PERCEPTIONS OF RESIDENTS OF BEING CONSULTED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES: A CASE OF BINDURA, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This is part of a broad research that sought to find out the participation of residents of local authorities in local government issues. This paper looks at the perception of residents of being consulted in local government issues. The study was carried out against a background of a perception that during the last decade service delivery by local authorities in Zimbabwe has declined drastically. Although many factors could be attributed to this decline, it can be argued that people's participation in the local governance processes has also reduced drastically resulting in misplaced priorities by the local authorities. The study adopted both qualitative and quantitative approaches focusing on Bindura Municipality as the study location, to investigate the perceptions of residents of being consulted in local governance issues. The study used quota sampling method where research participants were drawn from high, middle and low density suburbs. Fifteen participants were drawn from each type of the suburbs in Bindura. The study sample consisted of Bindura residents, counselors and residents associations representatives. The research used questionnaires as research instruments. The study found out that the residents were only consulted when there was going to be a council budget which was a statutory requirement for budgets to be approved by central government. The residents were never consulted on matters of service delivery, formulating by-laws and there was rarely feedback on previous meetings. The study recommends that the counselors always organize feedback meetings on issues that will have been discussed at meetings, residents be consulted in the formulation of by-laws and residents take an active part in issues of service delivery.

KEY WORDS: Perceptions, participation, local governance, consultation, service delivery.

INTRODUCTION

The Zimbabwe governance system provides citizens with the opportunity to elect their representative in local government structures. This opportunity facilitates a link between residents and their local authority and thus, it is expected that the elected councillor, as the people's representative in a given ward, would present issues and people's priorities to the local authorities on behalf of the residents. This process however can only be effective when the residents have the opportunity to present their submissions to their representative, in most cases through consultative meetings.

It has been observed that during the last decade service delivery by local authorities has declined drastically. Although many factors can be attributed to this decline, it can be argued that people's participation in the local governance processes has also reduced drastically resulting in misplaced priorities by the local authorities. A case in point was reported in the Standard issue of 10-16

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February 2013, which says, "Most people living in flats in Mbare have resorted to using the bucket toilet system when nature calls because they have not had running water for the past three weeks". This problem, although specific to Mbare, has been experienced in many towns and cities including Bindura. Such problems have resulted in a plethora of other pathologies such as diseases, - cholera and typhoid, for instance, deaths, relocation of residents and violent conflicts. Water is a basic human need; therefore service provision by any local authority should prioritise such needs and other needs that sustain human life. Other areas of concern regarding service provision include servicing of roads, waste management as well as provision and maintenance of recreational facilities. All the said areas have not been given much attention, especially during the last decade.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the perceptions of residents on being consulted in local government issues by Counselors?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Local Governance

In recent years, Governments have progressively sought to engage citizens in the governance of their communities and neighbourhoods. Increasing participation at the community level, it is argued, is good for improving and targeting local service delivery, empowering communities, raising local accountability and developing cohesive communities in pursuit of citizen well-being and better governance (Rai, 2008)

Local government is a product of devolution as a dimension of decentralisation. Gomme (1987:1) defines local government as,

> …that part of the whole government of a nation or state which is administered by authorities subordinate to state authority, but elected independently of control by the state authority, by qualified persons resident or having property in certain localities which have been formed by communities having a common interest and common history (Gomme, 1987 in Chikerema, 2013:87).

Meyer (1978:10) defines local government as,

> …local democratic governing unity within the unitary democratic system of a country, which are subordinate members of the government vested with prescribed, controlled governmental powers and sources of income to render specific local services and develop, control and regulate the geographic, social and economic environment of defined local area (Meyer, 1978 in Chikerema, 2013:87).

One has to note that whilst local governments are actually not independent of central government control, they enjoy only relative autonomy due to the division of responsibilities for services between central and local government and it should be captured that the division of these

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responsibilities is a political or policy issue. According to Mawhood (1993:66) local government is the third tier or level of government deliberately created to bring government closer to the grassroots population and gives these grassroots structures give a sense of involvement in the political processes that control their daily lives. Chikerema (2013) asserts that the existence of local government has always been defended on the basis that it is a crucial aspect of the process of democratisation and intensification of mass participation in the decision making process. It is furthermore argued that no political system is considered to be complete and democratic if it does not have a system of local government.

In traditional representative democracy, elected representatives are the ones expected to make decisions on behalf of the people, who in turn hold them accountable at times of elections. Decisions and policies in turn are carried out by rational bureaucracies, occupied by specialists whose expertise is the basis of their legitimacy. In more participatory approaches, both the elected and the bureaucratic forms of representation and legitimacy are challenged, as communities and their leaders are invited into (or demand) more direct forms of engagement. Conflicts emerge over who speaks for whom, and with what authority, and about the appropriate relationship between the 'governors' and the 'governed' (Goventa, 2004). However, the principles of citizen engagement being advocated across government departments are increasingly being incorporated into local government and partnership strategies for local service delivery, community cohesion, race equality, neighbourhood renewal and devolving power at a local level (Rai, 2008).

Local Governance Challenges

Despite the growing emphasis on citizen governance, recent research seems to indicate that many citizens and communities remain disconnected from local democratic processes and are failing to engage with the structures of governance that have been established for their benefit (Ellison and Ellison, 2006 in Rai, 2008). Citizen engagement appears to be limited by factors such as:

- disillusionment with the bureaucracy of formal governance and perceptions that engagement will not make a difference;
- lack of confidence and community capacity;
- lack of awareness and knowledge of governance roles and routes into them;
- lack of meaningful consultation and inadequate follow-up (Maguire and Truscott, 2006);
- the mechanisms that exist to facilitate participation at a local level are often ill-equipped for reaching and engaging all sections of society, and fail to recognize the diversity that exists or to discern the needs of those being targeted (Rai, 2008:14)

Similarly, in their recent study of deliberative policy processes, Hajer and Wagenaar (2003:1) argue that 'the rise of a vocabulary of governance indicates a shift away from well-established notions of politics and brings in new sites, new actors and new themes. "Their efforts to find solutions acceptable to all who are involved (and to expand the circle of involvement) nibble and gnaw on the constitutional system of territorially-based representative democracy" (Goventa, 2004:8).

In addition to these challenges the 1993 Constitution of South Africa, contains provisions that are aimed at ensuring citizen participation in local government affairs. However, a number of

challenges have been cited that include poor communication, different educational background making it difficult to understand documents prepared by technocrats, different social status and petty conflicts between technical staff and political leaders and the perennial shortage of resources (Moore, 2007; Olowo, 2002 in Kasozi 2008:42).

While effective governance, both local and national, requires "bottom-up" strengthening of capacity for accountable decision-making, resource management, and monitoring service delivery, the question to be asked is - does participation, as a concept of good governance, result in good service delivery? In other words, is there a correlation between participation and service delivery?

Local Governance and Leadership

Rai (2008) postulates that local government should provide a clear and strong strategic leadership role for whole places and communities. Furthermore, the need to promote and develop stronger local partnership structures for the purpose of agreeing and achieving local priorities that really matter to communities and citizens should be emphasised. The need is revealed in the World Bank's Voices of the Poor study, prepared for the World Development Report 2000/1, which finds that many poor people around the globe perceive large institutions, especially those of the state, to be distant, unaccountable and corrupt. Narayan, et al (2000:172) in Goventa (2004) cites another study by the Commonwealth Foundation (1999) as stating that in over forty countries also found a growing disillusionment of citizens with their governments, based on their concerns with corruption, lack of responsiveness to the needs of the poor, and the disconnection from the lives of ordinary citizens. Leadership by the 'council' often attracted greater criticism than other community-based leadership structures. Action led by the 'institution' appeared to be driven by officialdom and distant bureaucrats with little connection to the community (Rai, 2008)

Stephen Covey (2004:98) in Rai (2008:50) defines leadership as "communicating people's worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves". Sir Michael Lyons (2007) promotes the notion of 'leadership of place' and 'place-shaping', and advocates for a local government that is able to operate at different levels, is in touch with its citizens and has its finger firmly on the community pulse (Rai, 2008) The Birmingham White Paper focuses on the need for councillors to assume the role of 'community champions' and to step up their accountability to local people. Blair (1998) in Goventa (2004:9) says,

> The democratic impulse needs to be strengthened by finding new ways to enable citizens to share in decision-making that affects them…The truth is that in a mature society representatives will make better decisions if they take full account of popular opinion and encourage public debate on the big decisions affecting people's lives (Tony Blair, 1998 in Goventa, 2004:9).

One of the assumptions of participatory forms of governance and development is that greater participation will allow more inclusive inputs into decision-making processes, which in turn will lead to better decisions, as the Prime Minister's quoted statement above suggests. At the heart of the assumption is a link between participation and representation, such that greater anticipation

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will also lead to better, more informed, forms of representation (Goventa, 2004). The Birmingham City Council had this to say about leadership;

> … we accept and take seriously our responsibilities to lead the community. Our particular role includes working with key players ... building consensus on the way forward; ensuring the city's basic physical and service infrastructure is effective; and taking the lead where appropriate. (Birmingham City Council, 2006 in Rai, 2008)

A study conducted by Rai (2008) in Birmingham City revealed that where participants expressed dissatisfaction it was often due to mistrust or a lack of visibility and responsiveness, which some noted seemed to coincide with the timing of elections. Others expressed the following views:

- In some cases councillors were perceived to ignore issues raised by those who did not/do not vote for them.
- Councillors who did not appear to be genuinely interested in the community they had been elected to serve but seemed to be motivated by self-interest or prioritised party and organisational interests (Rai, 2008:58)

In a review of participatory public policy initiatives in the UK, Taylor (2004) writes of the ongoing tension between representative and participatory democracy:

> Not enough thought has gone into the relationship between the two with the result that many politicians are no longer sure of their role and feel threatened by the power that they feel is being given to community representatives. It is this that creates "wounded lions" at all levels that frustrate the rhetoric from the centre. (Taylor, 2004 in Goventa, 2004:8)

While critics of representative democracy are quick to point out the lack of accountability of elected representatives, likewise much attention has also been paid in the literature to the relative lack of accountability or representativeness of community leaders. While acknowledging these critiques, Taylor (2003) views participation as a "minority sport". She explores the question of the emergence of 'usual suspects', or the relatively limited number of local community leaders that are involved in partnerships (Goventa, 2004). This implies that there are other dynamics within the communities where some community 'leaders' have some agendas whether political or otherwise. However, in a survey on the Parliament of Zimbabwe conducted by the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), close to 40% of respondents said they did not know their local Members of Parliament (MP), while another 65% stated that their MPs did not organise frequent meetings with their constituencies.

Local Governance Legal Context in Zimbabwe

According to the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Amendment number 20 (2013) the three tiers of government are; the national government, provincial and metropolitan councils, and local authorities that is to say –

a) Urban councils, by whatever name called, to represent and manage the affairs of the people in urban areas; and

b) Rural councils, by whatever name called, to represent and manage the affairs of people in rural areas within the districts into which the provinces are divided (The Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Amendment No. 20 (2013:22).

Basic values and principles governing public administration under the new constitution state that, "people's needs must be responded to within a reasonable time, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making. So many authorities have pointed out discrepancies almost always between what is written and the reality on the ground. It may also be argued that "a reasonable time" can be subjective and those in leadership can easily use the phrase to escape accountability.

In Zimbabwe urban governance is the immediate responsibility of Urban Councils in co-governance with the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development, which has an overall supervisory role. Chapter 29: 15 of the Urban Councils Act of 1995, revised in 1996, provides for the establishment of municipalities and towns and the administration of local boards, municipal and town councils. It confers functions and powers that impose duties upon municipal and town councils, as well as local boards (Mhlahlo, 2007). In Zimbabwe urban governance is not totally autonomous, the responsibilities and functions of urban governance are often shared and take place within a policy framework, which is both set by national politicians and over which those same national politicians will want to exert influence and direction (ibid).

In Bolivia, the Law of Popular Participation of 1994 mandated broad-based participatory processes, starting at the neighbourhood level, as part of the process of local government decentralisation. It also recognised the importance of social organisations that already existed, including indigenous communities, with their own practices and customs. About 15,000 such 'territorial base organisations' are registered to participate in the planning process. However, in addition, the particular innovation of the Bolivia law was legally to create citizens' oversight or Vigilance committees in each municipality, which are empowered to freeze municipal budgets if actual expenditures vary too far from the planning processes. Again, the actual implementation of these laws varies greatly, due to differences in understandings, power relations, citizens' awareness, etc. in differing localities (Goventa, 2004:21).

The functions of local authorities, according to the new Zimbabwe Constitution, Amendment No. 20 (2013) Section 276 (2a and b) states that an Act of Parliament may confer functions on local authorities, including –

a) a power to make by-laws, regulations or rules for the effective administration of the areas for which they have been established;

b) a power to levy rates and taxes and generally to raise sufficient revenue for them to carry out their objects and responsibilities (Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2013:126).

Goventa and Valderrama (1999:19) say, "If democracy lies in rule by the people, the promise of democratic decentralisation is to make that rule more immediate, direct, and productive." This research sought to assess the extent to which communities were involved in the development of local by-laws as well as budgetary processes among other things.

In this section, the researcher provided an overview of the policy context, which relates to the key themes covered in this report.

The Concept of Participation

The intention of this study is not to consider how much participation is required in political institutions in order for democracy to be said to exist. Rather, the concern is in the way in which certain groups and individuals monopolize power and development resources at the local level. In examining the theory of participation focus will also be on major variables which inhibit participation at a local level.

According to Miller and Monge (1986) in Kasozi-Mulindwa (2013) three models of participation influence decision-making: cognitive, effective and contingency. The cognitive concept is premised on the thinking that participation improves the flow of information from bottom to top, leading to quality decision-making. The effective model reasons that participation enhances self-realisation, as advocated by McGregor's (1960) theory about motivation. The effective model thus concerns itself with the focuses on the passionate gains of participation. On the other hand, the contingency model assumes that the level and effectiveness of participation depend on circumstances. While the cognitive and effective models express the logic behind participation, it has been argued that the contingency model states that to be effective, certain conditions for participation must be in place, including: participants' attitudes, organisational context and the kind of decisions to be made (Kasozi-Mulundwa, 2013).

Participation typology according to Ganenta and Valderrama (1999) includes four strands of work around participation, especially in the development context. On the one hand, there are those approaches to participation which have focused on community or social participation, usually in the civil society sphere or in which citizens have been beneficiaries of government programmes. On the other hand, there is the tradition of political participation, through which citizens have engaged in traditional forms of political involvement e.g. voting, political parties, and lobbying. Increasingly, in the context of democratic decentralisation, these two traditions are being linked to a broader notion of participation as citizenship. Each of these approaches may draw upon a variety of participatory methodologies of planning, monitoring, research, education and action (Ganenta and Valderrama, 1999).

The concept of citizenship has long been a disputed and value-laden one in democratic theory. To some, citizenship has implied a set of individual rights, while to others it is seen as a broader set of social and civic responsibilities. More recently, some have argued for linking these two traditions, such that the .right of participation in decision-making in social, economic, cultural and political life should be included in the nexus of basic human rights. Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined;

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citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents. (Lister 1998:228 in Goventa and Valderrama, 1999:32).

Participation is also viewed from the political point of view, whereby it is seen as part of democracy, that is, looked at in the context of citizens' rights to participate in matters that concern them. It has also been argued that participation enhances democratic values that are necessary for enhancing and improving service delivery in public organisations (Kasozi-Milindwa, 2013). Citizen engagement is about involving the community in the decision making process and is critical in the successful development of acceptable policies and decisions in government, the private sector and the community. In democratic societies, people's participation in decision making and local government processes are transparent and accountable. Because they are engaged, they feel empowered, that they have personal political efficacy and are in control of their destinies (Maribyrnong City Council, 2014)

The concept of accountability has political, social and financial dimensions. Transparency aims at enhancing accountability to all stakeholders, focusing on the financial, social and political dimensions (Kasozi-Mulindwa, 2013). The study will focus more on participation in decision-making in the budgeting processes and policy formulation. It is believed that when developing countries involve their citizens in the budgeting process, accountability, transparency and efficiency are enhanced, as citizens are made aware of government operations and how resources are mobilised and utilised for the common good (Shah, 2007 in Kasozi-Mulindwa, 2013). Shah (ibid) further states that tremendous achievements in terms of political, social and economic development have been made in those local governments of both developed and developing countries where citizens have been involved in the budgeting process. (Kasozi-Mulindwa, 2013)

Levels of Participation

According to Maribyrnong City Council (2014) citizen engagement can take many forms. Examples include:

- Volunteering time to be on decision-making committees and boards (at schools or community centres),
- Attending public meetings and consultations, and being involved in responding to local decisions and issues,
- Being a part of formal Council processes (for example, sitting on advisory committees and other structures), and
- Communicating with Councillors to convey concerns about matters that have a personal impact (Maribyrnong City Council, 2014:1)

Greater emphasis has to be on the importance of participation not only to hold others accountable, but also as a self-development process, starting with the articulation of grassroots needs and priorities, and building popular forms of organization (Goventa and Valderrama, 1999). Citizen participation in this sense involves direct ways in which citizens' influence and exercise control in governance, not only through the more traditional forms of indirect representation.

Hart (1992) cited by the Civic Education and Community Mobilization (CIVCOM) (2003) provides a typology of eight levels of participation as listed:

1. *Manipulation* – The individual does what those with authority/power suggest that they do, but they have no real understanding of the issues. The individuals are asked what they think and the person with authority listens to some of the ideas but they do not tell them what influence they have on the final outcome.
2. *Decoration* – The individual takes part in an event, but they really do not understand the issues.
3. **Tokenism** – The individuals are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.
4. *Assigned but not informed* – Those with authority take the initiative to call in others, but the individual only decides whether to take part after being informed on the "how and why" of the project.
5. *Consulted and informed* – The individual works as a consultant in a project that is designed and run by those with authority, but the individual understands the process and their opinions are treated seriously.
6. *Authority-initiated, shared decisions with others* – Those with authority, involve others in a project, where important decisions require consensus between them.
7. ***Initiated and directed by those with less authority*** – Those with less initial authority conceive, organize, and direct a project themselves without interference from those with more power.
8. **Shared decisions** – Decisions shared by those with more and less initial power, is the final goal of genuine participation.

Source: Adapted from Hart (1992) Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence: UNICEF, Innocent Essays in CIVCOM (2003:28).

The researcher used Hart's "ladder of participation" in analyzing data on the levels of participation by residents.

Makumbe (1996) notes that participatory development can be represented as a continuum of participation levels from passive participation, where donor or government initiated ideas are promoted, to active participation where the recipients are involved in all stages of a development project, including the evaluation. Makumbe (1996:61) concludes that, "local government structures in Zimbabwe, fail dismally to facilitate meaningful beneficiary participation in development". The United Nations publication as cited in Makumbe (1996) observed that active participation requires time to attend meetings, vote and inform oneself about issues. Active participation goes beyond mere choice making from predetermined alternatives. Passive participation largely pertains to such choice making and even manipulation of the masses by those who will have critical decisions in the first place. According to the United Nations (1967) in Chikerema (2013:87) if people are continuously expected to be passive recipients of government

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programs, policy and projects, they tend to shun participation and lose interests in the programmes which lead to failure and underdevelopment of local communities.

Rai (2008) asserts that participation is strongly influenced by the motivations, current circumstances and backgrounds of individuals, which determine whether governance opportunities are taken up. This assertion leads to the question of the nature of people who participate in local governance.

Who participates in Local Governance?

A study conducted by Rai (2008) in Birmingham, revealed that across all wards, descriptions of the types of people that were more likely to participate in formal governance structures included:

- people engaging in their professional capacity, e.g. local government officials, police officers, health professionals, teachers, etc.;
- those holding elected office, e.g. councillors, MPs;
- community workers and activists;
- the politically motivated, committed party supporters (Rai. 2008:88)

Along similar lines, previous research suggested that 'wealthy executives' and 'prosperous professionals' were more likely to engage in civic activities than those with no formal qualifications or in routine occupations. There were, however, also some negative undertones, with not infrequent references to individuals described as 'the usual suspects', 'do-gooders', 'busybodies' and 'those with axes to grind'.((DCLG, 2006c in Rai, 2008)

METHODOLOGY

The study used the mixed method approach that is both qualitative and quantitative. According to Fielding and Fielding (2006) the logic behind these two approaches is the same in that while quantitative research may be used to test theory, it can also be used to explore an area or generating hypothesis or a theory. On the other hand, qualitative research is presented as the most appropriate approach for theory generation - it can be used for testing hypothesis and theories. The other advantage of using the approach is that simultaneous mixed method design may permit the transformation of the qualitative data to quantitative numerical data and incorporation into the quantitative data set.

The survey design was preferred for this study on the basis of its strengths and appropriateness to the nature of the study. The study required that original information needed be sought from mainly the intended beneficiaries, that is residents of Bindura who are most affected by service delivery in the town. In order to get reliable statistical results that could confidently be generalized, it was important to sample a fairly large number of respondents to make sure they were representative of the population. The other reason for selecting the survey was the fact that they are suitable for studying characteristics, opinions, attitudes and experiences of a population gives them relevance to the nature of the study. .

The study sample consisted of forty-five residents, three counselors and three members residents representative association. The study adopted random sampling technique. The research used questionnaires as research instruments. Questionnaires were chosen because they allow the respondents to answer questions at their own convenient times, are relatively easy to analyse and reduce bias through uniform presentation of questions. Simple descriptive statistics were used to present data.

RESULTS

1 Attendance of Residents at Meetings Convened by the Local Authorities and Residents Associations

Figure 1: Residents consulted on local governance issues
     N=45

Figure 1 shows that the majority of residents' respondents (20 or 55.6%) did not attend any meetings on local governance over the 5 year period while 44.4 percent attended meetings.
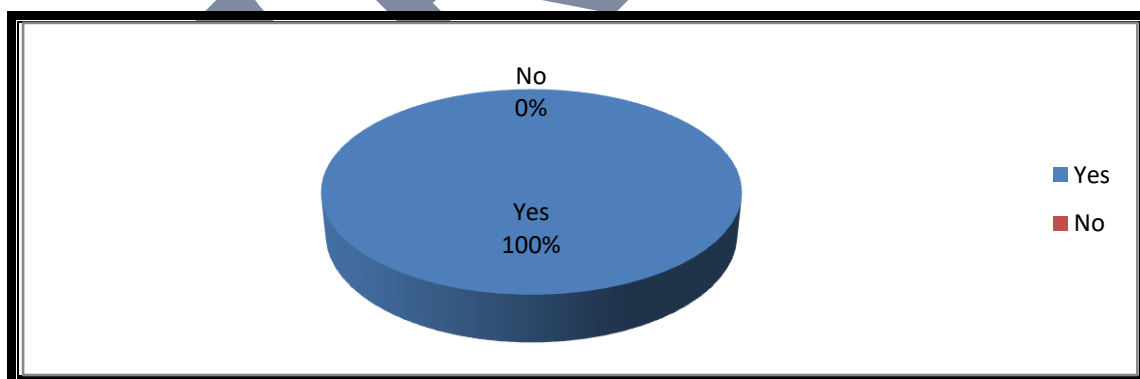

Figure 2: Residents Association consultation
N=3

According to Figure 6 all the 3 sampled residents' association members were consulted by the local authority on matters of local governance.

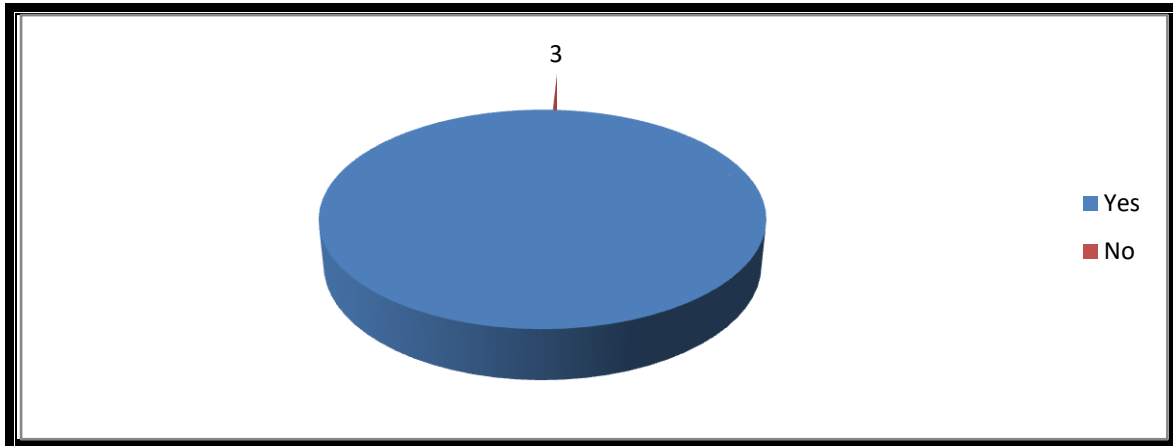**Figure 3: Responses by councillors on consultation**
N=3

The chart shows that all 3 councillors convened consultation meetings with constituents in their wards during the 5 year period.

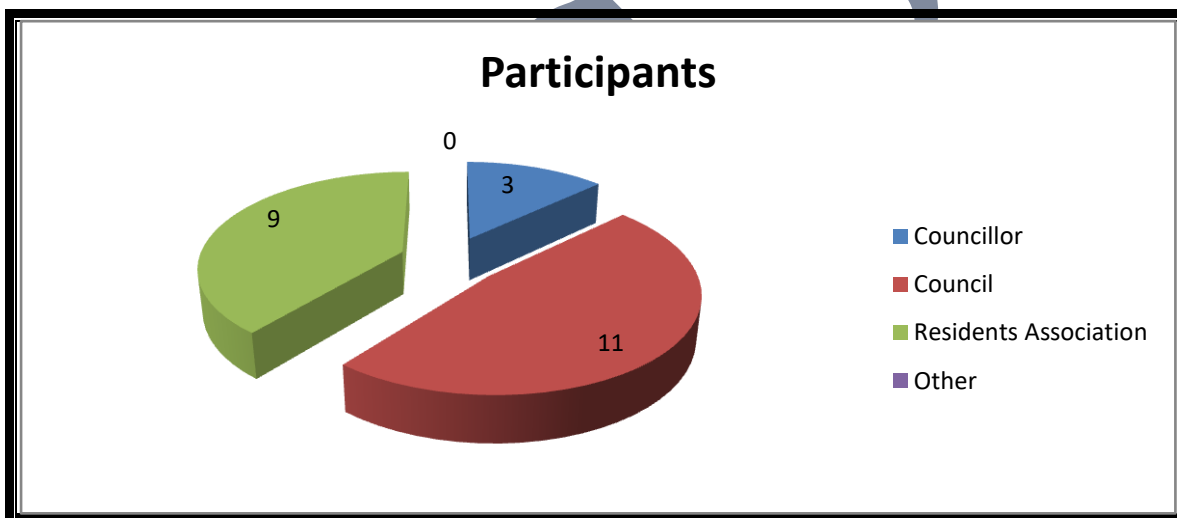**Conveners of meetings attended**

Figure 4: Distribution of residents who attended consultation meetings and the conveners. N=23

The chart shows that 11 people, representing 47.8 per cent of respondents who attended meetings were invited by the local authority (council) while 13 per cent were invited by the ward councillor. The rest, 39.1 per cent, a significant number, attended meetings called by the residents associations.
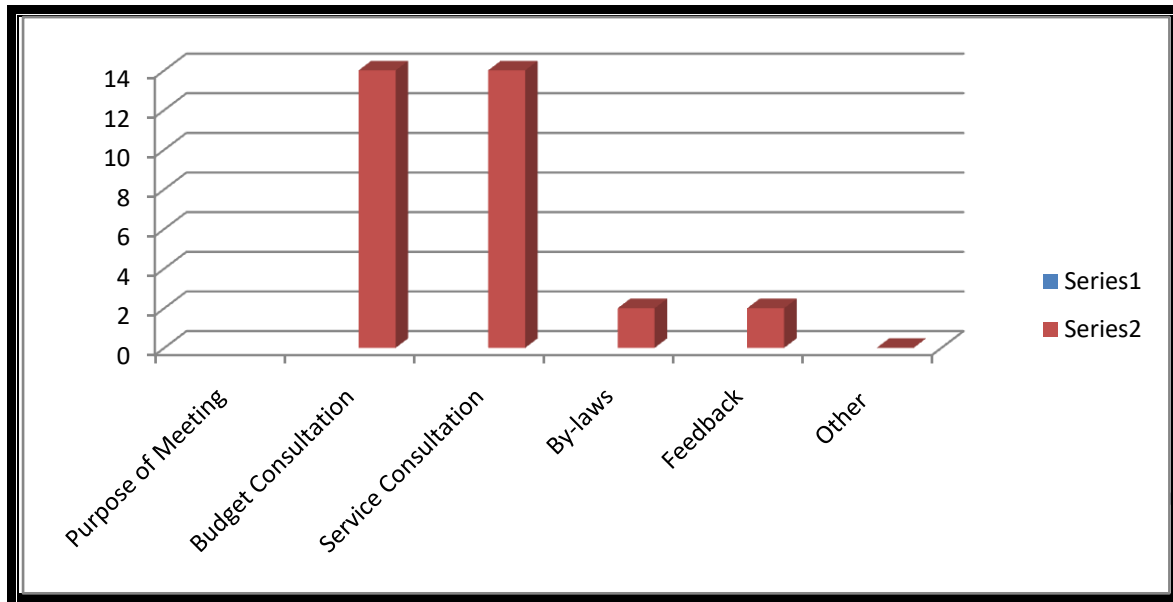
The Nature of Meetings Organised

Figure 5: Purposes of meetings attended by residents.   **N=32**

The graph (Figure 5) shows that budget consultation and service consultation meetings were attended by 14 respondents each representing a total of 87.5 per cent of respondents. By-laws consultation meetings and feedback meetings were also attended by 2 participants each or 12.5 per cent. The budget and service consultation meetings attracted more people than other forms of meetings. It can also be deduced that some residents attended more than one type of meeting (Figure 5 reveals that in all 20 people attended meetings).
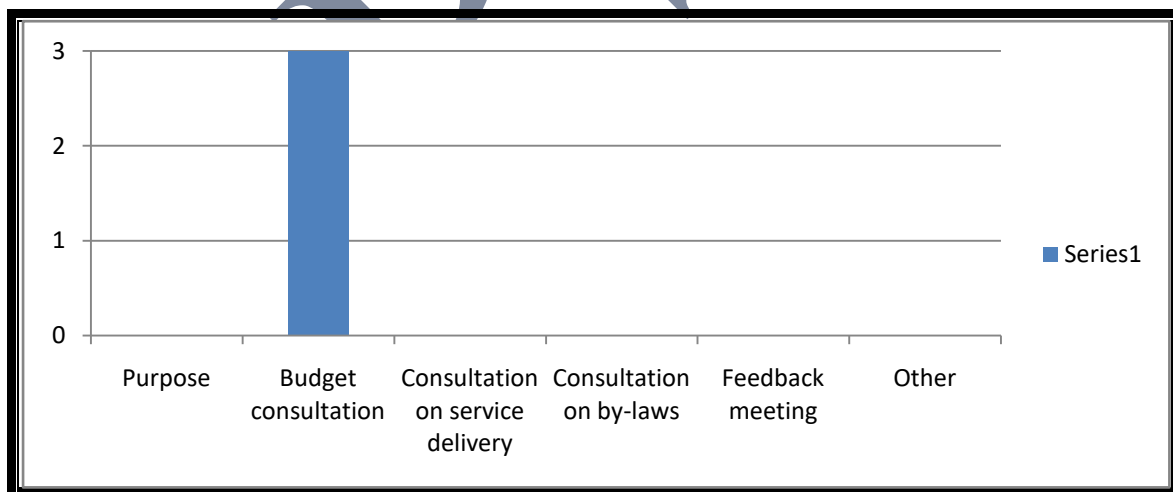

Figure 6: Purpose of Residents Association, Council consultation meetings
N=3

Figure 6 indicates that all members (3) of the residents association attended budget consultation meetings only.
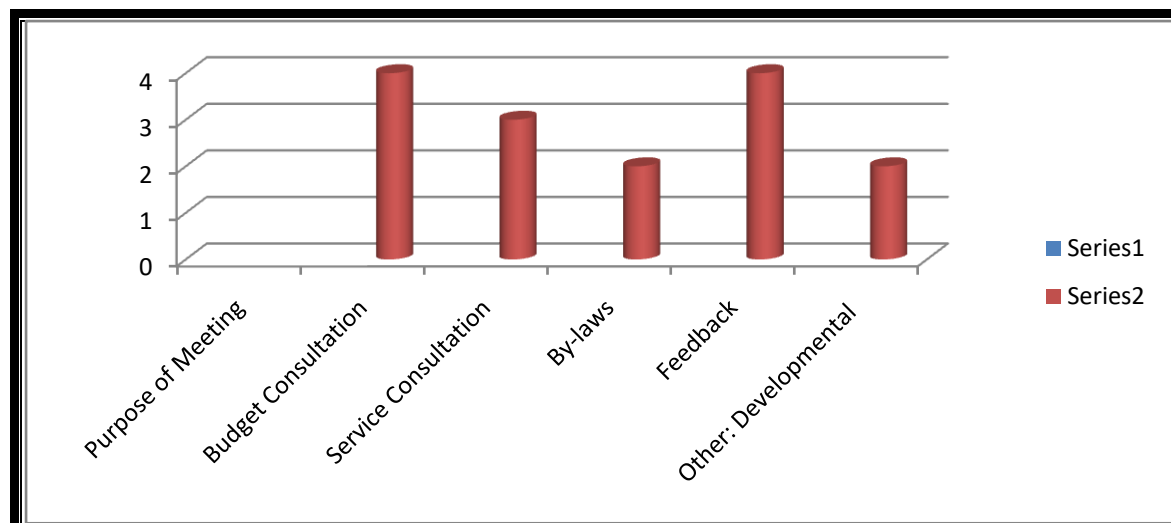
Figure 7: Meetings organised by councillors
N=3

Figure 11 shows that 3 councillors organised meetings on budget consultation and for feedback purposes. Three councillors organised service consultation meetings apart from the budget and service consultations while 2 each convened by-laws consultation and developmental meetings over and above the budget and service consultations.

.**4.3.4. Invitation to Meetings and Actual Attendance**

Table 1: Invitation of residents to meetings and actual attendance
N=45

Frequency of Invitations/Attendance	Residents	*Percentage*	Frequency of Attendance/ Non-attendance	*Percentage*
0	15	*33.3%*	23	*51.1%*
1	4	*8.9%*	12	*26.7%*
2	8	*17.8%*	4	*8.9%*
3	6	*13.3%*	2	*4.4%*
4	1	*2.2%*	1	*2.2%*
5	6	*13.3%*	2	*4.4%*
6	0	*0%*	0	*0%*
7+	5	*11.1%*	1	*2.2%*
Totals	**45**	*100%*	**45**	*100%*

Table 1 shows that a significant number of respondents representing 33.3 per cent of the residents sample never received any invitations during the period 2008 to 2013. While 33.3 per cent did not receive the invitations 51.1 per cent did not attend the meetings. The table also reveals that 66.7 per cent of the respondents received invitations ranging from1 to 7+ during the same period. Of those who received invitations 48.9 per cent attended the meetings between 1 and 7+ times.

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Table 2: Invitation of Residents Association to meetings and actual attendance N=3

Frequency of Invitations/Attendance	Residents Association members	*Percentage*	Frequency of Attendance/ Non-attendance	*Percentage*
1	3	*100%*	3	*100%*

Table 2 reveals that all the 3 sampled respondents were invited to one consultation meeting and all attended the meeting.

Table 3: Meetings organised by councillors.   N=3

Number of meetings	Frequency
9+	2
10+	1

Table 3 reveals that 66 per cent of the respondents said they had conducted 9+ meetings and the other 33 per cent said they had organised 10+ meetings.

Reasons for Non-attendance of Meetings by Residents

Table 4: Reasons for non-attendance of meetings N=45

Clusters	Categories
1. Bad timing of meetings (17)	• Work commitments (10) • Other commitments (7)
2. Politicization of developmental meetings (12)	• Manipulation of the meeting agenda for political gains (9) • Fear of political victimization (3)
3. No invitations (9)	• I did not get the invitation (including late invitations) (7) • No meetings were held (2)
4. Meetings are unworthy (useless) (13)	• Nothing comes out of the meetings (8) • Meetings are poorly organised (3) • Poor leadership (2)

Table 4 shows that 17 of the responses gave reasons related to bad timing of meetings. The majority of the reasons related to work commitments (10) and the rest related to other commitments (that were not specified). The table also reveals that 13 responses were related to the reasons that the meetings were unworthy to attend. In support of this theme 8 responses indicated that nothing tangible comes out of the meetings while 3 responses stated that meetings were

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poorly organised. The rest (2) blamed it on poor leadership. The other reasons that came out of the responses centred on politicization of supposedly developmental meetings (12). Two categories coming out of the responses relate to manipulation of the meeting agenda for political gains (9) and fear of political victimization (3). Finally the table shows that some of the respondents did not get the invitations to the meetings (9). The responses under this theme can be broken down into two categories namely; those who did not receive the invitations (7) and those who claim that no meetings were held (2).

In analysing the data presented above it can be deduced that a significant number of responses (17) indicated that they could not attend the meetings because of commitments.

Other Channels for Forwarding Concerns to Council

**Table 5: Other channels for bringing issues to the attention of council.
N=43**

	Channel	Frequency
1.	Did not use any other channel	22
2.	Went direct to council offices	11
3.	Residents Association	5
4.	Suggestion box	3
5.	Demonstration	1
6.	Formed an ad hoc committee	1

 Table 5 shows that 22 (51%) respondents out of 43 said that they never used any other channels to direct their concerns to council. Eleven (11) directly approached the council in order to communicate their concerns. The table also reveals that 5 respondents used the residents association as an alternative to direct their concerns to the local authority. Three or 7 per cent of respondents indicated that they used the suggestion box as an alternative channel. One respondent said that a demonstration was used to air concerns to council while the other 1 .respondent indicated that an ad hoc committee had been formed to bring their concerns before council.
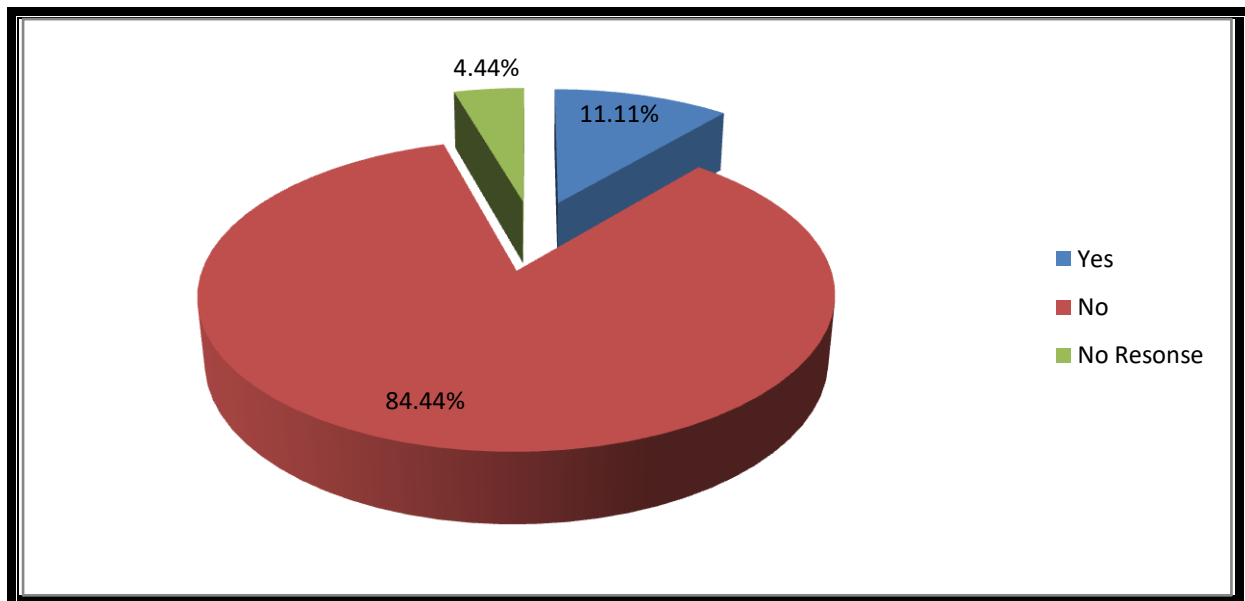
4.3.7 Level of Consultation

Figure 8: Level of satisfaction with the consultation by the local authority

Figure 8 reveals that 84.44 per cent of the respondents felt that they were not consulted enough in local governance decisions. Five respondents representing 11.1 percent of the respondents felt that consultation during the 5 years was adequate while 4.4 per cent did not respond to the question.
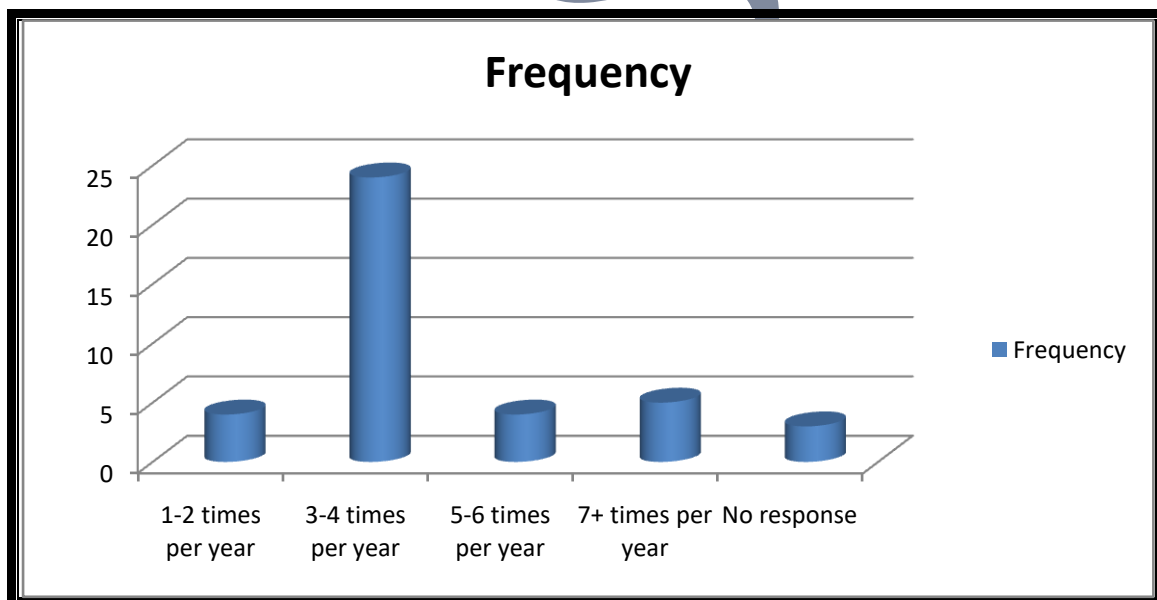

Figure 9: Residents' preferred number of consultations

Figure 9 shows that 24 respondents (53.33%) preferred to have consultation meetings with the local authority between 3 and 4 times a year. Five (5) respondents felt that 7 or more consultations were preferable. Four representing 8.9 per cent of respondents settled for 1 to 2 meetings per year and 3 respondents did not answer the question.

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DISCUSSION

Evidence produced by the study indicate that the majority of residents (55.6%) did not attend any meetings convened by either the council, the councillor or even the residents association. A number of factors could have contributed to low participation in consultation meetings of local residents (figure 1), for instance, some may have missed the invitations to attend the meetings. Others may have been committed when the meetings were held. Other reasons could also include the fact that some deliberately did not attend because they felt that the meetings "were not worth attending or they considered them more political than developmental". The finding affirms Rai (2008:11)'s findings that "general barriers included the 'lack of time', lack of awareness of the opportunities to engage and practical barriers such as the timing of meetings and inadequate childcare facilities".

The fact that less respondents participated in meetings on local governance issues perhaps means that residents do not value their participation in such processes or the environment conducive for participation is non-existent. Pieterse (1998) asserts that all communities irrespective of their scale, are comprised of multiple interest groups that are always in the state of reproducing themselves in relation to other interests and dynamics. In such contexts it is extremely difficult to develop an institutional or decision-making mechanism that can satisfactorily capture these ever-shifting dynamics. This perhaps may be true to the fact that Bindura is dominated by two major political parties namely ZANU PF and MDC-T that have sponsored candidates for local government ward councillors. Attendance of consultation meetings may be on the basis of party affiliation of the individual residents. Similar findings were made by Kasozi-Mulindwa (2013:) who posits that the people interviewed stated that the selection of participants for the budget conferences was based on partisan support. Individuals and groups known to be critical of the technical officers and executive are not invited and those who attend are never given a chance to contribute.

The study findings have revealed that all the councillors claim that they organized an average of 9 consultation meetings over the 5 year period. However, evidence also indicate that 47.8 per cent of respondents who attended meetings were invited by the local authority (council officials) while 13 per cent were invited by the ward councillor. The rest, 39.1 per cent, a significant number, attended meetings called by the residents associations.

The findings of this item may be indicative of the presence of the local governance actors on the ground. The fact that council hosted more residents (47.8%) at its consultation meetings than the councillors could perhaps mean two things, firstly that residents have more confidence in council than the councillors, who are the elected representatives of the residents, and the residents associations. Secondly it could infer that council is more in contact with the residents than other actors. On the other hand it would appear that the presents of the residents association in local governance is quite significant given that it is a voluntary organization.

The revelation that the councillor, who is an elected representative of residents, convened the least number of meetings could be deduced either to mean that the councillor failed to convince

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residents to have confidence in him or her, or councillors consulted people on lesser occasions. Pieterse (1998) professes that local communities are often led and dominated by ambitious people who try and align participatory imperatives with their strategic agendas to control and lead development processes, especially resources and the power that they represent. This implies that once the elected leaders have been put in power they tend to pursue their individual agendas and reduce performance on their mandate. As an elected representative the expectation would be to be on the lead in terms of contact with the residents.

The study reveals that residents were motivated to attend budget and service consultations than other types of meetings. Figure 7 shows that budget consultation and service consultation meetings were attended by 14 respondents each representing a total of 87.5 per cent of respondents. By-laws consultation meetings and feedback meetings were also attended by 2 participants each or 12.5 per cent. It was also revealed that some residents attended more than one type of meeting.

It would appear that residents have greater interest in meetings that have the effect of directly addressing their concerns. The findings above reveal that residents are interested in issues related to service delivery and those that affect their pocket. Evidence collected in the study reveal that council officials conducted more budget meetings than councillors. Although generally the findings revealed that participation in budget consultation meetings was low, the findings concur with Kasozi-Mulindwa (2013)'s findings that "Local Government, technical officers were more committed to meeting the needs of the ordinary citizen than political leaders, who were only interested in pursuing their own rent-seeking agendas". However, Rai (2004) argues that the intentions of authorities to involve and consult with communities were sometimes perceived as being no more than tick-box exercises where the outcomes had already been determined.

The fact that feedback meetings were only attended by 6.3 per cent of those who attended the meetings reveals that there is less interest in what has been done or what has not been done. During times of economic hardships people are mostly concerned with issues of service delivery and financial savings where possible implying that all other things become secondary. It should however be noted that all selected councillors (Figure 7) said that they had conducted feedback meetings. This probably means that people may not have been clear on the agenda of some of the meetings they attended unless otherwise revealed by the convener. This concurs with (Rai, 2008:19) who said it was the lack of awareness about the opportunities to engage, lack of information about the issues to be discussed and late notification of forthcoming events that contributed to poorly attended meetings and failure by citizens to engage in the governance of their communities.

The study revealed that all members (3) of the residents association attended budget consultation meetings only. However at these meetings they also raised other agendas such as home ownership even though no meeting was specifically convened for that purpose.

Without judging the capacity of the residents association, it is perhaps possible that while the local authority recognises the association, by virtue of it (local authority) inviting the association to a

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meeting, it did not value its participation in local governance given that it was only consulted on one issue (the budget) per year. It would appear that budget consultation meetings appear prominently in all findings. However what may not be revealed by this study is whether the meetings yield some results as expected by the residents. It is also possible that the meetings prioritised by council are only meant to 'rubber stamp' decisions made already or just for political reasons (people were consulted). This is confirmed by findings in which residents indicate that "nothing tangible comes out of the consultation meetings" and thus the reason for not attending the meetings

On the other hand members of residents associations were only invited to one type of meeting which they all attended. It can be deduced that as an association representing residents it would have been ideal for the association to get more invitations and more meetings because associations are supposed to feel the space between residents and their local authority. Cunill, (1991) and Rosemberg (1994) citing a Latin America multi-country case said legislation exists in which organisations of civil society are recognised and have the right for information and to address demands and petitions but the formal spaces where these groups participate are not widely used (Goventa and Valderrama, 1999) Although it is not the objective of this study, it would be interesting to establish how frequent and to what extent the association involves residents in their consultation processes.

The research findings indicate that residents were not adequately consulted on issues pertaining to crucial decision of service delivery although some chose to stay away after they had been invited to attend consultation meetings. This is confirmed by findings which reveals that councillors had convened an average of 9 meetings a claim which is also affirmed by some residents (11.1%) who stated that they had been invited to consultation meetings more than 7 times. Furthermore methods of inviting participants needed to be revised as a relatively high number of respondents stated that they had not been invited. In a related study Kasozi-Mulindwa (2013) established that;

> *...the issue involved in mobilising citizens to participate and demand transparency and accountability of elected leaders and public servants against a cultural background of lack of democracy, emerged as one of the challenges of participatory budgeting (Kasozi-Mulindwa, 2013:135)*

It can be deduced that a significant number of the residents (33.3%) never received any invitations. This probably means that the councillors and the local authority officials did not employ effective ways of organising meetings and inviting residents. Perhaps selective methods were used to invite people to meetings. Table one also reveals that while 66.7 per cent of respondents were invited to meetings a lesser percentage (48.9%) attended, however it is also revealed that few people attended more meetings thereby increasing the frequency of attendance, for instance 2 respondents attended 5 times each. Several reasons could be attributed to low attendance that may include lack of confidence in the processes and their outcomes. The other reason for low participation could be as stated by Kasozi-Mulindwa (2013) that participation is voluntary, and there are no sanctions for non-participation and no feedback mechanism.

In summary, the findings under variable one reveal that residents were not adequately consulted and in the few cases they were consulted their contributions were not taken seriously indicating that real participation was almost non-existent (manipulative participation).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the study findings the following recommendations are being made:

- Counselors should always organize feedback meetings with their constituencies to appraise them on the outcomes of the issues that they will have discussed with residents. They need to keep the residents aware of whatever developments that will be occurring whether positive or negative.
- By-laws affect the livelihood of residents so there is need for the residents to be consulted on their formulation. When they are being changed the residents have to have their input.
- There is need to make sure residents take an active part in issues of service delivery and ascertain how it should be delivery.
- Meetings with residents have to be widely publicized so that most of the residents are aware of them. The use posters, announcements in public gatherings and social media may be employed to publicise the meetings.

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