultations to ongoing relational processes, which is critical for building resilient, informed, and active communities that can spearhead their own development (Westoby, 2014). When effectively facilitated, dialogue enhances cooperation, which makes civic engagement sustainable and impactful (Melo, 2018).

2.11.3. Inclusive Decision-Making

Traditionally, decision-making processes and responsibilities have been those of government officials and internal stakeholders, without involving active participation from the community (Rijal, 2023). However, with a change in era, community involvement has taken center stage, and it is advocated that it be at the forefront of the decision-making process because it affects communities (Baxter et al. 2022; Rijal, 2023). This is important because a fundamental tenet of community development is that people should be able to influence decisions that affect their lives as active involvement in making decisions responds to the context of socio-economic issues in a community (Magagula, 2025). When community members actively participate in the decision-making process, it leads to equitable and sustained development in communities (Petunia and Selepe, 2020). Furthermore, current civic engagement activities should focus on active involvement because community members can gain experience in organising, identifying resources and developing strategies that should be adopted to improve the community's well-being (Ohmer *et al.*, 2019; Ohmer *et al.*, 2022). Inclusive decision-making ensures that individuals who are normally excluded in the decision-making process are not overlooked and promotes legitimacy and trust between community members and institutions, as individuals feel that their perspectives are taken into consideration when shaping community development outcomes (Maddaloni and Sabini 2022). This is particularly important because when the process of participation is transparent, it encourages individuals to be civically engaged (Zhao et al., 2023). In addition,

inclusive participation requires intentional efforts to remove barriers that prevent meaningful engagement, such as lack of information, or unequal power relations (Rinquest and Simba, 2024). By creating such participatory spaces, institutions such as local government can encourage involvement from diverse groups, which enriches the decision-making processes as an array of voices and perspectives can be included in the processes (Asamoah and Lle, 2025). This strengthens the effectiveness of civic engagement in community development.

The above section presents various strategies to increase civic engagement in community development initiatives can be considers. This includes civic education and awareness. This is strategy emphasises the importance of being civically educated and aware. This means that individuals need to be educated to be able to respond to the needs of the community (Ballard et al., 2016). Furthermore, civic education equips individuals with the skills and knowledge to do this (Digdoyo, et al., 2024; Wyber et al., 2021). Civic education and awareness cultivate civic responsibility as one becomes aware of the issues present in their community and how they can actively participate in addressing these issues. Another strategy presented above is dialogue and mobilisation. Dialogues are an avenue that opens the door for community members with different backgrounds and different perspectives to come together and voice the out in pursuit of community informed solution which makes it easier to mobilise them (Westoby Peter, 2014). This is important, especially for formal civic engagement that take place in the form of community meetings. when community members and local government come to gather to have conversations on which best action that can be taken address community issues (Fourie and Der Waldt, 2021). This further extends to inclusive decision-making. As there has been a paradigm shift from only those in power making decisions for those on the ground to actively including them in the decision-making process. Inclusive decision-making processes in civic engagement activities ensures that those who are normally excluded from such processes are included to ensure that decisions that those who are affected by these decisions are given priority in influencing that decision (Maddaloni and Sabini 2022).

2.12. Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of civic engagement in community development. It reviewed the history of civic engagement, its significance in democratic communities, and the benefits of civic engagement in community development initiatives. From the literature reviewed, challenges

associated with promoting civic engagement in community development include the lack of participation from community members, power relations, and ineffective leadership. This chapter also presented strategies that can be adopted for effective engagement in community development. It also covered the legislative framework that can be used to support these strategies, and one of the responses to the lack of engagement is shifting from invited participatory spaces to those invented by community members because they are more responsive. The prevailing argument in this chapter is that inclusive and participatory practices are needed for effective civic engagement in community development initiatives. The succeeding chapter explains how the research design and methodology were carried out through this study. It also presents the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of the preceding chapter was to present the relevant literature on the intersection of civic engagement and community development. It further dealt with issues that promote and negatively affect civic engagement towards community development. Thus, the main purpose of this chapter is to discuss the two theoretical frameworks, namely, social capital and Arnstein Ladder of Citizen Participation, that underpin this study. This chapter commences with an exploration of the Social Capital theory, discussing its origin, justification, and relevance to this study. Thereafter, it discusses Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation which also serves as relevant frameworks for this study. This chapter also presents a discussion on how the theories complement each other in the context of the study. Finally, the chapter summary is presented.

3.2. Social Capital Theory

The Social capital theory has historical roots in concepts such as civics and civic engagement, gaining popularity in the 1980s and 1990s, define social capital as network-based resources. Social capital theory is built on the premise of relationships between people (Tshifhumulo et al., 2025). These social relationships encompass both individual and collective action (Ferlander and Mäkinen, 2025). According to Hauberer (2019), the main elements of social capital are trust, norms of reciprocity, and the networks of civic engagement. Furthermore, Hauber (2019) posits that if there is a high level of trust among people, there is a higher chance that these people will work together in their development efforts. Social trust grows to close sources, norms of reciprocity, and networks of civic engagement (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). The networks of civic engagement can either be horizontal or vertical (Gibson, 2001, Putnam 1995). Horizontal networks normally include people from the same status and power, whereas vertical networks are characterised by subordinates who are normally community members and superior officials (Grote, 2012). This kind of network is normally unstable (Putnam, 1995). In communities, horizontal networks are prevalent because of shared mutual trust, which encourages strong norms of reciprocity (Kambuku, 2024). Norms of reciprocity imply that people will help each other without expecting anything in return because of the level of trust among them (Tshifhumulo et al., 2025).

This balance is created by the shared values among people (Fonseca et al., 2018). Furthermore, in the South African context, social capital can be linked to Ubuntu. The interaction of poverty and inequality influences the chances of volunteering, the sense people give to their participation (Seabe, 2014). Understanding this interaction is important because volunteering is hailed as supporting democratic and participatory principles. In the South African landscape, volunteering is a form of expression of the Ubuntu Philosophy. Ubuntu is based on the Afrocentric concept of Africanism (Omodan and Dube, 2020). It is a Zulu word which means ‘humanity’. It is further mirrored by the expression ‘*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ which loosely translates to a person being a person through other people. The philosophy has principles that identify with humanness, mutual respect, mutual learning and common goals for the upliftment of the community (Kotze, 2024). When people volunteer, they reify the values of Ubuntu that link individuals through brotherhood and sisterhood (Swanson, 2007). Ubuntu is borne out of the philosophy that community strength comes of community support that is achieved through community support (Bobo and Arkhust, 2019). The decision to volunteer is to a certain extent determined by the actions and behaviours of others. As a result, it requires social capital, solidifying social embeddedness and the degree to which individuals are integrated into their communities (Seabe, 2014).

Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

The social capital theory suggests that capital can be in the form of bonding, bridging, or linking (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). Bonding social capital in communities reinforces homogeneous groups (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2025). It represents solidarity and reciprocity among people; therefore, strengthening itself while bridging social capital represents connections from the outside, which normally is beneficial to the inner group because they help in getting ahead instead of getting through issues (Poortinga, 2012). On the other hand, linking capital is a subset of bridging capital (Claridge, 2018). It represents relations between individuals with people in a higher stratum than themselves, such as government officials (Nguyen and Nguyen, 2025). Bonding capital refers to the relations amongst members of networks who are similar in some form (Putnam, 2000). It is among people from the same background, and is characterised with homogenous communities, who are more likely to come together when facing hardships, especially in surviving personal, emotional or economic hardships (Barker et al., 2022). This is because persons in these kinds of

networks are more likely to help or assist people who belong in the same network as themselves, mostly linked by the proximity of living near each other (Hawkins and Maurer, 2009). Bonding capital's social ties are created because the people share similarities such as language, ethnicity, culture and class, to which building and maintaining social capital through cohesion (Kyne and Aldric, 2019). It more focused on inward looking ties which encourage trust and cooperativeness among each other (Koul, 2024).

In addition, bridging capital is a result of networking outside normal social groupings (Claridge, 2018). It is inclusive and refers to the heterogeneous relationships among people (Murray et al., 2020). However, they are important as they can be used to procure resources and support from external networks (Putnam, 2000; Claridge, 2018). On the other hand, linking social capital sits between regular people and those in power (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). Linking capital is essential because it is a sub extension of bridging capital and can be used to procure resources and support from government or governmental organisations (Kyne, 2019). Linking capital is the extent to which individuals build relationships with institutions, such as government (Claridge, 2018). It is characterised by exposure and the development of new ideas and perspectives (Hawkins and Maurer, 2019). Linking capital is demonstrably central to the well-being of people, especially in disadvantaged communities (Claridge, 2018). This is because they extend beyond the immediate and familiar social environment. In the context of civic engagement and community development, these forms of capital enable communities to connect with influential actors, advocate more effectively for their needs, and participate meaningfully in governance processes. For marginalised groups, these types of social capital can play an empowering role, as they allow individuals to navigate complex systems, access resources that would otherwise remain unavailable, and influence decision-making spaces traditionally dominated by those in power. Overall, the presence of strong bridging and linking social capital reflects a community's capacity to engage beyond internal networks and interact with external networks that are important in understanding and facilitating civic engagement in community development initiatives

Relevance of Social Capital in the Study

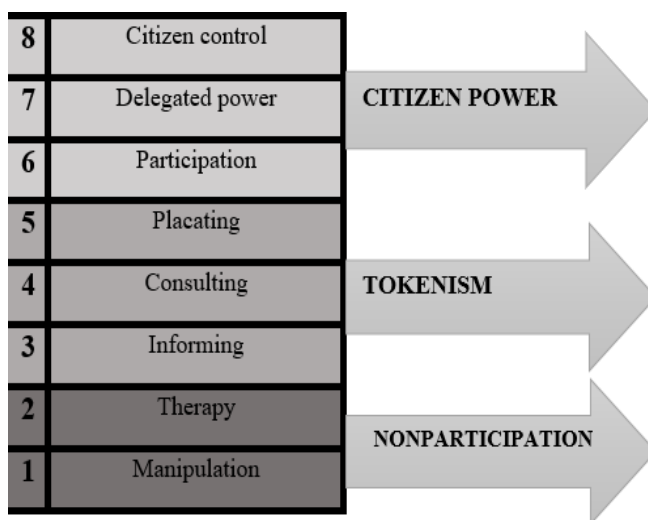
With the background of the social capital theory, the first and third objectives of this research study focused on exploring the perceptions of community members on the role of civic engagement in community development initiatives and exploring the challenges in promoting civic engagement

in community development initiatives (Nyamari, 2024). It provides an opportunity to understand how social networks, relationships, and norms in communities influence the level of engagement in civic activities. Furthermore, the social capital emphasises that communities with strong social connections and trust are much more likely to be engaged and active citizens in communities (Hauberer, 2019). When social ties are strong and individuals feel connected to one another, they are more likely to share information, mobilise collectively, and participate in activities aimed at improving their communities (Orazani et al., 2023). In contrast, when communities experience fractured relationships, lack of trust, or weak communication channels, civic engagement efforts often become limited or ineffective. Therefore, adopting this theory provides insights into the interplay of relationships present within the communities (Van Bakel and Horak, 2024), both among themselves and with external forces such as municipal officials as networks shape the level of participation in civic engagement activities in community development initiatives. Overall, adopting this theory as a lens in exploring the contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives can help understand how trust and social cohesion shape the willingness of individuals to participate in civic activities that strengthen community development.

By applying the social capital theory in this research study, it can then describe how the different relationships are organised in communities, which influence how they engage in civic activities aimed at promoting community development initiatives (Nyamari, 2024). Through this theory, the research objective can be used to further explore the prevalence of either bonding capital or bridging capital, which also influences civic engagement in community development initiatives (Poortinga, 2012). The bonding capital will be used to explore how strong it is within a community, which encourages active participation in local initiatives (Nguyen, 2025). The bridging capital can be used to explore the connection between outside links from the community, exploring the link between community members and municipal officials, and how the latter group enables or influences the level of civic engagement in community development initiatives (Nguyen, 2025). While this theory adequately explains the role of relationships in civic engagement in community development, it leaves a gap in understanding how the participation of individuals or collective groups occurs in civic activities that contribute towards tangible outcomes in community development initiatives; thus, the introduction of the theory explaining the participation of community members. The following section elaborates on Arnstein's ladder of participation.

3.3. Citizens' Ladder of Participation

This study further adopts the ladder of citizen participation to complement the social capital theory as a theoretical framework. To facilitate civic engagement in community development initiatives, the ladder of citizen participation can be used to describe the distinct levels of participation that are normally present (Asamoah and LLe, 2024). Arnstein's ladder of participation model was designed to help communities move away from manipulative and controlling ways of participation (Yende et al., 2025a). The ladder is also used to help facilitators or community development workers facilitate engagement in a participatory and empowering manner in local communities (Arnstein, 1969). This is important because the underrepresented and minority groups in communities can be empowered to make informed and meaningful decisions (Arnstein, 1969). The ladder of participation has eight steps and can be broken down into three categories: non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power (Hofer et al., 2024)).



Ladder of citizen participation

Source: Arnstein (1969: 217)

3.3.1. Non- participation

This part of the ladder explains that citizens are not actively involved in the decision-making processes (Yende et al., 2025). The rungs that make up this step are manipulation and therapy (Arnstein, 1969). Manipulation as a rung is at the bottom (Asamoah and LLe, 2024). It is in the

name of participation whereby citizens are placed on advisory boards under the false pretence to educate them or to engineer their support by feeding them information that those in power think is relevant, which blind sides them from receiving full information (Yende et al., 2025a). The rung of my manipulation is explained as a process used to pressure or manipulate the participation of citizens in favour of these and power (Fischer, 2022). Ultimately, this rung is merely used to prove that the people at the grassroots level are involved, to show and save face. As a result, those citizens are used as pawns and are a symbol acting as if they have participated in higher levels, and they dutifully spread the message that they have participated (Asamoah and LLe, 2024). Arnstein (1969) makes the use of opening a new centre in a local community, where local citizens who are part of the decision-making process in the adoption or building of the centre are used as a front of participation. Arnstein (1969) explains that these citizens may sign in on the adoption of these initiatives only to find that their participation is being controlled, a form of manipulation. The rung of therapy is used by those in power to adjust the values and attitudes of citizens (Yende, 2021). In such cases, the government tries to change or influence what citizens may think so that whatever they believe in better fits the narrative of development rather than allowing them to think for themselves (Hofer et al., 2024). In both these rungs, manipulation and therapy are used to expose how non-participative in nature they are, and the aim of these rungs is to cure and educate participants (Arnstein, 1969).

3.3.2. Tokenism

The second category of the ladder is made up of degrees of tokenism. Tokenism is an artificial appearance that is achieved by including a limited number of individuals from the majority group into positions of power (Kurt-Yimalaz and Surgevil, 2019). Tokenism is made up of three rungs, namely, informing, consulting, and placation (Arnstein, 1969). Informing is the first step of legitimate participation, through informing citizens of their rights and responsibilities (Yende et al. 2025). It is often flawed because it is based on a one-way trip, where officials are the ones disseminating information from their office to citizens, and citizens have little opportunity to influence the decision-making process (Arnstein, 1969). This consultation invites citizens' opinions. While this is another step towards genuine participation, if the consultation process is not combined with other modes of participation, it becomes difficult to ensure that the citizens' opinions are considered in the planning process (Masiya et al., 2019). The placation rung on the ladder is when citizens become or begin to have some sort of influence (Varwell, 2022). Here,

citizens are allowed to advise and plan, but those in power are the ones who can judge whether the plan or advice is actually feasible (Varwell, 2022). While in all these three rungs, a form of tokenism can be identified in the form of superficial involvement (Di Santo, 2023). Citizens are included in the decision-making processes as a front; that community members are participating.

3.3.3. Citizen control

The third category of the ladder is citizen control and is made up of three rungs: partnership, delegation, and citizen control (Arnstein, 1969). Citizen control embodies active participation and empowerment of citizens in affairs that affect them by being a central part of the decision-making processes (Yende, 2021). This shapes the actions that are taken by community members, which influences their sense of ownership and responsibility towards their own development (Lachapelle, 2008). Citizen control should allow community members to obtain most of the decision-making power or full managerial power (Arnstein, 1969). Furthermore, more citizen control advocate for simply allowing community members to demand and be given the degree of power and control which guarantees that participants, or community members can lead or govern projects in their own community. This allows them to be able to negotiate the extent to which outsiders can change conditions that they have created for themselves (Naficy, 2021). Rung seven, which is partnership, is when power is renegotiated between the government and community members (Gaber, 2019). The influence of the decisions that are taken is shared among them, shaping the relationship between local government and community members. (Gaber, 2019). Rung eight and nine, which are delegated power and citizen control (Arnstein, 1969). The dominance over the decision-making processes is handed over to the community, and they govern themselves and are responsible for the managerial aspects of their community development initiatives (Nel, 2018).

Relevance in the Study

The citizen's ladder of participation can be used to explain how to facilitate participation in civic engagement in community development initiatives (Hadija, 2025). The ladder the varying degrees of public participation, ranging from non-participation to tokenism and finally, to citizen control. In the context of this study, the second and third objectives of this research study are informed by this theory through exploring different types of civic engagement activities that individuals participate in to promote community development. This is so that it gives an understanding of the varying levels of participation in communities that influence the effectiveness of engagement in

development initiatives (Yusof et al., 2025). By exploring the different types of civic engagement activities that individuals participate in for community development. The ladder provides an explanation of how levels of participation differ. These varying levels of engagement influence the effectiveness of civic engagement in development initiatives. Communities situated at the lower rungs characterised by manipulation or mere information dissemination often have limited influence on decisions affecting their lives (Tanyanyiwa and Mufunda, 2021). In contrast, communities that are situated at the higher rungs such as partnership, delegated power or full citizen control are more likely to be involved in development projects. Furthermore, the challenges associated with community participation can also be understood through the lens of Arnstein's ladder. Issues such as ineffective leadership, power interests and conflicts and resistance to change often hinder communities from moving from framing their participation as tokenistic. Analysing these barriers within the ladder framework allows the study to explore whether community members remain in stages of non-participation, tokenism or have made progress to citizen control where active involvement and empowerment is at the centre. Adopting Arnstein work (1969) provides a foundation in understanding the extent in which civic engagement contributes to community development initiatives.

3.4. Synthesis of the theories

While the social capital theory and Arnstein's ladder of participation framework offer different explanations to how they work. They can easily be used to complement one another when trying to understand the contribution of civic engagement towards community development initiatives. The main tenets of the social capital theory are communication, trust, norms of reciprocity, and the networks of civic engagement (Hauberer, 2019). In communities where these tenets are more present and experienced more, or when social capital is high, community members are likely to develop a sense of community (Hauberer, 2019). Furthermore, community members are expected to contribute to the common good by participating in the community and can trust that even if they receive less effort than their efforts in one project or development initiative, in the long run, the benefits will even outweigh the costs (Nyamari, 2024; Salinger et al., 2024). Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation is a theory that was designed to explain how the participation of ordinary individuals takes form (Arnstein, 1969). It is made up of eight rungs that are categorised into three categories. These categories are developed to show how as participation moves up the ladder, the more genuine participation becomes as it is in the interest of those who are participating (Yende,

2021). In essence, it ascends from non-participation to citizen control (Arnstein, 1969). This is the highest rung which explains that it be community members have moved up the ladder to indicate they have total control of their participation (Yusof et al., 2025). The theories complement each other in the sense that when trust exists among community members, they are more likely to influence each other to participate in civic engagement activities (Hauberer, 2019). The theories will explain how, if community members have a trusting relationship (bridging and linking capital) towards municipal officials, they are more likely to participate in civic engagement activities, and if not, their participation is likely to decline (Yusof et al., 2025). Likewise, the relationship among themselves (bonding capital), if they trust each other, they can cause the next person to participate.

3.5. Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a framework to understand the roots where this study is grounded. The two theories that inform this study are the social capital theory and Arnstein's citizen's ladder of participation. The social capital theory as presented discusses how it has roots in civic engagement. It is rooted in trust, norms of reciprocity, and the networks of civic engagement and can exist in three types of capital, namely, bonding capital, bridging capital and linking capital. It argues that bonding capital exists between individuals who belong in the same group. This is normally found around immediate people that are within themselves that they interact with. Linking and bridging capital is characterised by relationships with people who exist within the community but with different hierarchies. Most commonly, this is found between community members and external links such as local authorities, municipal officials. This theory will help and guide this study to understand the kind of relationships that exist with the community both among themselves and the relationship that exist between the community and municipal officials. While this theory adequately explains the nature of relationships that exist. The element of participation is not considered. Hence, the introduction of Arnstein's ladder of participation as part of understanding the contribution of civic engagement towards community development initiatives. The ladder is divided into three categories, namely, non-participation, tokenism and citizen control. The three categories show a progression from non-participation to community members actively taking control of their participation. These theories complement each other to explain the relationship between municipal officials and community members, and the relationship between community members themselves and the kind of participation that occurs because of these relationships.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the two theoretical frameworks, namely, social capital theory and Arnstein's ladder of citizens' participation, that are adopted and used as the framework guiding this research study. The discussion of the chapters presented the principles of social capital such as trust and networks. Likewise, Arnstein's ladder provided an explanation of the degree of participation. Building on this, this chapter describes and explains how the research design and methodology were applied in this study during the data collection process. Following this introduction, this chapter focuses on describing the research design, paradigm and approach that was used. It also narrates the research methodology that was used, with a particular focus on the targeted population, sampling methods and procedures, the data collection process, and the steps that were followed during the data analysis process. Finally, it narrates the ethical considerations and discuss the data control measures used to ensure the quality of data. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

4.2. Research Design

This study used exploratory research design, which is conceptualised as a process of data exploration to uncover new and relevant insights (Swedberg, 2020). This design is believed to be particularly useful for studies seeking to clarify underlying issues, identify patterns, and generate preliminary understanding rather than test predetermined hypotheses (Thomann and Maggetti, 2020). It is also defined as a design that allows researchers to investigate complex social processes in their natural settings, enabling the discovery of meanings, relationships, and emerging themes that may not be evident through structured inquiry (Fisher and Aguinis, 2017). The researcher used this design because it went beyond describing the data that the researcher collected and explaining the different patterns that were discovered in the data collection process (Hunzkier and Blankenagel, 2021). Therefore, an explorative research design was suitable for studying the contribution of civic engagement in community development because it allowed the researcher to study a subject that had not been extensively explored (Swedberg, 2020). In the context of exploring the contribution of civic engagement in community development, the research design allowed the researcher to explore various aspects of the phenomenon such as the different forms of existing civic engagement activities and the challenges associated with these activities

(Thomann and Maggetti, 2020). To execute this using research design, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to explore the phenomenon of civic engagement on community development initiatives. The strength of the exploratory research design is that semi-structured interviews can be used to collect secondary data that needs to be interpreted (BookBoon, n.d.). Therefore, using semi-structured interviews was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to develop an interview guide that would explore the phenomenon of civic engagement on community development initiatives and guide how to interact with the participants. Additionally, because semi-structured interviews are flexible (Adams, 2015), it allowed the researcher to ask probing questions. This is aligned with the argument by Stebbins (2011) that exploratory research design is most appropriate when a researcher seeks to gain in-depth, nuanced insights into under-examined social issues through flexible and conversational forms of inquiry. It also supports Swedberg's (2020) view that exploratory studies allow researchers to follow emerging ideas and adapt questions as new understandings unfold during the research process. To further explore this, the interview guide was developed in a manner it had open-ended questions to allow the participants to share detailed and comprehensive answers to the questions to better understand civic engagement.

4.3. Research Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm informed this study's philosophical stance. Interpretivism is concerned with creating depth in the meaning by considering differences in circumstances, leading to different realities (Pervin and Mokhtar, 2022). The interpretive view emphasised the importance of subjective interpretations and meanings attached to the lived experiences of participants (Alhazmi and Kaufmann, 2022). To uncover the experiences of the participants, social construction, languages, shared consciousness, and other social interactions, the interpretivism paradigm was used to reveal them (Phillips, 2023). The paradigm encouraged the researcher to consider the complexity of human experiences and interactions to foster a deeper understanding of the phenomena that were being studied (Putnam and Banghart, 2017). When adopting an interpretive paradigm for a study exploring the contribution of civic engagement to community development, the researcher focused on understanding the subjective experiences and meanings that individuals attach to their involvement in civic activities that contribute to community development initiatives. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with giving meaning to

experiences that participants share with the researcher (Alhazmi and Kaufmann, 2022). Therefore, to apply this paradigm, using the semi-structured interviews to collect data, the researcher gave meaning to their experience through analysing these responses using the thematic technique (see chapter 4). By incorporating the interpretive paradigm, the researcher could analyse the data collected in a way that contextualised the participants' viewpoints on how civic engagement shapes community development efforts and the perceptions attached to civic engagement and community development initiatives. Through the paradigm, the researcher was able to identify various activities that municipal officials linked to civic engagement and community development, as well as how community members participated in civic activities and their impact on community development initiatives. This assisted the researcher in understanding the contribution of engagement in community development. Finally, through the interpretive paradigm, the researcher identified recurring themes about what hinders and promotes engagement in community development.

4.4 Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is intended to approach the world 'out there' and to understand, describe, and explain a social phenomenon from the inside, such as analysing responses from human subjects (Flick, 2017). Similarly, Kemparaj and Chava (2013) explain that the qualitative approach can be used to understand the social world order by exploring people's circumstances, experiences, and perspectives. The rationale behind adopting a qualitative research approach in this study was because it is exploratory in nature. This allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences, and motivations of individuals involved in civic engagement activities through the lenses of both community members and municipal officials. The approach was flexible and adaptable, which was ideal as it was based on the emerging findings because of varied insights, experiences, and opinions on the contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives. The qualitative approach was executed through semi-structured interviews. This is because the research approach is considered adaptable and particularly focused on preserving rich meaning to the data that was collected using the semi-structured interviews that was used to address the research questions to gain insights about civic engagement on community development initiatives (chinyere and Eze, 2023; Ugwu and Eze, 2023). The use of semi-structured interview guides allowing the researcher to probe for clarity and deeper understanding of their experiences in the participants' own words Overall, adopting this approach

qualitative the researcher to the rich and enigmatic world of the research participants, which allowed the researcher to appreciate the subjectivity of reasoning behind their lived experiences (Chawla and Sondhi, 2011).

4.5. Target Population and Sampling Procedure

A target population has been described as a specific, conceptually bounded group of potential participants representing the nature of the population of interest (Casteel and Birdier, 2021). Accordingly, this study was interested in includes community members and municipal officials because they are directly involved and affected by civic engagement in community development initiatives. These two groups were sampled and recruited using two non-probability techniques: convenience and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling is used to obtain information quickly and inexpensively (Ahmed, 2024). It is convenient because of the ease of availability of research participants (Chawal and Sondhi, n.d). It is commonly used in exploratory research when little is known about the phenomena being studied, helping understand the range of variability of responses that can be gathered from research participants (Chawal and Sondhi, n.d). In addition, according to Stratton (2021), convenience sampling is used when the researcher announces the study to the participants, and they decide whether they wish to participate in the study or not. Moreover, it is used to collect data from willing participants to increase the response rate and reduce non-response bias (Stratton, 2021). Therefore, Convenience sampling was a deemed an appropriate technique to sample community members because community issues directly impacted them and have lived experiences. The population of interest was accessible to the researcher, hence, convenience sampling. To conveniently sample, the researcher approached the participants by going to their residential homes and requesting if they could participate in the study once they knew the background information of the study. This was executed in line with the argument by Manohar *et al.*, (2018) who suggests that convenience sampling is flexible and allows the researcher to select accessible points including approaching them at home, work, or even public spaces. This led a total of twelve (12) community members who were available and interested in participating in the study. The reason for stopping at this number was because the data saturation point was reached at participant number 10. However, two (2) more participants were recruited to establish if there was no new information can be established. Even after the two (2) participants were recruited, there was still no new information which was an indication of data saturation. In

qualitative research, this is the point when the data collected from research participants no longer generates new responses and sufficiently addresses the research objectives (Mwita 2022).

In addition, the second sampling method was the purposive sampling technique. It is a call for special efforts to locate and gain access to individuals who have access to information that is of interest and is normally limited to a few individuals (Chawala and Sondhi, 2011). Furthermore, purposive sampling is a deliberate choice of selecting participants based on their qualities (Etikan et al., 2016). Therefore, for this study, a total of three municipal officials were purposively sampled. The municipal officials were key participants in this study because they had firsthand knowledge and experience used to understand the practices and challenges of civic engagement in community development (Brewer-Garcia, 2008; Mcgee, 2009). Initially, this study intended to purposively sample one community participation officer and two ward committee members. However, due to scheduling conflicts, the researcher purposively selected alternative municipal officials with related responsibilities. These included an official from the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) office, a public participation officer, and one ward committee member. This alternative selection of participants is in line with Dahal et al. (2024) who argues that the iterative nature of qualitative research that participant selection is not a one-time decision but an on-going process that may need adjustment as the study progresses. They were key informants because they could provide valuable insights into community development initiatives related to civic engagement within the municipality. Therefore, their perceptions are important because they can influence and promote civic activities that interest the community. In total, the sample size of this research study was fifteen (15) participants. Twelve (12) community members and three (3) municipal officials who provided their diverse and somewhat complementary experiences in civic engagement and its contribution to community development initiatives.

4.6. Data Collection Method and Process

The data collection method that was used was a semi-structured interview. This method employed a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions to gather further insight into the phenomenon being studied and served as a tool that assisted in the behavioural interview process (Adams, 2015). It provided specific questions and probing questions from the research participants' responses, allowing them to share their experiences in depth (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019). The rationale for choosing this data

collection method was its flexibility (Ruslin et al., 2022). While the researcher had predetermined questions through the interview schedule, there was space to ask more through probing questions that arose from the participants' responses, which helped the researcher explore unexpected insights into the contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives. Additionally, the method was also ideal because it was participant-oriented, which allowed the participants to freely express their thoughts and experiences in their own words in a conversational manner with the researcher as per the argument by (Mack et al., 2005). According to Buys et al., this method is rich when participants are allowed to share their stories in their own words which offers a nuanced insight to their experiences. Hence it was adopted in this study.

The data collection was done as follows: The researcher began with the interviews with the community members. These interviews were held between the end of October 2024 and mid-November 2024. They were conducted in the participants' home language (siSwati). This was done because according to Welch and Piekkari (2006), interviews conducted in the participants' home language builds rapport between the research participant and researcher to elicit their authentic experiences. Therefore, this was critical in the study to gain deeper insight into their lived experiences and the nuanced meanings they attach to civic engagement. Conducting interviews in siSwati also minimised misinterpretation, reduced response anxiety, and ensured that participants could articulate complex social realities without linguistic barriers. The average time of each interview was between thirty and 45 minutes (30-45). This corresponds with Jamshed (2014) who argues that semi-structured interviews in qualitative research on average should generally cover the duration of thirty minutes to an hour (30 to 60 minutes). According to Manohar *et al.*, (2018), when conveniently sampling, the researcher can approach research participants at their homes where they are most likely to be comfortable and participate freely. Following this guidance, interviews were conducted at participants' homes. The researcher approached various households and invited available individuals to participate in the study. Before and during the interview session, ethical principles were followed (see section 4.8). As per the argument by (Bless et al., 2013). Thus, to capture the rich data from the participant, the researcher also asked to use a recording device in the interview sessions. While most of the participants had no problem being recorded, two of the research participants were hesitant because they felt their insights could be traced back to them. In such cases, the researcher did not use the recording device. Al-Yateem (2012) argues that research participants recognise that their experiences, perspectives and actions

are being listened to, and that they may be judged by the next person. When the participant is aware that these experiences and perspectives are being recorded, they become more cautious in how they present their responses, and in some instances defer from being recorded. Therefore, when the participant declined the request to be recorded, the researcher carried out the interview without recording the interviews but rather kept a detailed record of the interview through notetaking.

In addition, the data collection process with municipal officials was slightly different. These interviews were held between the end of January 2025 and mid-February 2025. The interview guide developed in English because the working language in municipalities is English as it dominates in meetings and communication within Mbombela Municipality (Mhlongo, 2021). One interview with the municipal officials was held in English whereas, two of the municipal officials used both English and Siswati when responding to the researchers' questions. This is in line with McGareth et al. (2019) who argue that building rapport and establishing comfortable interaction in qualitative semi-structured interviews is important before and during the interview itself. Therefore, allowing the research participants to mix the two languages was appropriate so that they can convey their experiences clearly. The average time of each interview was between thirty and forty-five minutes (30-45). This corresponds with Jamshed (2014) who argues that semi-structured interviews in qualitative research on average should generally cover the duration of thirty minutes to an hour (30 to 60 minutes). According to Tajik et al. (2025), to purposively sample, the researcher can deliberately select individuals relevant to the research questions. Firstly, to recruit the potential municipal officials, the researcher had to go to the municipality to enquire about the relevant municipal officials and their duties and relevancy to this study. Hence, the identified municipal officials. Once the officials were identified, the researcher reached out to the municipality and set out appointment with them. After the municipal officials agreed to be interviewed, the dates of the interview were scheduled. On the day the interviews were conducted, the researcher followed the same procedure as the community members, relaying that their participation was voluntary. Before and during the interview session, ethical principles were followed (see section 4.8). As per the argument by (Bless et al., 2013). Thus, to capture the rich data from the participant, the researcher also asked to use a recording device in the interview sessions. All three municipal officials agreed to being recorded. The introduction of a recording device in line with who argues that recording devices offer a verbal record of the interview and allows the researcher to actively listen to the participant (McGrath et al., 2019).

4.7. Data analysis

This study employed the thematic analysis technique. Data analysis is the interpretation of data, creating processes that would allow insights that can be drawn from data collected from research participants, with a particular focus on the research objectives of the study (Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2022). Thematic analysis is a technique used to identify, analyse, and report patterns from a qualitative data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, the technique was used to follow step-by-step guidance on reading, coding, theming, and developing themes to read data that was collected from participants (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). The technique offered a deep contextual understanding of real-world issues by exploring people's beliefs, perspectives, and experiences of their realities. Therefore, thematic analysis was a suitable approach for exploring the contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives because it allowed the researcher to identify and analyse patterns or themes within the responses. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of data analysis. The following guide was used:

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the data set:

In line with Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher began by familiarising themselves with the data. This was done by reading through the data and transcribing the data. According to Point and Baruch (2023), the purpose of transcriptions is to enable the researcher to familiarise themselves with the collected data. In this step, the researcher translated the responses the participants (community members) gave to the researcher from their home language (Siswati) to English. This concedes Yunus *et al.* (2022) who argues that translations bring the views and perspectives of individuals not fully fluent in English into the global body of knowledge. Once all responses were translated, a transcript with all the participants, both community members and municipal officials' responses was created. Furthermore, the researcher read through the transcriptions several times to get the gist of the responses. This promotes the knowledge of transcripts and immersion in the data collected from research participants (Adeagbo *et al.*, 2022).

Phase 2: Generate initial codes:

After the above step, the researcher set to generate codes to the data set. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), generating initial codes can be linked to the specific research questions that the researcher developed and segmented of the research responses that are interesting and relevant can

be coded against the research question as this process is important in transforming raw data into meaningful insights. To apply this, the researcher read through the data again, with the research questions in mind and identified responses that were closer to responding to the research questions that had been developed. From this, the researcher made judgements about the meaning of the responses that would address the objectives. This is in line with the argument made by Linneberg Korsgaard (2019), that coding data sets allow the researcher to provide how existing concepts are reflected to discover novel insights. By applying and assigning codes, this allowed the researcher to search for the themes.

Phase 3: Searching for themes

This led the researcher to search for themes within the coded responses. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that there are no set in stone rules that make up themes. a theme is categorised by its significance (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The process of generating themes is by making connections to codes. In this instance, themes were considered as big ideas that tie everything together (Naeem et al., 2023). Identifying themes from the codes that the researcher recognised involved the processes of synthesising and interpreting, where each code is grouped together based on their shared meaning (McLeod, 2024). To search for themes, the researcher collated the codes from the data set that could fall under a single theme. For instance, several codes related to explaining civic engagement in the community were collated into the theme ‘perceptions of civic engagement from municipal officials and community members’ (see chapter 5).

Theme 04: Reviewing themes

The themes were further reviewed and refined to confirm if they aligned with the initial codes. During this phase of data analysis, the researcher reviews and remodifies the themes that were developed in the previous phase (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). The purpose of reviewing the themes that the researcher has identified is to check if the data collected is connected to the themes such that they are sufficiently coherent (Braun and Clarke, 2021). This is so that the themes match the original codes. To apply this, the researcher refined the identified themes so that they could better fit the data set. The rationale behind this was so that the researcher ensured that the themes were consistent and the data within each theme was still captured (McLeod, 2024). This iterative process that strengthens the process of data analysis through quality checking and ensuring that the themes accurately and comprehensively represent the data.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

Once the themes were reviewed, the researcher moved to the defining and naming themes. According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), defining the theme is figuring out the themes relate to one another. Defining themes involves developing concise definitions of the themes to convey central meaning to a reader (McLeod, 2024). Furthermore, the process of defining themes should go beyond simply paraphrasing the data extracts but should rather attempt to interpret the meaning and significance that is drawn from the theme. To apply this, the researcher defined and named the emerging themes to capture the responses that were being analysed. This was done by defining the theme according to its relevance to the research questions. After this process, the researcher started writing up the analysis of the data collected, keeping in mind the research objectives to show how the themes responded to the research questions.

Phase 6: Produce the Report:

Finally, the researcher generated a final write-up that presented the themes that emerged, supported by quotes from the participants' responses. The themes that emerged from the research participants' responses are presented in chapter 5.

4.8. Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations that were adhered to were meant to protect the research participants from harm and to ensure that trust and transparency between the researcher and research participants were established regarding how the study was conducted. Ethical considerations have a particular resonance due to the in-depth nature of the study process involved, especially in qualitative studies (Arifin, 2018). Ethical considerations are concerns with the principles that govern a researcher's conduct behaviour to protect human participants in research (Esposito and Evans-Winters, 2022). The following ethical considerations were adhered to:

4.8.1. Prior to Conducting the Study

Before the data collection process, the ethical clearance letter from the University of Mpumalanga was issued (ethical reference no: *Ref: UMP/Nsubunga/08/2024*) to the researcher as approval to conduct the study (see appendix). Thereafter, a gatekeeper's letter was requested from the municipality and was it was issued (see appendix G), which gave the researcher approval to conduct the study in Kanyamazane, located within the Mbombela Local Municipality. Data were

collected through semi-structured interviews. Therefore, the following ethical issues were considered. This included the matters of informed consent and voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity, privacy, respect for autonomy, minimising harm, transparency, and data security as identified by Bless et al. (2013).

4.8.2. Non maleficence

Non maleficence in research is the act of not harming research participants that are participating in the study (Bless et al., 2013). To achieve this, the researcher ensured to make the research participants informed that their participation is informed by explaining to them the purpose of the study, how it is only for educational purposes and will not negatively affect them. The researcher also ensured that the participants' personal information such as their names will not be shared in reporting the findings, instead, participant identifiers were used such as participant 001 (community member). These actions ensured that the research was conducted ethically so that their participation causes them no harm.

4.8.3. Autonomy

Autonomy is the freedom of an individual action and choice to decide whether they should participate in the study without coercion from the researcher (Bless et al., 2013). To achieve this, the researcher first explained the purpose of the study. With the information that the researcher relayed to the participants they could freely decide if they wanted to be involved in the study. Once they agreed to participate, the researcher asked the research participants to sign the consent form indicating that they understood their role in the study which further emphasised that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any given moment as this gives them control over their participation.

4.8.4. Respect For Participants' Rights, Dignity and Fidelity

Human beings have legal rights, and no research study should violate any of these rights when participants are recruited, and dignity and self-respect should always be protected (Bless et al., 2013). All individuals who are involved in a research study must be treated with respect and trust, especially the ones who volunteer their time in engaging with a researcher. Furthermore, the researcher is not allowed to use language that might make the participant feel disempowered or come across as demeaning (Mirza et al., 2022). Hence, the semi structured interviews held with community members were held in the participants' home language (siSwati) so that they are

respected, while the municipal officials were interviewed using English as is the municipality's medium of instruction. . Above all, the researcher considered all participants as valuable not just as tools to collect data. The principle of fidelity in research implies faithfulness and keeping promises between researchers and research participants (Bless et al., 2013). To achieve this, the researcher honored the promise to keep the research participant identities undisclosed for the whole duration of the study and protected at collected.

4.8.5. The Right to Consent

Informed consent in this study meant that the ethical process was based on the principle that participants were able to autonomously make an informed decision regarding their participation. Valid informed consent required voluntary disclosure and understanding that participants were committing themselves to a research study (Catarina et al., 2024). To ensure that informed consent was adhered to, the researcher first provided the research participants with key information about the study, such as the purpose of the study. The researcher then gave the research participants a chance to ask any questions they might have had regarding the study and made sure that they could fully understand what they were committing themselves to. This ensured that the participants willingly and knowingly agreed to participate in the research study. After this agreement, the researcher requested the research participants' written consent by signing the informed consent document.

4.8.6. Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality in this study meant protecting the privacy rights of the individuals participating in the research study. This meant that the researcher was not allowed to disclose information about the participants, and when it was necessary to do so, it was the researcher's responsibility to disclose information in certain contexts while ensuring that the participants' information remains protected (Colosi et al., 2019). Similarly, the anonymity ethical consideration in this study advocated for the protection of human subjects involved in research while simultaneously providing a rich and detailed account of the social life or phenomenon that was being narrated (Kang and Hwang, 2023). To ensure confidentiality and anonymity in this research study, the researcher gave unique code names to the research participants.

4.8.7. Privacy and Data Security

Privacy emphasised the protection of the participant's personal information. In alignment with the alignment with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), that states that it is prohibited to process personal information (Staunton et al., 2021), the researcher ensured that participants' personal data that was collected, processed, stored, and used in a manner that protected their rights to confidentiality and privacy. Data security was a critical aspect in research, considering the era of technology we live in, ensuring the circulation and storage of data collected was essential to protect participants' information. This ethical consideration also prevented unauthorised access to data that was collected from research participants, which could potentially harm participants if their information were leaked (Ye and Tan, 2023). To ensure that data collected from participants was secure, the researcher made use of a secure storage system, for instance, encrypting the files with a password. Secondly, the researcher limited access to the data by only sharing it with trusted individuals who were requested to sign a confidentiality agreement. Lastly, to anonymise the data, the researcher removed any identifiable information such as the participants' particulars.

4.9. Data Control Measures

Data control measures are used to ensure that data findings are credible and trustworthy (Kouam 2024). The data control measures in place in this study were trustworthiness, validity, and reliability to maintain data quality.

4.9.1. Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue four criteria that parallel the quantitative standards of validity and reliability which are truth value, credibility, consistency and neutrality. Truth value is the confidence the researcher has towards research findings. To achieve this, the researcher conducted interviews with the research participants in their home language so that they are able to concisely share their experiences. This is supported by Welch and Piekkari (2006) whereby it is argued that using the primary language of the research participants provides high quality information.

4.9.2. Credibility and Consistency

Credibility and consistency are how much the research findings reflect the participants' experiences and how the study can be replicated and achieve the same results. To achieve this, the researcher has described details that were followed to conduct the study to replicate the findings. Neutrality as the last criteria is more concerned with the neutrality of the data which can be

achieved through triangulation (Kakar et al., 2023). Furthermore, Morse et al. (2002) argue that to achieve reliability and validity in qualitative studies, the researcher should follow verification strategies. The strategies argued is that the research questions and research methodology adopted should be compatible because qualitative research is interconnected. In this study, this was achieved by using research questions to develop an interview guide that would address the questions the study wanted to explore. To match this, data were collected using semi-structured interviews to explore the participants' experiences. The sampling methods, purposive and convenience sampling, and thematic analysis for data analyses to identify recurring patterns within the participants' response. Together, the presented research questions and methodology provided the researcher a strong foundation for the exploratory study. Furthermore, the activity of collecting and analysing data and refocusing research questions occurs in qualitative studies (Maxwell, 2012).

4.9.3. Validity

Validity in this kind of research is not a one step process when conducting the study but is maintained throughout the study. To maintain validity of the research findings then researchers should consider the act of member checking and triangulation. According to McLeod (2024), member-checking in qualitative research is an act whereby the researcher shares their interpretations with the research participants to ensure that the essence of their responses is captured correctly. To check the participants' responses, the researcher would read back their response to the participants to check if they had accurately captured their responses and to clarify if their responses were not lost in translation. Another act of maintaining validity of the research results. is through triangulation. Triangulation minimises personal biases by comparing research findings with other studies (Maxwell, 2012; Bans-Akute Tiimub, 2021). To apply this, in the data analysis chapter the researcher presented, the research finds parallel to the findings of their studies to maintain data quality.

4.10. Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to give a narrative description of how this study was conducted. The exploratory research design was adopted in this study because of its ability to uncover and explore new insights in the context of exploring the contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives. Paired with this research design was the qualitative approach,

which was used to explore the lived experiences of the participants, with a particular focus on how they narrated their different perspectives when responding to the questions asked by the researcher. This research study was underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm because it focuses on exploring the subjective interpretations and meanings attached to the lived experiences of participants. This chapter also elucidated the research methodology, including the identification of the target population and the adopted sampling techniques. It was determined that community members and municipal officials are this study's target population. The rationale behind having these two distinct groups was that community members are the ones who participate in civic activities in community development initiatives. At the same time, municipal officials are primarily seen as the facilitators of civic activities in community development initiatives. Community members were conveniently sampled, while municipal officials were purposively sampled. For both groups of participants, the semi-structured interviews were used to elicit their experiences. This chapter further explained how data were analysed manually using the thematic analysis technique. Lastly, it described the ethical considerations that were adhered to and outlines how the data control measures were considered to preserve the quality of data. The succeeding chapter will present and analyse the data findings from the research participants.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation and Analysis

5.1. Introduction

The preceding chapter explained the procedure followed to conduct this study. This study sought to explore the contribution of civic engagement to community development initiatives in Kanyamazane township, Mbombela Local Municipality. The chapter also detailed the research design, sampling methods, and data collection techniques employed to ensure the study's reliability and validity. This foundation sets the stage for the next chapter, which presents and analyzes the findings derived from the collected data. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to present the research findings. To address the objectives of this study, a qualitative research design was adopted, with semi-structured interviews as the data collection method. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data collected. This chapter is organized as follows: The first part presents the demographic profile of the research participants, followed by discussions of the major themes: factors contributing to low levels of civic engagement in community development initiatives, civic activities that foster community development, and the challenges and benefits of civic activities in communities. This chapter concludes with a summary.

5.2 Demographic Profile of Participants

The table below presents the demographic profile of the fifteen (15) individuals who participated in this research study. The profile is based on individuals' gender, age category, educational level, and employment status.

Participant number	Participant position	Gender	Age category	Education status	Employment Status
Participant 001	Community Member	Female	50 and above	No formal education	Self-employed
Participant 002	Community Member	Female	30-39	Secondary Education	Unemployed
Participant 003	Community Member	Female	20-29	Secondary Education	Employed
Participant 004	Community Member	Female	20-29	Tertiary Education	Unemployed
Participant 005	Community Member	Male	30-39	Tertiary Education	Employed
Participant 006	Community Member	Female	20-29	Tertiary Education	Unemployed

Participant 007	Community Member	Female	20-29	Secondary Education	Employed
Participant 008	Community Member	Female	20-29	Secondary Education	Unemployed
Participant 009	Community Member	Male	30-39	Secondary Education	Unemployed
Participant 010	Community Member	Female	30-39	Secondary Education	Unemployed
Participant 011	Community Member	Male	20-29	Secondary Education	Unemployed
Participant 012	Community Member	Male	30-39	Secondary Education	Unemployed
Participant 013	Municipal official	Male	30-39	Tertiary Education	Employed
Participant 014	Municipal official	Female	40-49	Tertiary Education	Employed
Participant 015	Municipal official	Female	30-39	Secondary Education	Employed

Figure 4.1 Demographic profile of participants

The table above presents the demographic profile of the research participants in this study. The table shows that five males and ten females participated in this study. The profile indicates that the 20-29 age group had 6 participants, which is 1 fewer than the 30-39 age group. The age groups 40-49 and 50 had the fewest participants, with only one participant in each age group. The level of education of the research participants indicates that most hold secondary education (9 participants), while the next-highest qualification is tertiary (5 participants). Only one research participant has no formal education. Most research participants reported being unemployed (8), followed by formal employment (6). Only one research participant disclosed that they are self-employed.

5.3. Participants' Perceptions of Civic Engagement

This study found that participants hold different perceptions of civic engagement. For example, community members who participated in this study perceive it as an action to improve their community, whereas municipal officials perceive it as an approach to achieving community development. Here are some of the participants' responses:

Participant 001 (community member): *"You mix with people from around your community and think of ways to uplift the community."*

This view from Participant 001 illustrates that civic engagement is solution-oriented, involving community members in developing ways to address community issues. It corresponds with the following view by Participant 002 (Community member):

“As I understand it, this means getting involved in the affairs of the community to satisfy the community's needs.”

The above responses reflect community members' perceptions of civic engagement. Responses range from coming together with fellow community members to address community issues, to participating in activities that improve the community, to bringing about change within the community. Doolittle and Faul (2013) explain that community members' perceptions of civic engagement are related to individuals' acknowledgment that they can and should make a difference in enhancing their local community development and that they also serve as catalysts for community change. From these responses, civic engagement is driven by community members, who choose the solutions pursued. This highlights the need for strong relationships and mutual understanding within the community. In a study by Clayton et al. (2010), it is argued that strong community relationships are essential for effective civic engagement, as they can encourage learning, growth, and acceptance of each other's ideas. Additionally, central to civic engagement is active involvement in the community through participation to change, alter, or improve their living conditions. Interestingly, municipal officials had different perceptions of civic engagement. Here is one of the participants' responses:

Participant 013 (Municipal official) *“With me, the concept of civic engagement is aligned with community development. So, what our department does is champion community development processes and work with various stakeholders. So, civic engagement must be linked with community development.”*

The above response from the municipal official aligns with the findings of Corbett and La Dentec (2018) that municipal officials' perceptions of civic engagement are multifaceted, combining various departmental efforts to bridge the gap between government and community members and attain desired community development outcomes. From this, we gather that civic engagement does not occur in isolation but is also connected to community development, guided by different

departments, to initiate and support development within the community and address the socio-economic living conditions of community members. Championing the process of development in local communities is closely linked to the active participation of those whom the development is intended to benefit. This suggests that municipal officials view themselves as advocates who empower local community members to participate in civic activities that improve their lives. This is also achieved through collaborating with different stakeholders. Municipal officials' overall perception of civic engagement is that it must be intentionally linked to community development to benefit the community. Community members' perceptions of civic engagement emphasize participation to address community needs, while the municipal official's perception is more closely tied to following processes and linking it to the community development approach. The different perceptions of civic engagement from community members and municipal officials indicate that civic engagement operates at different levels of impact. One is more action-based, whereas the other is from an institutional standpoint and may not be quickly reflected in the community, which can cause a disconnect about when and how civic engagement can occur.

5.4 Identifying and describing civic engagement activities

This study established that two primary forms of civic engagement, organised community-driven groups and community forums, were commonly used as means of expressing community concerns among the study participants. These initiatives serve as platforms for voicing grievances about pressing issues affecting South African communities, including high unemployment rates, poverty, inequality, and frequent service-delivery challenges. The participants indicated that community forums are normally organised around issues to debate and engage on socioeconomic issues. For instance, Participant 004 (Community member) expressed the following:

“There are community meetings organized by municipal officials where people can debate and deliberate on community issues.”

This view from Participant 004 illustrates that civic engagement can occur through participation in local authority community meetings and discussion of community issues. While this view indicates a formal channel for community members to engage directly with local authorities, some participants noted that the outcomes of such meetings may not yield tangible results in the community, leading to community-led civic engagement in the form of protest action. Here is Participant 002's response (community member):

“The other one I know of is in the form of protesting, especially when there is a need in the community, or community meetings do not yield the desired result. Often, it happens when there is a shortage of water, say about two weeks without water coming out from the taps. That is when we take to the streets to protest.”

From the participant’s response, community meetings, where individuals interact with local government representatives, are platforms for presenting grievances. According to Kgobe *et al.* (2025), community meetings promote public participation in community interactions and integrate their inputs into local governance practices when responding to complaints about the socioeconomic conditions they live in. Protests occur when the local government fails to meet its basic needs, such as access to water. Therefore, their protests are a manifestation of civic engagement. Protests occur when democratic institutions fail to deliver promises to the public. Haue *et al.* (2017) argue that civic engagement in the form of protests results from agitation towards governance, reflecting the disconnect between communities' expectations and government performance. From the above response, protests represent an active dissatisfaction with how communities are served, as their local issues, such as access to water, are not addressed. They are used to express their emotions and to demand change and better access to water in the community. From the above excerpt, it can be argued that community members see protests as a necessity to draw the local government's attention when their needs are not met or when the invited space for participation fails.

Community-Led initiatives for social well-being

The other form of civic engagement is organised, community-driven initiative groups that render community service. Here are some of the Participant responses: Participant 003 (community member):

“There is also a marathon. It is usually organized by a local pastor. The goal of the marathon is to promote healthy lifestyles.”

This view from participant three illustrates that civic engagement can occur within community-driven groups initiated within the community. Correspondingly, participant 007 (Community member) expressed the following:

“Volunteer work such as offering free services to organizations like Tfolalwati to share skills and knowledge to equip the youth in the community to be more fit for job opportunities.”

This view from the seventh participant implies civic engagement as a community service through volunteering in a skills development center to equip other community members with skills.

From the presented responses, it can be gathered that civic engagement can also occur in the form of community-driven initiative groups and community service. According to Tsoriyo (2024), community-driven initiative groups and community services allow communities to identify, plan, and implement projects concerned with the well-being of the individuals participating, as it is tailored specifically to meet their needs. There are various civic activities within the community, and this type is non-political and can include service provision to meet societal needs in areas such as food, health, education, and training, all contributing to the common good of those within the community (Ardoin et al., 2023). From the above excerpt, Participant 003 mentions a local marathon organised by one of the local pastors to promote healthy living. This indicates that civic engagement can be non-political as the pastor is not affiliated with any external groups, such as political parties or governmental affiliations. Therefore, this can be considered a people's movement. This is similar to the case of the Abahlali movement, which was not founded by non-governmental organisations, had no political affiliation, and received no donor funding, yet was created autonomously (Pithouse, 2009). The second excerpt from Participant 007 illustrates that volunteering at the youth development centre Tfolalwati, as a form of civic engagement, extends their skills at the centre to assist the youth in securing the skills and knowledge required for employment. Both responses from the participant indicate that non-political or non-formal civic engagement can be undertaken voluntarily to address a community deficiency, such as poor health or a lack of practical skills to approach employment opportunities. Therefore, it can be deduced from the participants that civic engagement can occur formally and informally. Formally, it occurs when community members engage with local authorities in community meetings. When these meetings are unfruitful, community members may decide to take action through protests to express their dissatisfaction. Non-formal education can occur when individuals volunteer to provide a service to address a community deficiency.

5.5 Factors contributing to Low levels of Civic engagement

This study found that various factors contribute to low levels of civic engagement in Kanyamazane. Some of these factors include mistrust of authorities and political institutions, limited resources and time constraints, limited awareness, limited participation, and socio-economic backgrounds. This section explores these factors in detail.

5.5.1. Corruption

The findings of this study reveal that the participants believed that corruption is one of the factors contributing to low levels of civic engagement. This creates a level of mistrust toward municipal officials, hindering civic engagement in community development initiatives.

Participant 006 (Community member) stated the following:

“I believe there are many challenges, but the first barrier is corruption that is going around.”

Based on the following remark, the participant believes that low levels of civic engagement can be attributed to corrupt municipal officials, and this causes a mistrust of local authorities. According to Voce, Morgan, and Cubitt (2024), when individuals in communities perceive that municipal corruption is prevalent in municipalities or municipal officials, they are unlikely to participate in civic engagement activities. The excerpt of the participant’s response suggests that corruption impeded their civic engagement because there is a form of mistrust between a community member and a municipal official. Furthermore, Putnam (2000) argues that trust is one of the important keys to relationships with authorities, and its absence can weaken the motivation to participate civically. The literature highlights that ineffective leadership is a common trait within South African Municipalities (Dirk, 2018). Mbombela Local Municipality is also not immune to this trait (Maphanga, 2022). This response highlights that when participants believe municipal officials are corrupt and act in their own interests rather than the public interest, this can demotivate civic participation, as they may see their civic engagement as manipulated. This can deter participants altogether. Therefore, it can be inferred from the participant’s response that perceiving corruption by local authorities weakens motivation to participate in community civic engagement activities.

5.5.2. Inadequate Resources and Time Constraints

The research findings indicate that while some participants may want to be civically engaged to promote community development initiatives, it is quite difficult to do so when they have other commitments, such as work, making it difficult to juggle both. The findings also suggest that when there are insufficient resources to support their efforts to be civically engaged, they may be discouraged and feel no need to participate. Here is one of the responses from Participant 008 (community member):

“To tell you the truth, civic engagement takes a lot of time. Some of us work, so we are unavailable to participate in civic activities.”

This statement from one of the participants highlights the practical barriers to civic participation, particularly the tension between livelihood demands and community involvement. It suggests that while individuals may value participation, economic responsibilities take precedence. The need for resources, money, and support emerges as a key factor in limiting civic engagement, considered as structural constraints. This aligns with the broader literature, which concurs that time constraints limit people’s participation in community development initiatives. For example, Weitkamp (2014) writes about how time unavailability is one of the barriers to civic engagement, as individuals have other pressing commitments. Also, Yende (2023) claims that time constraints limit their participation levels because other commitments are given higher priority than civic engagement. Similarly, Participant 007 (Community member) had this to say:

“Differing daily routines and schedules can affect individuals' participation. Individuals who have more responsibilities in the household or at work, or individuals with busier schedules, are not going to participate in a lot of activities in the community as compared to individuals with more flexible schedules.”

From the above response, the participant shares those different responsibilities, such as taking care of households or going to work. Formal employment plays a role in an individual's decision to participate in civic life. The response indicates that having more of these responsibilities is unlikely to be associated with civic engagement. Manuwa (2024) argues that the benefits of civic participation may take time to manifest, leading to hesitation in participating. In this case, responsibilities such as household duties or work that give them rewards within a specified period

(monthly or weekly), a salary, while the fruits of participating in civic activities might only be seen over an unspecified period, might make them hesitate to participate. Bezzo and Jeanett (2023) also affirm this research finding, noting that the lack of resources and time availability reduces community members' inclination to be civically engaged in community development initiatives. With fewer readily available resources for community members to be civically engaged, opportunities for engagement also decrease, hindering their efforts and further reducing their engagement in community development initiatives. Therefore, it can be inferred from the participants' responses that a lack of resources and time can serve as a barrier to civic engagement and participation in civic activities.

5.5.3. Lack of Awareness and Civic Education

The evidence from the research participants suggests that they are unaware of what is happening in the community and therefore cannot participate in civic engagement activities. Here is one of the responses from Participant 009 (community member):

“I feel like I do not exactly know what's happening, which might be why I am not really involved in anything in the community.”

Based on the following remark, the study participants seem not fully aware of what is happening in their communities. Similarly Participant 011 (Community member) had the following sentiment:

“How will you participate if you don't know anything. You can't make the right decisions, and you end up participating for the sake of saying you have participated.”

This view underscores that the lack of civic education also hinders individuals' participation in civic activities. This is similar to the lack of understanding of government processes, which can also contribute to low levels of civic engagement. This was a response from Participant 013 (Municipal official):

“We learn that communities are lacking in terms of understanding processes such as budget allocation and what constitutes prioritization.”

When individuals are uninformed or ignorant of their surroundings and are insufficiently educated about how to be civically engaged, they may be unaware of civic efforts, which contribute to declining civic engagement (Galston, 2007). This poses a risk of causing a disconnect from

communities, which further limits their participation as they would fail to recognize the importance of being civically engaged to promote community development. Furthermore, because of their limited knowledge of current community affairs and their lack of understanding of how to be civically engaged, they cannot communicate their lived experiences, which could shape responses to their community issues. Civic education and awareness should be at the forefront of communities, as it teaches community members how they can be best civically engaged according to their abilities and resources, and impart critical thinking skills that can prompt specific solutions for them. Therefore, it can be deduced from the participants' responses that being unaware of what is happening within the community they exist in serves as a barrier towards participating in civic engagement activities.

5.5.4. Unequal power relations

The study findings established that power plays may affect participation in civic engagement activities. This was expressed by Participant 006 (community member):

“Those who are in power believe they know better than those at lower levels. Whereas the truth of the matter is that people in power do not know the real problems people in communities face as compared to community members themselves, who know what they really need.”

Similarly, another response was that unequal power can take the form of being more educated than community members, which can also hinder individuals from actively participating because they perceive them as more educated, thus considering community members as spectators in their development. Here is a response from Participant 005 (community member).

“Unequal power occurs to different degrees; it's between the government and us. This is because they think they know better because they are educated.”

The findings indicate a power imbalance when participating in or promoting civic engagement activities. Unequal power relations within the community may be at play. From the excerpt, the participant reflects the power conflicts, “those in power,” pointing to municipal officials, and how they interact with community members. The response suggests that the power conflict may manifest in the form of hierarchical power imbalance, as those in power, who are municipal officials, can assume they know better, dismissing the inputs of community members. Ohmer

(2022) reflects how professionals (municipal officials) focus on ways for people to adjust to their environment. Rather than organizing social activities and community development initiatives within the community. External powers (municipal officials) are not necessarily embedded in the community and are not familiar with it, so they can easily marginalize the community's voice. These external powers prioritize their own interests, further disconnecting community members, civic engagement, and community development. While professionalization can highlight certain skills and resources, it can also exclude community members from active civic engagement. Therefore, it can be inferred from the participants' responses that unequal power relations exist, as they may fail to understand the circumstances of those they serve.

5.5.5. Redundancy and Lack of Participation

The study's findings suggest a lack of civic engagement due to individuals' other commitments. Here is Participant 006's (community member) response:

“People do not participate because they do not see change; they regard their participation as redundant.”

The above response from participant six illustrates that individuals do not participate because they do not see a difference in their participation. The participant sees that participation does not yield any change, which causes them not to participate. Interestingly, Participant 007 (a community member) shared that low participation levels are due to other commitments and busier schedules.

“Individuals with busier schedules are most likely not going to partake in a lot of activities in the community....”

The above insights indicate that low civic engagement stems from a lack of participation in civic activities. This is because participants do not see the impact of their civic engagement activities in the community. Not seeing the fruits of your own engagement can demotivate participation, leading to declining participation rates (Saunders, 2009). Those with limited availability are unlikely to participate in civic engagement. The lack of participation in civic activities is a barrier as it alienates individuals from the community (Brady et al., 2020). If participation is low, diverse voices and perspectives cannot be heard or acted on, leading to solutions that do not reflect the community's needs due to a lack of local insights. This further prevents individuals from engaging in civic life. Due to low participation, there is a lack of ownership and responsibility towards

community development initiatives. This leads to a further decline in supporting civic activities that promote community development. When community members are disconnected from what is happening in the community they live in, unaware of the problems that plague it, or not part of the group that shapes solutions, it leads to a disconnect and a lack of feeling the need to participate in civic efforts within the community. Therefore, it can be deduced from the participants' responses that a lack of participation in civic engagement activities stems from not seeing the tangible difference their participation makes and from busier schedules, which make it unlikely an individual will participate, further disconnecting them from the issues faced in the community.

5.5.6. Socio-Economic Backgrounds

The study found that the socioeconomic background of the research participants plays a significant role in their participation in community civic engagement activities. Participant 007 (community member) following sentiment:

“Lack of participation in civic engagement is connected to poverty and unemployment.”

The above responses from seven participants indicate that poverty and unemployment are deterrents to civic engagement in the community. In a similar tone, it corresponds with the view of Participant 001 (Community member):

“My sister, the problem in this community is poverty. As I said, we live on grant money. We don't have much to live on.”

The above insights from the research participants suggest that they are unemployed and receiving social grants, which all point back towards being poor. It is suggested that some participants are social grant recipients and view these grants as a means of financial security. According to Nittitornyada et al. (2024), higher income is directly associated with greater civic engagement, which, in turn, encourages greater participation. This relationship exists because economic resources enable individuals to access and participate comfortably in civic activities. Economic forces influence the types of activities individuals participate in; the higher their income, the more likely they are to have flexible working hours and stronger social networks that make it easier to access civic activities, thereby enhancing their ability to influence political and social processes (Arvanitidis, 2017). Therefore, participants' responses indicate that individuals who depend on social grants for survival are more likely to be concerned about meeting their immediate needs.

Participants' civic engagement can also be limited because they must still navigate or worry about how to make ends meet. These individuals are preoccupied with part-time jobs that can add to the little they receive from the social grants, and because they are not participating due to limited resources or capital and energy at their disposal, their voices remain in the trenches, further sidelining them from actively participating in civic activities.

5.6. Approaches Towards Increasing Civic Engagement Participation in Community Development Initiatives

The study identified different approaches to increase civic engagement in community development initiatives. Some of these approaches include media visibility, civic education, and social mobilization. This section explores these approaches in detail.

5.6.1. Media Visibility

The findings of this study reveal that to increase civic engagement, social media can be used to reach more people in the community. Here is one of the participants' responses from Participant 003 (community member):

“An approach that can be used to increase civic engagement is through social media. Almost everyone is on the internet. If you can post there. You can reach more people.”

This view from the participant suggests that a social media presence can help communicate how individuals can be civically engaged and reach more people, as more people nowadays have access to the internet. Similarly, this is what Participant 007 (Community member) had to say:

“Different age groups, such as individuals in their early years, are more likely to participate because there is a lot of pressure through social media and general conversations with the message to become the change.”

This view from the participant suggests that some individuals are likely to participate in civic engagement because of being influenced by conversations held on social media that encourage participation. This sentiment regarding the influence of social media is echoed by Participant 013 (municipal official), who shared that social media is a great platform for outreach to individuals to participate in civic engagement:

“We schedule community meetings and publish the dates of the meetings through the local paper, radio, and online platforms.”

From the above response, it suggested that individuals belonging to a certain demographic, in respect of age, the youth, and younger group are more likely to be influenced to participate in civic engagement activities if they are reached through social media. In the rapidly evolving digital age, the landscape of civic engagement presents new opportunities for more involvement through social media (Nchaga, 2025). The use of social media to communicate information is one of the expanding ways to share information across a group of people within a specified timeframe quickly. It is one of the approaches that can be used to promote civic engagement. The digital age can be used to bridge the gap between citizens and local governments and that more voices are heard and more of them are raised within participatory spaces. With the use of social media, the opportunities to civically engage open opportunities on platforms to communicate important information between local government offices and the public (Kahne, Hodgins, and Eidman-Aadahl, 2016). From the municipal’s response, it is apparent that online platforms are utilised to inform individuals about civic engagement, opening opportunities to participate.

5.6.2. Civic Education

The findings of this study suggest that both community members and municipal officials regard civic education as an important approach to encourage active participation in civic activities. Here is one of the participants’ responses from Participant 007 (Community member):

“It is important for community members to be aware of their issues in the community and the effects of those issues on the current generation. When you are educated and when you see the impact of their own engagement in civic activities, this assists in eliminating the issues faced within the community.”

This view by the participant argues that when community members are aware of the problems in the community and have the right line of information and are educated on how best they can participate in civic activities this can help them to be engaged in a meaningful way. Similarly, Participant 011 (Community member) argued that without information you cannot participate or make meaningful impact. Here is their response:

“How will you participate if you don’t know anything. You can’t make the right decisions, and you end up participating for the sake of saying you have participated.”

This participant's view indirectly highlights the importance of civic education because when people are informed, they cannot meaningfully participate. It corresponds with the view by Participant 013 (Municipal official):

“We are trying to educate communities about the processes of civic engagement involved, and this can be done through civic education.”

The above responses from the research participants community member and municipal official indicate that there is a need for civic education. Participant 011 (community member) expresses that it is quite difficult to be civically engaged if a person does not know how they can participate and cannot be part of the decision-making process which at times may lead to perfunctory participation. According to Havelson-Tucker and Smith (2024), civic education is about teaching community members about their duties in communities they exist in and providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to be civically engaged. Thus, civic education is an important approach that equips individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge, increasing the number of people who participate in civic engagement. Rietbergen-McCracken (n/d) and Mudau (2022) argue that civic education is the provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizens to participate in democratic processes with the goal to promote civic engagement and support democratic and participatory governance to increase participation in civic efforts. This resonates with the response from participant thirteen (municipal official) which points out that an attempt to increase participation in civic engagement can be done through civic education. Therefore, it can be deduced from the participants’ responses that while both responses from the community member and municipal official shares the similarity that civic education is a central part towards active participation in civic engagement. The responses also highlight that there is a gap of civic education in the community as municipal officials are still amid administering civic education which can hinder participation in civic engagement

5.6.3. Community Mobilisation

This study’s insights indicate that social mobilization presents an opportunity to come together to come together, share information to create a culture of interacting with other community members

on how they can be civically engaged to improve the living conditions in the community. This is what some of the research participants had to say Participant 004 (Community member):

“Without access to information, there are difficulties in participation or making informed decisions. So, when we come together, we can receive information on how to participate.”

This view from participant four indicates that being surrounded by other members of the community can be used to bridge the gap of being ill informed of what is happening in the community which can impact the level of participation and making informed decisions in civic activities. Similarly, Participant 007(Community member) stated the following:

“Establishing a community culture where all members are gathered and are concerned and actively involved in improving the quality of life in the community.”

The above views address issues of mobilizing community members to ensure a flow of information on how to be civically engaged. Similarly, Participant 015 (municipal official) had the following to say:

“We ensure that community members participate with our own mobilization strategies, such as sending pamphlets or loud hailing to communities.”

The above responses from the participants emphasise the need to come together and share information with one another to influence civic efforts with different strategies to do so. When community members come together, this is a form of community and social mobilisation and it is coordinated actions that accommodate various societal views, with the aim of encouraging inclusivity of diverse perspectives, and empowering community members (Gurgain, 2024). Both the responses highlight that community mobilisation can be used as an approach to bring about people and encourage participation from each other. This indicates that when coming together, different people and their perspectives can be considered when deciding how to participate in civic engagement activities. Additionally, community mobilisation is when community members are brought together to raise awareness about community issues with hopes that they will participate in actions that address identified community issues (Olayeeye, 2019). This closely resonates with Participant seven (community member)’s response that community mobilization is a space used to discuss community issues and come up with solutions in this setting to improve the quality of life. From the above responses the essence of community mobilization in civic engagement is

coming together to participate in the life of the community through sharing information with one another that can enable coming up with solutions that respond to the needs of the community and being involved in seeing through the outcomes that emerge from one another.

5.6.4. Community Meetings

From the municipal official's perspective, the study findings reveal that there are various ways to interact with community members about how they can be civically engaged. The most common platform for this is community meetings. Here is one of the participants' responses from Participant 013 (Municipal official):

"We schedule community meetings and publish the dates of the meetings through the local paper, radio and online platforms."

This view from participant thirteen indicates that the platform used to interact with community members is through community meetings that are published in local newspapers. It corresponds with the view of Participant 004 (Community member):

"Community meetings where people can debate and deliberate on community issues."

The above responses from both the municipal official and the community member share the commonality that community meetings are platforms for civic engagement (Rijal, 2023). The approach of community meetings is particularly important for effective civic engagement. Historically, the planning and decision-making responsibilities have fallen on the government and internal stakeholders. However, with recent shifts in how local government conducts itself, community involvement has taken centre stage in addressing issues that affect communities and their livelihoods (Rijal, 2023). In such settings, community members are often involved through community meetings. Public community meetings are an impactful community relations strategy for developing rapport between community members, stakeholders, and local government (Robinsons and Stephens, 2021). They serve as a platform for community involvement in the planning and decision-making processes of community affairs, which is a bedrock of democratic participation. As a platform for participatory democracy, they enhance communal involvement and accountability. Community meetings are further used as a gathering that can facilitate communication between the community and the local government. With community members

raising their local concerns, raising unheard voices, and opinions to contribute towards governance. Community meetings enhance the effectiveness of communication, which further allows community members to come together and join ideas to create solution-oriented actions to address community concerns. Therefore, participants' responses indicate that community meetings are a preferred platform for civic engagement. The meetings serve as a dual platform, one for disseminating information from the municipality and a platform for community members to deliberate on community issues and create solutions for these issues. Community meetings are platforms for facilitating and shaping the community's civic engagement.

5.6.5. Community Outreach

The study findings indicate that an approach towards increasing participation in civic engagement can be done through community outreach. These outreaches can occur in different forms, such as the use of pamphlets, loud hailing, and word of mouth through councillors and ward committee members. Here is one of the responses from Participant 015 (Municipal official) 015:

“There are various ways that we use, such as sending pamphlets, loud hailing, word of mouth through ward councillors and ward committee members.”

The above response illustrates that municipal officials' approach to increasing civic engagement is through community outreach. One form is through loud hailing. Loud hailing is a way to amplify a call or message. It is the use of speakers to amplify sound, often communicating information to communities in the shortest way possible. The information being spread is for their benefit or to invite community members to participate in a gathering or an action. The excerpt also mentions the use of pamphlets. According to Winoto et al. (2022), pamphlets are a physical tool used as an effective medium for disseminating information. The pamphlets handed out to the community can be used to read and learn how they can be civically engaged. Another form of outreach is through ward councilors and ward committee members, who play an important role as mediators between the municipality and the community. They ensure that community members are informed about municipal affairs and encourage participation in civic engagement. (Duma, 2023). Therefore, the response indicates that municipal officials rely on various forms of outreach as alternatives for disseminating information about civic engagement in the community. The reliance on loud hailing suggests that information may reach more people in the community, while the use of pamphlets suggests that the municipality recognizes it may be difficult to reach community members solely

through loud hailing. The physical handouts suggest that the municipality recognizes the need to reach all community members. The other form, through ward councilors and community members, suggests that the municipality trusts them to go into the community and represent municipal officials and share relevant information. All these outreach efforts aim to increase civic engagement and participation in the community.

5.7. Benefits of Civic Engagement towards Community Development Initiatives

5.7.1. Empowerment

The study findings indicate that the benefit of civic engagement is empowerment. It helps community members realise their potential for civic engagement, which can improve their living conditions. Here is one of the responses from Participant 007 (community member):

“Civic engagements contribute to empowering community members for the development of the community. Since it helps community members to realize the potential that they must improve the quality of life in the community as they participate more, take initiative, and see how much they could accomplish to tackle issues in the community.”

This view of Participant 007 indicates that, because of civic engagement, the participant becomes determined to contribute to change in the community. This is a similar response to what Participant 001 (Community member) had to say about empowerment:

“When community members are more involved, they are more empowered to be part of civic initiatives.”

This response reaffirms the belief that civic engagement can build positive attitudes towards their communities and actualisation of their potential when contributing to change. Interestingly, one municipal official noted that they empower communities based on what they need. Below is the response of Participant 015 (Municipal official).

“The first point of entry is the municipality as we are the custodians of the public. Civic engagement is a continuous process, we are responsible for communities, and we empower them according to the need we are responding to.”

The above responses from the participants indicate that when an individual is civically engaged, they are empowered and become proactive in seeking solutions to their socioeconomic conditions, ultimately improving their living conditions. According to Zimmerman (2000), civic engagement is expressed through developing commitments to improve and help the community. Furthermore, empowerment is the process of gaining control and mastery over one's own life (Zimmerman, 2000). This is particularly important because it allows individuals to be aware of the conditions they live in and to make decisions that they want to improve their well-being. According to Chan and Mak (2020), civic engagement is a behavioural aspect of empowerment, as it enables individuals to influence the communities they exist in through participating in civic activities. This is linked with the excerpt above, as it emphasises how empowerment causes self-reliance, where individuals are motivated to take initiative and address community issues themselves, and challenge fellow community members to be civically engaged. Furthermore, the excerpt above mentions 'realising own potential,' suggesting that the individual themselves may see themselves as an agent of change because they feel a responsibility towards for solutions that can address their socioeconomic issues and a responsibility to their community, which is central to empowerment. Therefore, it can be deduced from the participant's response that the benefit of civic engagement is empowerment, as it encourages individuals to take responsibility for their own affairs, reinforcing community members as owners of the solutions they create.

5.7.2. Social Cohesion

The study findings indicate that a benefit of civic engagement is social cohesion. It promotes social solidarity between people who participate together in civic engagement activities. Here's what some of the responses from Participant 003 (Community member):

"It builds relationships with other community members and gives us the ability to monitor our activities."

The response from Participant 003 illustrates that civic engagement builds relationships among community members, which also creates a sense of responsibility towards one another, indicating that community members may find themselves accountable to one another. Similarly, Participant 004 (community member) stated the following:

“If there is a sense of belonging, it is natural that community members will want to be included as opposed to feeling as if they don't belong, meaning that community members will not want to engage in civic activities.”

The above response from the research participant highlights that a sense of togetherness plays a significant role in shaping individuals' participation in civic engagement activities. This sense of togetherness strengthens community solidarity and is a form of social cohesion. Social cohesion is defined as a descriptive, common, multifaceted, and gradual phenomenon that characterizes a collective, indicating a sense of togetherness. The excerpt from participant three mentions civic engagement builds relationships; this is a central feature of social construct. The essential features of this construct include the quality of the social relations, including the social networks, trust, acceptance of diversity, and participation. Secondly, the identification of social entities, and thirdly, the orientation towards the common good, a sense of responsibility, and compliance with social order (Schiefer and van der Noll, 2017). These social cohesion features resonate with the participants' responses that civic engagement is the extent of connectedness and solidarity among groups in communities, especially in addressing issues that they face. Therefore, it can be deduced from the participants' responses that the benefit of civic engagement in the community is the improvement of social relationships found in the relationships that are founded and solidified in the civic activities that they participate in.

5.8. The Role of Municipal Officials in Civic Engagement

The study sampled three municipal officials, and they expressed their different roles in civic engagement in the community. Here is one of the responses from Participant 013 (M municipal official):

“We are mandated in terms of the constitution, as well as the Municipal Systems Act, about the involvement of the community in matters of local governance.”

The above responses highlight the importance of municipal divisions in promoting civic engagement in communities. They ensure that they participate in issues of local governance. The response from municipal officials is guided by a set of guidelines that bind them in how they interact with communities. Accordingly, the IDP is a tool for planning local issues, involving the whole municipality and its citizens in finding the best solutions to achieve long-term development.

In this context, the IDP and civic engagement are linked because the goal is to secure the livelihoods of people in communities. The IDP binds municipalities to consult with community members on issues that affect them and development, through community meetings held at local community halls. This form of consultation is public consultation on issues that affect local people. Expanding on this approach, another municipal official shared the importance of working with councilors to represent the municipality in the community about participation and involvement in civic engagement. Here is one of the responses from Participant 014 (Municipal official):

“We work in conjunction with councilors, and we are representatives of community members at the local government.”

From the above response, it is indicated that ward committees are area-based committees whose boundaries comply with ward boundaries. They were introduced as a system of local government, placed to give practical meaning and substance to democratic governance, serving as a function as a representative structure of the community by bridging the gap between government and local communities and better present local interests to government. The role of ward committee member is being a direct link to communities and is used as a channel to communicate local affairs with communities. However, it is important to note that they have no real power, as they are responsible for promoting participation and community involvement. The next participant emphasized the importance of ensuring participation in civic engagement: Here is another response from Participant 015 (municipal official):

“We go to communities and encourage them to cooperate in matters of governance so that they can have an opinion on matters of government, and we are able to mobilize the community according to what is needed. We are a go-between, as we can gather people, a mother body, and are the legislative arm of local government.”

The above responses indicate that the public participation office in municipalities must physically interact with the community on issues of local governance, so that the community can influence governance. The office is responsible for public participation, as this implies people-centered development in involvement, communication, and reciprocal influence. The office is also responsible for mobilizing community members for development. The public participation office is responsible for informing, listening, and engaging in problem-solving within communities and development agreements. Therefore, it can be inferred from the participants' responses that civic

engagement is a legal obligation and a practical necessity for encouraging participation in responding to community affairs and in local government affairs.

5.9. Challenges in Facilitating Civic Engagement in the Community

5.9.1. Interference

The study's findings reveal political interference arising from belonging to groups with different interests within a single community with different political affiliations. This can delay civic engagement. Here is one of the responses from Participant 013 (municipal official):

“In these consultation meetings, you find that there are competing interests among community members, which causes chaos in the meetings.”

This response from the participant suggests a clash in the community meetings held by municipal officials. This is similar to a response from Participant 015 (a municipal official) that it is difficult to reach an agreement in community meetings. Their response is as follows:

“The community is made up of different political parties, and sometimes they cannot come to an agreement on how issues in the community should be handled”.

The above response from the municipal official highlights that, within a community, individuals belong to different political groups with different ideas and views on how community issues should be handled, which can pose a challenge for the municipality when directing civic efforts, as reaching consensus becomes difficult. A municipality is important because it contributes to the growth and development of communities, and its function in communities cannot be overstated. These include, but are not limited to, providing sanitation, education, health care, and security services, as well as improving projects and development initiatives that impact the lives of communities (Nkhabu, 2021; Ramodula and Govender, 2022). However, interference significantly reduces the rate at which a municipality can perform its functions, which is detrimental to the municipality's common good (Rogger, 2018). When a community is divided, civic engagement contributes less to community development. Mngomezulu (2020) suggests that these political divides or interferences lead to poor service delivery, skew project delivery, and create strains between the municipality and the communities it serves. The excerpt above indicates that there is division within the community because of different affiliations, which can make it difficult for the municipality to engage with the community due to disagreements over how to solve community

problems. Therefore, it can be inferred from the participant's response that political interference plays a major role in disrupting the municipality's interactions with the community in civic engagement efforts, making it harder to respond to community needs.

5.9.2. Limited Understanding of Government Protocols and Unrealistic Expectations

The study's findings reveal that the municipality is bound by a set of rules and regulations that govern its operations, and because community members lack knowledge of the lengthy processes the municipality follows, this misunderstanding arises between the local government and the community. These are some of the participants' responses: Here is one of the responses from Participant 013 (municipal official):

"We learn that communities are lacking in terms of understanding processes such as budget allocation. That is what constitutes prioritization in communities, which leads to communities accusing us of spending government money while not doing anything, when it's not like that."

Participant 013 (municipal official) further stated that:

"...Impatience from community members."

Another similar response from Participant 015 (municipal official) was expressed as follows:

"A challenge we often see is that community members have unreasonable expectations from government; they want us to do everything, and they also want freebies."

From the above responses, the participants (municipal officials) expressed that very often community members lack understanding of the protocols governing local government structures or offices' operations, such as timelines, budget processes, and other policies, which leads to reduced participation in civic engagement activities. According to Themba and Selepe (2020), the lack of accessible information about local government protocols and the mismatch between municipal actions and community expectations significantly hinder effective civic engagement. The responses from the municipal officials indicate frustration due to a disconnect with community members: they are unaware of the processes to be followed when overseeing civic engagement activities, and because they do not understand this process, they do not understand when it takes

time for their civic efforts to be realized. As a result, community members may feel that the local government is purposely delaying the implementation and outcomes of their civic efforts, leading to distrust of the local government. This is linked to the expressed response that community members are rarely, if at all, adequately educated or even know how to participate in solutions to the issues they face in their communities. The municipal officials further highlighted that, given information about government protocols, this may warrant unwarranted expectations from the local government in responding to community issues, given limited resources to accommodate the community. Therefore, it can be deduced from the participants' responses that community members are not adequately informed about local government processes, which can cause confusion and mistrust of the municipality, and the expectations from the municipality not being delivered can further cause frustration on the community's side, which can also warrant protests hindering effective civic engagement.

5.9.3. Limited Funding

The study established that the municipality works according to the budget allocated to them. Therefore, they have limited financial resources to extend to communities to support their civic efforts. Here is one of the responses from Participant 013 (municipal official):

“... because we are a municipality, the local government is different in the sense that it must raise its own financial resources through bills we charge consumers for services like water, electricity, sewer, refuse collection, and property rates. So, our finances are anticipated revenue, only to find that people don't pay for the services that have been rendered, which eventually affects the support we can extend to communities.”

The above view discusses how municipalities have limited funds to support communities, as they must raise money from service fees, which may lead to overestimation because some do not fulfill their obligations to pay for these services. In the end, this affects the way the municipality operates, especially in communities. This is a similar response to Participant 15 (municipal official):

“Communities do not understand the dynamics of finances. Of course, we do have conditional grants given to us by the government, but that money has already been allocated, we cannot do other things out of the scope.”

The above views from the participants indicate that municipalities must generate their own income to support themselves. According to the South African Local Government Association (2018), funding for local government is limited, given its mandate to local communities. Given the limited resources in the form of grant funding and generating their own revenue, municipalities need to find innovative ways to fulfill their developmental role in communities. Therefore, the above responses resonate with the literature, which indicates that municipalities must generate their own income through rates charged for the services they offer communities. As a result, municipal income is forecast based on anticipated income from services to disburse funding that can support civic engagement efforts. However, because this is anticipated income, the municipality fails to retrieve or to get their customers to pay for these services, causing a deficit in funds, a lack of funding within the municipality, which further trickles down to being unable to offer substantial financial resources to support civic engagement. In a recent study by Lo Prete and Sachhi (2023), it was found that civic engagement can contribute to building an effective fiscal government, and higher levels of active participation in civic engagement activities are associated with greater willingness to cooperate and work together for the common good. Therefore, it can be deduced from the participants' responses that while the municipality has limited funding and has already been allocated for specific cases that cannot be diverted, it makes it difficult to support communities with their civic activities, further alienating community members from participating in civic engagement and weakening governance.

5.10. Mechanisms to Support Civic Activities

5.10.1. Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

Participants expressed that one mechanism to support the community's civic efforts could be stakeholder engagement. This is a process of targeting specific groups or organizations that can impact civic engagement. The key informant further stated that this could extend to external stakeholders, including businesses, non-profit organizations, and the public. Here is one of the responses from Participant 013 (municipal official) 001:

“Something we can do to support communities is engage and collaborate with external stakeholders. We can contact them, hold a meeting, and let them represent their own interests, and then we connect the community to them.”

This view from participant thirteen illustrates that civic engagement can be supported by external stakeholders who are connected to the community and can open up opportunities for collaboration to increase civic engagement. It corresponds with the view by Participant 015 (municipal official):

“We involve relevant stakeholders and departments because they cannot just go into the community without reaching out to us.”

From the participants (municipal officials), it can be inferred that municipal officials are overseers of diverse stakeholders with different interests and can easily connect these stakeholders to communities when civic engagement is needed. In a recent study by Matole et al. (2023), it is emphasised that local government can enhance structures for communities to communicate with civic leaders or groups, facilitating external collaboration that strengthens civic engagement and promotes effective community development. Local government is inherently collaborative in nature, structure, and orientation (Allison, 2008). Therefore, the extent to which this can be leveraged is exponential. This can benefit the communities that local governments serve. Stakeholder engagement and collaboration can enhance civic engagement by creating information networks and equitable resource allocation and distribution while also promoting community participation at the forefront of civic activities. This strengthens responsiveness and accountability, which also translates to improved life of people in communities (Morgan et al., 2023). Collaboration with stakeholders is critical for solving complex public problems and overcoming socio-economic issues. When local government takes initiatives and forms collaborations on behalf of communities with external stakeholders, this can improve the responsiveness to community needs, increasing social capital among community members and tangible benefits of their civic efforts. Therefore, it can be deduced from the participants' responses that to support civic engagement efforts, municipal officials play the middleman by connecting community members with stakeholders that can promote their cause and increase accessibility to resources needed, which can bring about opportunities for collaboration for the municipality, community, and external stakeholders.

5.10.2 Capacity Building

The study's findings reveal that capacity building is a process through which individuals gain strength and maintain the capabilities needed to spearhead civic engagement activities. The

municipal officials said it is one mechanism used to support communities' civic efforts. Here is one of their responses: Here is one of the responses from Participant 013 (municipal official):

“... Because sometimes the issue isn't financial, communities need capacity building to empower themselves.”

The above response from the municipal official suggests that community members need to be capacitated so they can participate in civic activities, and this goes beyond financial support. This can also be done by insisting on or sharing knowledge and skills needed to facilitate civic engagement activities. This view corresponds with the view of Participant 015 (municipal official):

“We can support communities because we are the ‘go in between’, helping community members by connecting them to the relevant structures and information.”

The participants' responses suggest that when addressing community challenges, the problem is not always a financial one but rather a lack of resources available to the community, which may prevent individuals from being civically engaged. Instead, the community needs capacity-building to empower them to be civically engaged. Capacity-building initiatives from local government can contribute to civic engagement efforts by equipping community members with the skills and knowledge and teaching them how to actively participate in civic activities, thereby promoting long-term effectiveness in community development initiatives (Oweyo, 2024). This can provide the community with the necessary support and resources. Similarly, Gurgain (2024) explains that when local government provides capacity building to communities, it enhances civic engagement by providing workshops and training workshops that teach communities about the processes of local government, empowering community members to be well-informed of their participation so they can participate meaningfully. The emphasis in capacity building is that it should empower the community, causing them to be more responsible for coming up with their own solutions than being dependent on the municipality to rescue them from the socio-economic conditions they face. Therefore, it can be deduced from the participant's response that financial issues do not solely cause the lack of participation in civic engagement but not being equipped with the knowledge on how to do it. Thus, it is important for municipal officials to empower them through capacity-building initiatives such as workshops that can enable community members to understand civic engagement from the municipality's perspective and how they can be involved and participate on their own.

5.11. Chapter summary

This chapter's purpose was to present, interpret, analyze, and discuss the study's findings. Firstly, it presented the demographic profile of the research participants. The first theme the researcher identified was community members' perceptions of civic engagement and community development. Under this theme, the subthemes that emerged included how they understand both these concepts and identifying and describing civic engagement activities that contribute to civic engagement within the community. The second theme that emerged was related to the factors that contribute to low levels of civic engagement in the community. The participants cited a lack of trust in authorities and political disappointment. Other factors included limited resources, time constraints, limited awareness and knowledge of how to participate civically, and, finally, socio-economic backgrounds that impacted the level of participation among community members. The third theme that emerged from the research findings was the approaches that could be used to increase civic engagement, discussed in the subthemes of increasing media visibility, civic education, and social mobilization. The fourth theme presented was the benefits of civic engagement towards community development initiatives. This included the subthemes discussing empowerment, improved decision-making processes, improved quality of life, and social cohesion. This chapter also presented data collected from municipal officials. The theme discussed was the role of municipal officials in civic engagement for community development, and it explained what each office does. Secondly, the researcher discussed the themes of how municipalities communicate with community members, which is through loud hailing and community meetings. Another theme was the municipal challenges encountered when promoting civic activities for community development. This included political interference, limited funding, and a lack of understanding of local government processes. The final theme identified by the researcher was the mechanism municipal officials use to support community members' civic efforts towards community development. With the subthemes of engaging relevant stakeholders, collaborating with them, and providing capacity building to community members to support them. The following chapter presents the discussion, conclusion, and recommendations from the study.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an analysis and interpretation of data collected from community members and municipal officials from Kanyamazane in the Mbombela Local Municipality. Two semi-structured interview guides were used to obtain data from the participants, including municipal officials and community members, to address the research objectives. The main finding is that civic engagement on formal platforms such as community meetings may fail, leading to protests because of the failure to meet community needs. Ultimately, community-led initiatives emerge to address these issues. The purpose of this chapter is to first present the discussion of the study findings and to infuse the theoretical frameworks adopted, namely the social capital theory and the Arnstein ladder of citizen participation, followed by a reflection on the research objectives and study limitations, and, lastly, the conclusion.

6.2 Discussion of Findings and Infusing Theoretical Frameworks

Divergent Conceptions of Civic Engagement, but a Shared Goal

The research findings reveal that community members and municipal officials have different conceptions of civic engagement. The latter group views it as an institutional responsibility they have towards communities. Very often, municipal officials are bound by administrative regulations that they need to adhere to. According to Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation, this corresponds with the rung of consultation, because community members are given the opportunity to voice out their opinions, but this does not translate to any real power. This means that municipal officials are confined within the regulations that guide them to facilitate civic engagement. This is translated through the structured community meetings held as a platform to offer opportunities for community participation by allowing community members to have input within the boundaries of what the municipality allows. The protocols to be followed to set up these structured meetings make civic engagement a formal process. Conversely, the views from community members reveal that they view civic engagement as a collective action. According to the social capital theory bonding social capital in communities represents solidarity and reciprocity among the people who are involved (Claridge, 2018). The difference lies in the methods used to achieve civic engagement. As a result of these divergent conceptions of civic engagement, there is a disconnection on how civic engagement should occur in the community. Despite these differing approaches, both municipal officials and community members share a common goal, being actively involved in the development process, with the participation of community members being the driving force.

From Tokenism to Citizen Power

When formal participatory spaces such as community meetings fail to yield the desired results, it gives rise to protests as a form of civic expression (Battaglini, 2017; Sajó, 2009). Protest action arises when community members perceive that their input in community meetings is not considered and that their needs are not being addressed. This is a shift from passive participation to direct action (Battaglini, 2017). The failure of community meetings causes local people to assume citizen control through protest. This is the highest degree of citizen power in the citizens' ladder of participation. For these protests to succeed, they are characterized by a high level of social capital because they are collective actions (Brooks, 2025). The ability of communities to mobilize collectively through protest reflects high levels of bonding social capital, as it requires coordination, information sharing, and working towards a common goal. As Putnam (2000) explains, bonding social capital refers to networks of trust, solidarity, and reciprocity among individuals with shared experiences or backgrounds. These strong ties are necessary for presenting a unified front and advocating for the cause of local people to the local authorities. Similarly, community-led initiatives such as a garden and a marathon club for social well-being illustrate another form of citizen power. Community-led initiatives are formed autonomously by community members from municipal officials. Community members form and run these initiatives independently with the sole purpose of improving their social well-being. Additionally, community-led initiatives for social well-being reflect the presence of bonding capital. According to Putnam (2000), the networks of civic engagement can be horizontal and are characterised by homogeneous communities that are more likely to come together. This is important in community-led initiatives, as those who initiate and run these initiatives need to have a close relationship with community members to ensure that they are successful and respond to community needs. Community-led initiatives also reflect that when formal participatory spaces fail to address community needs, they can be created as another form of civic expression that is initiated by the people themselves, reflecting that power ultimately rests with them.

Structural and Contextual Barriers to Participation

The research findings highlight that there are different factors that contribute to low levels of civic engagement in community development initiatives. Among them, corruption is identified. It fractures the relationship that community members have with municipal officials. fractures their relationship. Corruption undermines trust between municipal officials and community members. The dimension of trust between two groups is part of the foundations of social capital theory (Davis,

2025). Therefore, if corruption is one of the identified factors, it reflects that the research participants do not trust municipal officials, who play a significant role in facilitating civic engagement, thereby disintegrating social capital. The findings also revealed that unequal power relations and limited awareness can hinder effective civic engagement. When participants shared that the explicit display of power between community members and community and municipal officials can lower their likelihood of participating. Additionally, being unaware of what is happening in the community, by omission, excludes them from civic engagement, as they cannot participate when they are not informed. Such a lack of awareness can be linked to socio-economic backgrounds, inadequate resources, and time limitations for civic engagement. The intersection of these factors suggests that community members may feel silenced or excluded from civic engagement, thereby weakening social capital within the community. According to Arnstein (1969), this falls under the rungs of manipulation and informing (lack of informing). The lack of information sharing hinders community members' civic engagement, which explains why they may seek other forms of civic engagement, such as participating in protest actions and community-led initiatives to move up the ladder. Civic engagement and social capital are reported to rest in the collective efficacy to exert influence over issues that affect community members such that independent and coordinated activities arise from failure of formal channels to bring about change (Collins 2014). Therefore, such progression to protests and community-led initiatives creates a new avenue for community members to rebuild social ties and assert collective action when addressing community issues.

Reimagining Civic Participation Through Communication and Mobilisation

The study's findings relate to the approaches that can be adopted to increase civic engagement levels and the perceived benefits. The participants highlighted approaches such as media visibility, community mobilisation, and outreaches to strengthen civic engagement. These approaches can be essential in building and cementing relationships between community members and between municipal officials and community members. In the context of Arnstein (1969), these approaches can be used to progress from the rungs of non-participation and tokenism towards citizen power. For instance, media visibility through local radio stations, social media, loud hailing, and pamphlets can be used as tools to disseminate information. This ensures that community members are informed about activities in their vicinity and can promote meaningful participation in civic

life. Community mobilisation encourages community members to collectively advocate for their needs and organise themselves towards a common goal. Similarly, when outreach initiatives are inclusive, they can bridge the gap between municipal officials and community members and ensure that they are at least given the chance to be civically engaged. The rise of grassroots mobilisation and community-led development, therefore, represents not a rejection of participation in community meetings but rather a reimagination of civic engagement through participatory approaches, marking the progression towards empowerment and, much more importantly, citizen control as per the citizen's ladder of participation. By integrating these approaches, this can give the municipality a chance at collaborative governance, where community members are not just consulted but play an active role in shaping decisions or community development initiatives that affect their lives

6.3. A Reflection on Research objectives

The aim of this study was to explore the contribution of civic engagement in community development initiatives in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality. From this aim, objectives of the study were drawn out as follows:

6.3.1. Objective 1

The study achieved this objective by identifying and describing the civic engagement activities that foster community development initiatives in Kanyamazane. The findings from this study indicated that there are two primary forms of civic engagement commonly used to express community issues and concerns. The first form of civic engagement occurs through meetings or community forums. This is an invented space of participation created by local authorities and municipal officials to discuss issues affecting the community and comment on local governance. When the raised issues are not corrected, this can lead to protest action when formal channels fail to yield the desired results. Ultimately, organised, community-driven initiatives emerge to address community needs. Community-driven groups serve as invented spaces of participation, where research participants organize themselves and form initiatives that respond to their respective community issues and concerns. This organizing civic engagement kicks off from the grounds, indicating that community members can be actively involved in the development process, and their participation is the driving force without interference from local authorities. The key takeaway from these findings is that civic engagement in Kanyamazane occurs in both formal and non-formal spaces, thereby achieving this objective.

6.3.2. Objective 2

This study achieved this objective by identifying and analysing the factors contributing to low levels of civic engagement in community development initiatives in Kanyamazane. The findings of different factors contributing to low levels of civic engagement in community development initiatives include mistrust in local authorities, inadequate time and resources, lack of awareness, unequal power relations, lack of participation, and socio-economic backgrounds. Mistrust weakens the obligation to be civically engaged, as it seems that their engagement is futile and might not cause changes in community development initiatives. This factor can be discussed in conjunction with how unequal power relations undermine the ability of individuals to be civically engaged. From the view of community members, they may feel that authorities do not necessarily

understand their lived experiences, as they come with expertise, wanting to impose on community members, whereas they are not embedded in the community. Other factors identified such as the lack of awareness on how to be civically engaged or even platforms where community members can be engaged significantly contribute to low levels of civic engagement in community development initiatives. The socio-economic background such as unemployment and financial strain limits their motivation to be civically engaged because they are more concerned about how they can secure their livelihood. This reinforces the factor that there is inadequate time available for individuals to be civically engaged. The key takeaway from this is that these identified factors indicate that low levels of civic engagement are a result of structural and contextual factors at play that lower the levels of participation in civic engagement activities, thereby achieving this objective.

6.3.3. Objective 3

This study achieved this objective by identifying both the challenges and benefits of civic engagement in community development initiatives. The challenges that emerged from the research findings include political interference, lack of information about government protocols, unwarranted expectations, and limited funding. The findings on political interference shed light on the presence of different political affiliations in communities and within the municipality itself. This is the agenda for how the municipality can improve living conditions. This is closely linked to how community members may have expectations of the municipality to execute its duty towards the community. While the municipality may feel that it does not have the capacity to deliver or act on all issues and concerns in the community, due to limited funding available to the municipality. When community members do not understand the protocol that municipalities must follow, it causes a disconnect in how civic engagement can be supported. While there are challenges in being civically engaged, there are benefits that can be enjoyed when it successfully happens, such as empowerment and social cohesion. Empowerment is a direct result of taking initiative to solve problems that are found in the community, directly related to the invented space of participation because the community owns this type of organising, hence, they own the organising. This coming together of community members forms relationships among themselves which builds trust and efficacy in running more similar organised groups. The key takeaway from this finding is that, as much as civic engagement may be a challenge, it presents an opportunity for the community to

realise that their own participation is important and solve issues within the community by coming together to act as one, thereby achieving this objective.

6.4. Study Limitation

One limitation of this study concerns the data collection process. This study is qualitative in nature. Therefore, only a total of fifteen (15) participants were part of this study, as it is concerned with understanding the lived experiences of individuals. This is criticised because the research findings cannot be generalized to the whole population of Kanyamazane, as a small number of the population participated in this study. The second limitation of this study is that it initially intended to purposively sample one community participation officer and two ward committee members. However, due to scheduling conflicts, the researcher purposively selected alternative municipal officials with related responsibilities. These included an official from the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) office, a public participation officer, and one ward committee member.

6.5. Recommendations

From the findings presented, the following recommendations are made to improve the contribution of civic engagement towards community development initiatives:

- Formal channels, such as community meetings or forums that are held in communities, should not only be tokenistic in nature, but the inputs of community members on the issues that affect them should be incorporated in the solutions as a step towards citizen power, which is important for community participation and empowerment
- Municipalities should give more support to community-led initiatives, either financially or through capacity building. This support can enhance the effectiveness of civic engagement in community development initiatives.
- There is a disconnect between municipal officials and community members about the understanding of civic engagement. Creating a common understanding between the two parties can foster stability and clarity about what is expected from each party. This also includes explaining and communicating how the government operates to limit unwarranted expectations from community members

- For effective civic engagement, municipal officials should build and maintain better relationships with community members. Create a transparent relationship that supports communities.
- Create more awareness through campaigns, media visibility, ward councilors, and ward committee members to improve their communication strategy and disseminate information on the importance of being civically engaged to contribute to community development in the area.

6.6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the contribution of civic engagement towards community development initiatives. To explore this, three objectives were identified. Firstly, identify and describe the current civic engagement activities in Kanyamazane. From this, the study findings established that two forms of civic engagement were present. Formal and non-formal civic engagement are identified by municipal officials and community members, respectively. The findings revealed that these forms occurred in both formal and non-formal structures. Formal civic engagement is a result of institutionalised participation through community meetings and forums that are organised by municipal officials. In extension, when these formal channels fail to yield results in local communities, they can give rise to protests aimed at raising concerns about how local governance has failed to serve communities. Furthermore, when these formal channels fail communities, they create a platform for community organising to fill these gaps, especially in addressing community social well-being, which falls under non-formal civic engagement, as these activities are initiated independently of municipal officials. These two forms of civic engagement are divergent, yet they share a common goal: improving the quality of life. The second objective sought to explore the reasons behind low levels of civic engagement. The key findings indicated that there were structural and contextual barriers behind this, that this was a result of corruption, which led to a mistrust in local government, lack of awareness, unequal power relations, lack of participation, and the socioeconomic backgrounds all influenced whether they were civically engaged, as identified by the participants who were community members. Municipal officials cited issues such as political interference, limited funding, and a lack of knowledge of the municipal protocols they must follow to facilitate civic engagement. As a result, the presence or interplay of

these factors can create the impression that civic engagement is either ineffective or inaccessible. Finally, the last objective sought to explore the challenges and benefits of civic engagement in community development initiatives. While there are challenges, civic engagement offered participants an opportunity to build social cohesion through the relationships they formed and to be empowered. Furthermore, it presents an opportunity for the community to realise that their own participation is important in solving community issues. In a nutshell, the study findings indicate that civic engagement has a significant contribution to community development initiatives. Actively promoting or advocating for social cohesion, empowerment, and active participation. At the same time, the challenges presented, such as mistrust in local government and socioeconomic backgrounds, remain, limiting the effectiveness of civic engagement in community development initiatives. Despite these challenges, the findings suggest that civic engagement can be reimagined to include approaches such as media visibility, community mobilization, and outreach to improve community members' active participation and maintain channels that are responsive to community needs.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

A Consent Form for Participation in the Study

I agree to participate in a research project conducted by, who is doing her Master of Development Studies at the University of Mpumalanga.

This participation form serves as permission that I am giving to the researcher regarding my full participation in this research.

The participation form also acknowledges the following aspects:

1. I have adequate information about the research topic, and I understand the study.
2. I understand that my participation is based on voluntary participation. Therefore, the role that I will play in the study has been clearly outlined to me and I understand the role.
3. I am fully aware that since my participation is voluntary and there is no force used on me to participate in the study. I can withdraw at any stage of the researcher when I no longer feel comfortable sharing any information.
4. I understand that during the data collection process, the researcher will take written notes and use a tape recorder to record our conversation for the purpose of the study. I give the researcher full permission to take written notes and I am aware that I can choose to not be recorded by the researcher.
5. I am aware that my anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality will be respected in this study. Therefore, the researcher will only share information that I have fully agreed upon for the need of the study.

.....

Participants signature

Date

.....

.....Researcher signature

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Research interview guide for research participants.

Master of Development Studies

Research Project Title: Exploring the contribution of Civic engagement in development initiatives in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality.

SECTION A: Demographic Profile of Participants

1. Gender

1. Male		2. Female		3. Other	
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2. Age (years)

1.	19 or less	
2.	20-29	
3.	30-39	
4.	40-49	
5.	50 and above	

3. Level of education

1.	No formal education	
2.	Primary education	
3.	Secondary education	
4.	Tertiary education	

4. Employment status

1.	Formally employed	
2.	Unemployed	
3.	Self-employed	
	Other, specify	

Section B: Civic engagement and community development

1. What is your understanding of civic engagement?
2. What is your understanding of community development?
3. What community development issues is your community facing?
4. Which community development initiatives are you currently aware of
5. Can you describe civic engagement activities you know of?
6. Tell me about your view regarding the value and importance of your own involvement in civic activities?
7. What are the personal motivations that drive individuals to actively participate in civic engagement activities and contribute to community development?
8. How does the level of awareness regarding community issues influence individual's decision to engage in civic activities?
9. What role does the sense of belonging play in motivating individuals to take part in civic engagement for community development?
10. How does civic engagement contribute empowerment of community members in the community empowerment?
11. How does civic engagement influence decision make process in the community?
12. How do internal and external factors influence affect the decision to take part in civic engagement activities for community development?
13. What role do you think civic organisations play in supporting civic engagement for community development?

14. What are the different approaches that can be used to promote civic engagement for community development?
15. What barriers exist that prevent community members from participating in civic engagement activities?
16. What do you think are the long -term effects of civic engagement on community development?
17. How does limited knowledge hinder the promotion of civic engagement activities?
18. How does the lack of resources hinder the promotion of civic engagement activities?
19. How does unequal representation impact the promotion of civic engagement activities?

APPENDIX C: Interview schedule (Translated Version)

SIGABA A: IPHROFAYILI YEBANTFU LABADLALA INDZIMA

1. BULILI

1. Labadvuna		2. Labasikati		3. Lokunye	
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2. IMINYAKA

1.	19 Nangentasi	
2.	20-29	
3.	30-39	
4.	40-49	
5.	50 Nangetulu	

3. ISIZINDVO SEKUFUNDZA

1.	Kute imfundvo lececeshiwe	
2.	Imfundvo lesisekelo	
3.	Temfundvo lephakeme	
4.	Imfundvo lephakeme	

4. SIMO SEKUCASHWA

1.	Basebenti labasemtsetfweni Labangasebenti Bantfu labatisebentako letinye, khombisa	
2.	Labangasebenti	
3.	Bantfu labatisebentako	
	Letinye,	

	Khombisa,	
--	-----------	--

SIGABA B: KUHLANGANYELA KWEMPHAKATSI NEKUTFUTFUKISWA KWEMPHAKATSI

1. Uyini umcondvo wakho wekutibandzakanya kutenhlalakahle?
2. Uyicondze njani intfutuko yemphakatsi?
3. Nguyiphi indzaba yekutfufukiswa kwemphakatsi lobukene nayo?
4. Ngutiphi tinhlelo tekutfufukisa umphakatsi lowatiko kwanyalo
5. Ungachaza yini ngemisebenti yekuhlanganyela kwebahlali loyatiko?
6. Ungitjele ngembono wakho ngekubaluleka nekubaluleka kwekutibandzakanya kwakho emisebentini yemphakatsi?
7. Yini leyenta bantfu kutsi babe nencenye etintfweni letiphatselene nekuhlanganyela kutenhlalakahle kanye nekusita ekutfufukiseni umphakatsi?
8. Lizinga lekwatisa ngetindzaba temphakatsi lisitsintsa njani sincumo semuntfu ngamunye sekutibandzakanya emisebentini yemphakatsi?
9. Ngumuphi umsebenti lowentiwa ngumcondvo yekuhlanganyela ekuchubeni bantfu kutsi babambe lichaza ekutfufukiseni umphakatsi?
10. Kubandzakanyeka kwebahlali kungawutfufukisa njani emandla emalunga emphakatsi?
11. Kubandzakanyeka kwebahlali kungayitsintsa njani indlela yekutsatsa tincumo emphakatsini?
12. Tintfo tangekhatsi netangaphandle tisifaka njani sincumo sekuhlanganyela emisebentini yekuhlanganyela kwemmango ekutfufukiseni umphakatsi?
13. Ucabanga kutsi inhlangano yemphakatsi idlala yiphi indzima ekusekeleni kutibandzakanya kwemphakatsi ekutfufukisweni kwemphakatsi?
14. Ngutiphi tindlela letehlukene letingasetjentiswa kutfutukisa kutibandzakanya kwebahlali ekutfufukisweni kwemphakatsi?
15. Ngutiphi tihibe letikhona letivimbela emalunga emphakatsi kutsi ahlanganyele emisebentini yemphakatsi?
16. Ucabanga kutsi yini imiphumela yesikhatsi lesidze yekuhlanganyela kwebahlali ekutfufukisweni kwemphakatsi?
17. Lwati lolulinganiselwe luvimbela njani kutfutukiswa kwemisebenti yekuhlanganyela kwebahlali?
18. Kungabi khona kwemitfombolusito kukuvimbela njani kutfutukiswa kwemisebenti yekuhlanganyela kwebahlali?
19. Kungalingani kwekumelwa kwebantfu kubakhutsata njani bantfu kutsi bahlanganyele emicimbini

Appendix D: Interview Guide (Municipal Officials)

Master of Development Studies

Research Project Title: Exploring the role of Civic engagement in community development initiatives in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality.

1. How does the municipality define civic engagement and its importance in community development?
2. What has been done specifically in communities to promote civic engagement?
3. How does the municipality involve the community in civic engagement activities for community development in the community?
4. What role do municipal officials play in promoting civic engagement to address community needs?
5. Are there any success stories of how civic engagement has positively impacted community development?
6. How does the municipality measure the effectiveness of civic engagement activities in achieving community development?
7. What challenges are faced in promoting and fostering civic engagement?
8. What strategies are used to ensure civic engagements efforts includes all participating members of the community?
9. How does the municipality collaborate with other community stakeholders to ensure that civic engagement activities are practised throughout the community?
10. What support does the municipality offer to community members for their civic engagement efforts for community development?

Appendix E: Letter Requesting Permission

31 May 2024

PO BOX 45

Mbombela Local Municipality

1200

RE: Request Permission to Conduct Research in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a student, registered for the Master of Development Studies programme at the University of Mpumalanga. I hereby request permission to conduct a research study within the Mbombela Local Municipality at Kanyamazane. The research is mainly for my academic growth and personal development.

The proposed title of my research is **Exploring the Contribution of Civic Engagement in Community Development Initiatives in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality**. With this letter, I have attached the proposal document and data collection instruments that I will use to collect data from the participants of the study.

Should you wish to obtain more information or have questions related to the study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact details are as follows:

Name of Researcher: Hope Nsubuga available at: 220042268@ump.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr. Nsizwazonke Yende available at: Nsizwazonke.Yende@ump.ac.za

I hope my request will be in order to meet your set requirements.

Yours Faithfully

Nsubuga Hope

Appendix F: Ethical Clearance



Ref: UMP/Nsubunga/08/2024

Date: 09 August 2024

Dorcas Hope Nsubunga
(220042268) School of
Development Studies
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS, DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SCIENCES
University of Mpumalanga

RE: APPROVAL FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE FOR THE STUDY:
*Exploring the Contribution of Civic Engagement in Community Development Initiatives in
Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality*

Reference is made to the above heading.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences) UMP, approved the ethical clearance of the above-mentioned study.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach, and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be stored securely in the school/division for a period of 5 years.

The Ethical Clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter, Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.



Prof.
Ogujiuba Kanayo
Chairperson:
FREC,
Faculty of Economics, Development and Business
Sciences University of Mpumalanga

Appendix G: Gatekeeper's Letter

Civic Centre
1 Nel Street
Mbombela 1201
Republic of South Africa



P O Box 45
Mbombela 1200
Republic of South Africa
Tel: +27 (0) 13 759-9111
Fax: +27 (0) 13 759-2070

OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

Enq: Ms. Annah Chiloane
Tel: 013 759 2152

16 August 2024

University of Mpumalanga
Private Bag X11283
Mbombela
1200

Attention: Miss Nsubunga

Dear Madam,

**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CUNDUCT RESEARCH KANYAMAZANE ,
MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

Your letter dated 14 August 2024 on the above mentioned subject has reference.

The City of Mbombela hereby grants you permission to collect data for a research study titled:
***"Exploring the Contribution of Civic Engagement in Community Development Initiatives
in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality"***.

Please take note that the municipality will not be liable for any financial responsibility on this study.
Kindly ensure that the work of employees is not interrupted and consent is obtained from each
participant before the actual data collection.

The City of Mbombela wishes you all the best with your research and would appreciate that you
share with us an A4 size hardbound copy as well as an electronic copy of your final approved
research report.

Regards,

**W J KHUMALO
CITY MANAGER**

Appendix H: Research Ethics Clearance form

This form is to accompany any application seeking ethics approval for a research project. It is designed to identify the nature of any ethical issues raised by the research. This form must be completed by the **researcher** as well as the **Research Ethics Committee of the UMP**, before potential participants are approached to take part in any research.

PART 1				
1. Name of Researcher/s: NSUBUGA HOPE DORCAS				
	E-mail/s	<u>220042268@ump.ac.za</u> <u>hopedorcas2019@gmail.com</u>	Telephone number	+27715354338
	Department / School / Faculty	School of Development Studies, Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences.		
2. Project Short title: Exploring the Contribution of Civic Engagement in Community Development Initiatives in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality				
3. Funders/sponsors (where relevant): NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION				
FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY				
PART 2				
Has the project been approved by the:	For official use only		For official use only UMP Research Ethics Committee	

	Faculty / School's Research Committee			

PART 3				
<i>TO BE COMPLETED BY THE RESEARCHER</i>		<i>For official use only</i>		
		Please mark an X in the appropriate column/box		
		Yes	No	Not certain
1. Consent				
I	Does the study involve participants lacking the capacity to give informed consent or those who may have difficulty giving meaningful consent (e.g. children)? (Please give age)		X	
	<i>RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: NO, PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY ARE ABOVE 18 YEARS</i>			

li	Are subjects to be involved in the study without their knowledge and consent (e.g. through internet-mediated research, or via covert observation of people in public places)? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: NO, PARTICIPANTS WILL GIVE INFORMED CONSENT BEFORE COMMITTING TO THE STUDY		X	
lii	Will the participants be informed of the nature of their involvement in the collection of data - of all features of the research that reasonably might be expected to influence willingness to participate? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: BEFORE DATA IS COLLECTED, THE RESEACHER WILL	X		

	<i>GIVE RAPPORT OF THE STUDY.</i>			
Iv	Will the participants be told that they can discontinue their participation at any time? <i>RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: THE RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY, PARTICIPANTS CAN DISCONTINUE AT ANY TIME.</i>	X		
V	Will participants or their guardians be asked to sign Consent Forms? a) If not, will consent be verbal or implied? <i>RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: THE CONSENT SERVES AS PROOF THAT PARTICIPANTS DID GIVE COSENT</i>	X		
2. No Harm				
I	Could the study induce unacceptable psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or		X	

	negative consequences beyond the risks encountered in normal life? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: THE STUDY WILL NOT INDUCE STRESS OR ANXIETY ON PARTICIPANTS. IT IS NOT TOO SENSITIVE			
li	Will drugs or other substances (e.g., alcohol, drinks, foods, food or drink constituents, dietary supplements) be administered to the study participants? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: THE STUDY DOESN NOT REQUIRE PARTICIPANTS TO USE DRUGS OR SUBSTANCES		X	
lii	Does the study involve physical stress (or the participant's expectation thereof), such as might result from heat, noise,		X	

	electric shock, pain, sleep loss, deprivation of food and drink)? Not at all, the study does not involve any physical stress. <i>RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: THE STUDY DOES NOT REQUIRE PARTICIPANTS TO BE INVOLVED IN PHYSICAL STRES</i>			
Iv	Does the study involve the induction of mental discomfort in the participants (examples: fear, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, shame, guilt, embarrassment, becoming aware of personal weaknesses)? <i>RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: THE STUDY DOES NOT INVOLVE INDUCTION OF MENTAL DISCOMFORT</i>		X	

V	Does the study involve invasive, intrusive or potentially harmful procedures? For example, these may include, but are not limited to, electrical stimulation, heat, cold or bruising. RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: THE STUDY DOES NOT INVOLVE HARMING PARTICIPANTS		X	
Vi	Are there any particular groups who are likely to be harmed by dissemination of the results of this project? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: NO HARM CAN BE CAUSED BY DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION BECAUSE IT IS NOT SENSITIVE		X	
3. Confidentiality/Anonymity				

I	Will research involve the sharing of data or confidential information beyond the initial consent given? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: PARTICIPANTS WILL HAVE PSEUDO NAMES/ ASSIGNED CODES		X	
Ii	Will the study involve respondents to the internet or other visual/vocal methods where respondents may be identified? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY CANNOT BE IDENTIFIED		X	
Iii	Does the study make clear what will be done to ensure anonymity/confidentiality, especially if it involves the processing of sensitive data (e.g. health, sexual lifestyle,	X		

	ethnicity, political opinion, religious or philosophical conviction)? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: ONLY THE RESEARCHER WILL HAVE ACCESS TO SUCH INFORMATION AND WILL NOT BE DISCLOSED WITH OTHERS			
Iv	Is there a risk that the research might lead to disclosures from participants concerning their involvement in illegal activities? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: Not at all		X	
V	If data is going to be obtained via the internet, have data protection protocols been specified? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE:		X	

Vi	Will any third party have access to participant data during the course of the research? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: NOT APPLICABLE		X	
Vii	Could publication of the research results possibly interfere with strict confidentiality? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: PERSONAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS WILL BE PROTECTED, CODE NAMES WILL BE ASSIGNED TO PARTICIPANTS		X	
4. Research Design / Methodology				
I	Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants, (e.g., will participants be deliberately falsely informed, will information be withheld		X	

	from them, or will they be misled in such a way that they are likely to object or show unease when debriefed about the study) RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: ALL IMPORTANT INFORMATION WILL BE SHARED WITH PARTICIPANTS BEFORE DATA COLLECTION COMMENCES			
li	Has care been taken to ensure that data collection will be as valid and reliable as possible? <i>RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: DATA COLLECTED WILL BE RECORDED AND THE RESEARCHER WILL ALSO BE TAKING NOTES DURING THE PROCESS</i>	X		

Iii	Has care been taken to ensure that participants can contribute fully and equally to the study (e.g. access to technology)? <i>RESPONSE</i> / <i>MOTIVATE: EACH PARTICIPANT WILL BE ALLOCATED A SPECIFIC TIME TO SPEAK</i>	X		
Iv	Where appropriate and applicable, have measures been included to promote diversity and equity in terms of the population and focus of the study (e.g., gender, race, age, sexual orientation, disability, etc.)? <i>RESPONSE</i> / <i>MOTIVATE: Not Applicable</i>			
V	Are all methods, tools and instruments sensitive and appropriate to the context/participants?	X		

	<i>RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: YES, ALL ADOPTED METHODS HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED AND APPROPRIATE FOR THIS STUDY</i>			
Vi	Is there evidence of the critical evaluation of source material or an indication of how source material will be critically evaluated (to ensure reliability/credibility)? <i>RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: YES, THROUGH DATA COLLECTION MEASURES</i>	X		
Vii	Have the methods of data analysis been stated and suitably justified? <i>RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: THE SECTION OF DATA ANALYSIS IN THE PROPOSAL HAS BEEN ADEQUATELY JUSTIFIED</i>	X		

Viii	Have norms or norming procedures (where relevant) been described and are they appropriate? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not Applicable</i>			
5. Integrity and Honesty				
I	Is the proposal well referenced and demonstrate a wide range of reading/awareness? RESPONSE / X MOTIVATE: YES, ALL AUTHORS' WORKS HAVE BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED IN THIS STUDY			
Ii	Have the qualifications of the researcher/researchers been provided and verified and are they suitable/appropriate for the study? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: Yes, the	X		

	researcher is qualified to carry out the proposed study.			
Iii	Does the proposal indicate how the researcher/s will report back to funders/sponsors? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not Applicable</i>			
Iv	Does the proposal set out what steps will be taken to disseminate the results to interested participants/affected parties? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY WILL BE SHARED WITH PARTICIPANTS	X		
V	Does the proposal indicate how results will be disseminated and demonstrate awareness	X		

	of possible intellectual property rights? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY WILL BE SHARED WITH PARTICIPANTS			
6. Environmental impact (if applicable)				
I	Does the proposal indicate what measures will be taken to ensure that the study will not harm or damage the ecosystem or natural/social environment or how these will be restored/rehabilitated after the study? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: Not Applicable			
Ii	Does the study involve any form of genetic modification (where relevant)?			

	RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not</i> <i>Applicable</i>			
7. Financial Obligations				
I	Are there payments to the researchers/participants that may have an impact on the objectivity of the research? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: NO PAYMENTS WILL BE MADE IN THIS STDUY		X	
Ii	Have sample contracts been provided for any study involving remuneration agreements for participants? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: NOT APPLICABLE		X	
Iii	Have budget requirements been			

	responsibly considered and met?			
	RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: Not Applicable			
8. Conflict of Interest				
I	Is there any potential conflict of interest regarding the researcher and/or participants? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: Not at all.		X	
9. For research involving animal subjects (if applicable)				
I	Does the proposal indicate what measures will be taken to eliminate or minimise any potential pain, anxiety or discomfort that may be caused to the participants? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: NOT APPLICABLE			
li	Have any manipulations to be performed on the			

	animals been described in appropriate detail? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not Applicable</i>			
Iii	Will any of the proposed manipulations potentially affect the well-being of the subject? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not Applicable</i>			
Iv	Will any form of restraint be used on the animals? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not Applicable</i>			
V	Does the proposal indicate in sufficient detail how the animals will be cared for (e.g. access to water/feeding regimen)? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not Applicable</i>			

Vi	Will the animals be kept in a safe environment for the duration of the study? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not Applicable</i>			
Vii	Has a plan been provided for what will happen with the animals after the study has been completed (e.g. euthanasia)? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not Applicable</i>			
Viii	Does the proposal stipulate the use (dose rate and route of administration) of any pharmacological agent to be applied to the animals? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not Applicable</i>			

Ix	Has provision been made for a suitably qualified person to monitor the well-being of the animals and does the proposal indicate their experience/qualifications? RESPONSE / MOTIVATE: <i>Not Applicable</i>			
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PART 4 – ETHICAL CLEARANCE		
Ethical clearance granted	Yes	No
Comments:		

CHAIR OF RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

RESEARCHER (S): Principal investigator

Name: HOPE

Surname: NSUBUGA

Signature

NSUBUGA

Signature HD

Appendix I: Turnitin Report

NSUBUGA H DORCAS.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

2%

SIMILARITY INDEX

1%

INTERNET SOURCES

1%

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STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1

Submitted to University of Mpumalanga

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"Social Cohesion and Resilience through
Citizen Engagement", Edward Elgar
Publishing, 2024

Publication

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8

Submitted to University of Rwanda

Student Paper

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Submitted to Babes-Bolyai University

Appendix J: Editors Certificate



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Kimberley 0831

+27(0) 65 660 3839

pmayimele1@gmail.com

Date: 30/12/2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter serves as proof that the dissertation titled ***Exploring the Contribution of Civic Engagement in Community Development Initiatives in Kanyamazane, Mbombela Local Municipality*** Nsubuga H.D. has been thoroughly edited by a qualified professional editor.

Regards,