



Community Participation in Local Government Structures: The Case of Manonyane Community Council in Lesotho

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Article Info

Received: February 17, 2025

Accepted: February 24, 2025

Published: February 28, 2025

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Citation: Moliehi M-Mokhothu, (2025) "Community Participation in Local Government Structures: The Case of Manonyane Community Council in Lesotho" Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2(1); DOI: 10.61148/3065-6990/JSBS/026

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Abstract:

Local government is a means that the government uses to deepen democracy; it brings government closer to the people at the grassroots level. By this process the government is widening access to the structures of government and giving the electorate greater democratic control over development planning processes and making institutions more accountable. Thus the communities should be involved in the operations of the councils within their jurisdiction. The concept of participation becomes pivotal to the council decisions and plans, which means that the communities should be involved in the local governance. Participation has been used in the discourse of development as well as being related to the rights of citizenship and democratic governance. With the re-introduction of local government system in Lesotho in 2005 the councils were elected throughout the country. This had to take the country a step further in its democratization journey and created a better system in so far as popular participation is concerned. This chapter explores how the communities are involved in the processes of these councils, to what extent are the communities participating in all the councils operations? The dynamics of community participation will be investigated. If there are any barriers to this participation some initiatives and strategies for overcoming such barriers to participation will also be explored. The findings from the case of the Manonyane Community Council will be used as a basis for the chapter's argument.

Keywords: local government; council; participation; decentralisation; communities; operations

1.Introduction:

The Kingdom of Lesotho covers 30,355 square kilometres and is an enclave land-locked by The Republic of South Africa. The population of Lesotho is about 1.8 million (2006 census). It obtained its independence in 1966, during which time its local government system was inherited from the British colonial rule, of which Lesotho was a former protectorate. After independence, the government of Lesotho was governed by the Basotho National Party (BNP) leadership. According to Mofuoa (2005), when the new government assumed power it abolished the councils that existed then through the Local Government Repeal Act of 1968. The new government felt that it was fragile and incapable to handle local government finances and administrative issues. Mofuoa continued to maintain that a more important reason for the abolishment of these District Councils was political because they were dominated by the opposition Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), which appeared to be a threat to the governing BNP. The abolishment of local government saw an end to participatory institutions at the local level, resulting in the increasing centralised administrative machinery. During this

period, the government opted to have some limited degree of deconcentration where it worked through committee systems in the villages as well as posting fieldworkers in the districts and regions. Thus, real powers and functions remained with the Central Government with a minimum of district level decision-making on policy issues (Wallis and Van de Geer, 1984).

Between 1966 and 1986 Lesotho had deconcentration kind of decentralisation through development committees and field workers. According to Kapa (n.d.) the committees system was even better because every village in Lesotho had its own Village Development Committees (VDC) hence the scope for the people to have a better direct input in issues affecting their lives. In 1986 the military toppled the government and took over power. The government before the military rule had enacted the law of Urban Government Act 1983 to introduce the first municipality in the capital, Maseru. This was one other way that the government wanted to decentralise but starting in towns and urban areas. The purpose for starting with Maseru town was that if everything goes well the system could be replicated in other urban areas in the whole country. So, the Military government allowed the first elections of Maseru to take place under 'Order Number Four of 1986' which banned all political activities. So people who were nominees of these elections were not under the banner of any political party. The birth of the Maseru City Council came after the elections of 23rd March 1989. Thus, from the military government perspective, all these changes were done primarily to deepen popular participation in local administration (Mofuoa 2005). The Maseru City Council was sponsored by the World Bank financially to cultivate the necessary infrastructure for the establishment of a local authority. Maseru was declared a 'city' on the 15th of April 1989 on the inaugural occasion by the late King Moshoeshoe II (Lethobane, & Mota 1990:3). Unfortunately Maseru City Council did not perform as expected due to the following reasons:

- *The conflict between the council and the military government that damaged the operations of the municipality*
- *The political colours in the council, the town clerk was a BNP and councilors were BCP members and both these parties used the council as a forum to push their agenda, thus hindering the municipality to make a meaningful impact in its attempt to deliver services*
- *War between the councilors and bureaucrats, the council ended up violating the standing orders that established it, culminating in its suspension by the military government (Mofuoa, 2005:10)*

From 1993, Lesotho returned to civilian rule after the military rule which was between 1986 and 1993. The government was under the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) which had won the elections of 1993 and this government established the Ministry of local government in 1994 with the purpose to drive local government issues, starting by drafting the bill for the enactment of the law that will enable the country to go for elections that introduced local government again from that of colonial rule. According to Shale (2004), the Ministry of Local Government was charged with the responsibility to spearhead the decentralization process, and has

had to decide on the model which would address the country's needs. The restoration of the civil rule was followed by the enactment of Local Government Act of 1997 and it repealed all other laws that came before local administration. It was supposed to lead the country to the first local government elections throughout the country after the military rule. However, it took the country some eight years to prepare for local government elections which came in 2005, after the Local Government Elections (Amendment no.6 of 2004 was passed. According to Kapa (n.d) the, April 30th 2005 local government elections ushered into Lesotho's administration, at least in theory a decentralized system throughout the country. While Sekatle (n.d) maintains that, one major reason given for the decision to introduce local government was that decentralisation would improve and accelerate service delivery. That is, through decentralized governance would involve communities in the planning and implementation of development programmes.

The focus of this chapter is on the participation of the communities in the operations of the councils. I will argue that communities have limited involvement in the councils' operations. Most people do not even know exactly what the councils are supposed to do. The chapter will be structured in the following order: the research methodology, the concepts relating to community participation, decentralization, and participation and a description of the empirical findings from the Manonyane Community Council, which is the case study and barriers and solutions to such barriers to community participation and the conclusion will be drawn to shed light on the phenomena in question in this study.

2. Research methodology:

The methodology employed for this study was based on a desktop review of secondary sources, face-to-face interviews with the Manonyane Community Council, the Community Council Secretary and twenty members of the community picked randomly, mostly the street vendors found at the National University of Lesotho gate. Focus group discussion was held with five councillors out of twelve. The Director of decentralization within the Ministry of Local Government was also interviewed to find out how they are dealing with the national decentralization policy on the issues of citizens participation in the council's operations. Data was collected from June to September 2016. The themes that were explored are empowerment of citizens through information dissemination, holding leaders accountable for service delivery and active participation in the council decision-making processes. The results from the interviews were analysed qualitatively.

The theoretical framework for this chapter relies on participatory democratic theory which holds that those who are affected by the decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process – public participation may be regarded as a way of empowerment and as a vital part of democratic governance. Ismael *et al* (1999:28) citing Chistenson (1971:194) maintained that citizens will have access to adequate political information and use it for enlightening political decision-making process. Participation improves the quality of information required for planning (Setsabi, 2009:152). As such this study is largely informed by this theory as participation of the citizens has been examined.

3. Conceptual framework:

The concept of Local government has been defined by different scholars. Ismael *et al.* (1997:3) maintains that, Local Government refers to the level of government which is commonly defined as a decentralized, representative... within a geographically defined area". Mawhood (1983:4), on the other hand views, local government as a unit that has its own budget and a separate legal existence which is granted to it by the central government to allocate substantial material resources on a range of different local councils. Through their representatives, people have more control over their resources rather than having them controlled by personnel far remote in the cities or headquarters. It has been observed that officials at the headquarters know more about technology that is available. The rural people know more about the environmental constraints. Therefore, it is important to involve them on issues of poverty alleviation and development. People feel fulfilled and motivated when their destiny is in their hands, and they have a sense of ownership in decision-making process.

According to Appadorai (2004:287), the concept of local government is further defined as the government by popularly elected bodies charged with administration and executive duties in matters concerning the inhabitants of a particular district or place. Closely related to the notion of local government is the concept of decentralization. Decentralisation is defined as "the opportunity for effective people's participation increases under a firm decentralization policy, also implies the multiplication of decision-making points in local government, as well as field administration which, in turn, requires effective co-ordination" (Kotze, 1997:25). Decentralization involves a transfer of authority to perform some service to the public from an individual or an agency in central government to some other individual or agency which is closer to the public to be served. The basis for such transfers is most often territorial and it can also be made functionally (Turner & Hulme 1997). Mawhood (1983: 1) maintains that, decentralization suggest the hope of cracking open the blockages of central bureaucracy, curing managerial constipation, giving more direct access for the people; and stimulating the whole nation to participate in national development plans. Decentralisation is, therefore, an important ingredient for instituting democracy and widening the civic space for citizen participation (Kessy, 2013:33).

Communities are composed of individuals and groups of people with different and often opposing interests (Burkey, 1993:41). This means, communities could be complex and heterogeneous with, the poor, the headmen, landowners, elites, youth and women. Wallis & Scott (2013:66) opines that community empowerment is closely allied with citizen participation and how members of a group can act collectively in ways that enhance their influence on, decisions that affect their interests. Swanepoel and de Beer (2011:18) summarised the meaning of community as a term characterized by a closeness of people with shared needs or interests or a need to participate in development and some measurable level of poverty or deprivation. The community exists where a group of people perceives common needs and problems, acquires a sense of identity, and has a common set of objectives (Swanepoel and de Beer, 2011:18). Regardless of their differences the communities still have common goals and common objectives hence; the notion

of community development has been easier and gained more results than in areas which are disorganised.

Equally noteworthy is the notion participation. Participation has been used in the discourse of development, lately the concept of participation is being related to rights of citizenship and to democratic governance. The purpose of the decentralization policy is to deepen and sustain grassroots-based democratic governance and promote equitable local development by enhancing citizen participation and strengthening the local government system (The National Decentralisation Policy, 2014). Burkey (1993:56) argues that, participation is a process whereby people learn to take charge of their own lives and solve their own problems, is the essence of development. He continues to say, participation is essentially learning by doing exercise - plans are made, action is taken, results are studied and lessons are learned. The concept of participation relates to the involvement of the broad mass of the population to influence decision making in favour of popular needs and aspirations (Chikerema, 2013). Citizen participation in public policy, whether direct or indirect, is imperative for democratic local governance. However, participation becomes somewhat meaningless unless local authorities have sufficient functions, power and resources to implement policies and decisions (Ismail *et al.*, 1997:31). Kessy (2013:216) citizens' participation can be studies in the way a citizen interacts with political system through voting in elections, attending council meetings or participating in local committees created by local authorities. Citizens' participation aims at empowering the indented beneficiaries so that they may share in control of resources. Lesotho aspires to a decentralisation policy that will assist to enable citizens to actively participate in governance and service delivery activities, and take responsibility for their own development. Basotho must have power to demand quality services (National Decentralisation Policy, 2014). According to Kapa (2013), the citizens can if they wish, request official documents of the councils, including minutes of the meetings, they can also attend meetings of the council, except when confidential issues are discussed. However, he observed, that Basotho have not used these opportunities.

The Government of Lesotho is committed to promoting participatory democracy, poverty reduction and sustainable development through inclusive governance and adoption of a National Decentralisation Policy formulated in February 2014 (National Decentralisation Implementation Strategy 2014-2018). This policy wants to deepen democracy and empower its citizens with information and knowledge to demand services and hold local leaders accountable for their actions. It also urges that citizens should participate in and control over service delivery in all councils in the country. However, Kapa (2013:13) observed that, citizens may not be using the channels for participating in the activities of their respective councils because they do not know that these channels exist. The community seems to be limited in information pertaining to local government in Lesotho, it difficult for them to participate, question, or even to complain about councils due to inadequate information.

4. The Context of Manonyane Community Council:

Manonyane Community Council is situated 35km outside of the

Maseru city jurisdiction. It serves about sixty-seven villages of which some of these villages are in areas that are not easily accessible. The Councillors were twelve at that moment because two were late. This council had four committees. They were: Finance Committee, Planning Committee, Land Allocation Committee and Social Welfare committee. The Administration staff is made up of Community Council Secretary, Assistant Administrative officer, Assistant Physical Planner, Clerical Assistant, an Accounts Clerk and two Office Assistants. The council is mandated to allocate land, provide water systems in villages, protect the pastures, look after burial grounds and provide market places as well as have good places for dumping cabbage and assist support groups for HIV/AIDS. This council has the National University under its jurisdiction and some five high schools, one hospital and a police station.

The councillor's focus group discussed how they interact with the communities in their operations. Community Council's Secretary was interviewed to establish how the community members interact with the council in its operations. How the council interacted with the public was the main issue here. The director of decentralisation was also interviewed on how the ministry is pushing the contents of the policy on decentralisation, especially on public participation. Twenty members of the community were also interviewed on how they understand the role of the council and how they contribute to its undertakings.

5. Findings and Interpretation:

In the focus group of councillors, it was observed that, Section 18 of Local Government Act 1997 provides for the council to have general meetings once a month but Manonyane Community Council has decided to meet twice in a month. In these meetings public can attend but they are not expected to participate by way of asking questions or making comments. The public can only sit and listen to the deliberations. Special meetings can be convened when need arises with a two-day notice for councillors to attend. These could be closed meetings where public is not expected. After its meetings it is expected that different councillors for different wards will go back to their wards to disseminate the information, announcements, or plans made by the council and it's the expectations from the citizens as well. The councillors would ask the chief of the area to call a *pitso* (public gathering), in this public gathering the councillors are supposed to disseminate information to the public and the public is allowed to ask questions or to make their own comments. The community members may also put forward their needs or wants for council consideration though this gathering. Community members have not used this channel because they were not aware that they can submit their needs and want through the *pitso*s held by the councillors. The councillors claimed that they feel they have not really made it clear to the community members about their role in the council operations. They interact with the community members during *pitso*s but not much has come out of these gatherings because the community members would just listen to the information as is disseminated to them.

The Community Council Secretary maintained that, Manonyane Community Council has 'Public Service Day' this is the day on

which the council normally invites the community members and different service providers to their premises. These could be the office of Home Affairs in the department of National Identity, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health and some private services such as insurance companies and banks. At this gathering the Ministry of Home Affairs normally registers people so that they can have their birth certificates, national identity cards and fill in forms for people to access passports. Ministry of Social Development registers orphans who are to be assisted by the government either at school or on issues of health. They also register old aged persons who are due for government grants. The Ministry of Health normally provide education on health issues and the risks surrounding diseases such as sugar diabetes, high blood pressure and HIV/AIDS and people are encouraged to test for these chronic diseases. The banks and insurance companies normally market their different products. It was observed that on this day majority of people attend hence, the council takes this opportunity to explain about what the council does and how it can assist people within their areas and different villages. The council secretary maintained that this day has been an eye-opening to most of the public about the role and operations of the council.

The Community Council Secretary mentioned that the teachers of primary schools within the Manonyane Community Council jurisdiction have undergone training on the practical aspects of the council and they are supposed to put it in the curriculum for the school children. She maintains that the teachers are not the ones responsible to include this subject in the curriculum, but the assumption is that they will teach and enlighten school learners about the role of the council. It has been established that the primary school learners are taught about the local government system in the country. But for high schools it is not yet clear if they are taught about local government.

The Physical Planner of the council has made it clear that there are no decisions made by the council yet nor have they made any policies. The council has made plans for cleaning campaigns and service day only. The public was not involved in the planning of these activities but they were expected to participate when the cleaning was taking place. It is because the plans are still supposed to be approved at the central government by the Ministry of Local Government. The previous council had made several plans such as identifying the dumping place, which was approved by the inspection team, but it is still not in use at the moment also they had planned for the grave yard place which is not in use at the moment. These plans are both still awaiting approval from the Ministry of Local government in Maseru.

The Director of decentralization from the Ministry of Local Government mentioned that they are aware that the public is not as involved as expected hence, they are embarking on a campaign to mobilize the public to be interested in the operations of the councils. They are collaborating with non-state actors so that they can use them in the communities since they have observed that the non-state actors have rooted themselves in the communities through other projects. Apart from that non-state actors have been involved during the national policy formulation, so they understand its contents better. The non-state actors or civil society groups are normally engaged during elections for training the public. The

Ministry felt that it would be proper to engage them for training people on communities' role towards the council's operation and decision-making processes.

It is an important concern to utilize the non-state actors that they can assist in educating, mobilizing, and making awareness campaigns for local government issues. These non-state actors have been involved during local government elections in training the public about elections. It is true that it would be easy to utilize them again for information dissemination about national decentralization policy. According to Setsabi (2009:150) participation of civil society in processes of governance enables it not only to advocate for its constituency, but also to act as public watchdog over the state.

The Ministry of Local Government has had a training of trainers' workshop for information officers in the country. The purpose was to give them in detail about the council works and the contents of the policy document. These officers are the face of the ministry in their respective districts. They are supposed to assist the councils to spread the good news about councils' operations to the communities and take from the communities any complains. It is anticipated that if the communities understand the council's operations they will easily participate in its functions. As information officers they should be acquainted with knowledge and proper information so that they can assist anybody coming to the ministry about what the National Decentralization Policy is all about the operations of the councils and how they relate to the public at large. But these officers are at the district level not at the community level hence why they are not reaching out to community members. As Setsabi (2009: 150) observed, changing attitudes of public officers toward increasing access to information remains a major challenge because citizens often do not know what information is accessible and what is available for their consumption.

The Director in decentralization mentioned also that the Ministry of Local Government has had training of trainers' workshops and it is planning to undertake at community levels using what it calls 'policy influencers' such as members of parliament. The ministry wants to use members of parliament for their different constituencies and make them collaborate with the councils within their jurisdictions. It is because the public normally favour more the members of parliament than the councillors. So, if they can be acquainted with the right tools for proper mobilization of the public at the grassroots level the public may take the council more seriously and understand its importance within the communities. However, this does not mean it could be the perfect means of reaching out to the communities.

Observation was made by the Director that employing the members of parliament would be good to a certain extent, it might be tainted by political parties' interests and as such it may not gain the results that the ministry is intending. Mofuoa (2005:10) maintained that the political colour of the council clouded the smooth operations of the municipality; party politics rocked the operations of the municipality. The Director continued to observe that people in Lesotho are very sensitive towards political parties, so if the ministry uses the members of parliament, they must be careful

about their involvement. On the other hand, this could reinforce political will from the government on how to enforce legislation that has been passed for this purpose. It has been observed that most countries embark on decentralization to be moving with the trends. This may explain the lack of political will to pursue the decentralization initiative to its logical conclusion (Wallis & Scott, 2013:54).

He continued to provide the other method that the ministry intends doing that of printed brochures that are going to be written in Sesotho which will be given to the public. They will have extracts of the policy pillars summarized for ease of reference. The ministry also has a radio and television slots where people who access radio and television can ask question on the phone-in programmes on local government. The radio programmes have become popular in Lesotho but only the national broadcasting (Radio Lesotho) can be accessed by majority of the people, the Television is still not accessible in rural areas due to lack of electricity. The government is working on rural electrification, but it has not yet covered a bigger area.

The first output in raising awareness and creating knowledge about the policy, is to get the policy and support tools printed, distributed in ways that ensure that all stakeholders have access to the information in appropriate form (National decentralization implementation strategy and action plan: 2014). It is not the problem in Lesotho since majority of people can read and write. When asked whether they can read most people said they are not interested in such documents. Even where they have read nothing compels them to attend council meetings or to have submitted anything for consideration in policy or plans made by the councils. As for the radio most people use it well to ask questions about the operations of the councils. But this method has not made community members to be interested to attend any council meetings, when they ask questions, it becomes clear that they do not know the role of councils in their areas.

The director observed that it is important to meet the public physically at *pitsos* or workshops and embark on campaigns for sensitizing the citizens about the operations of the councils. He also maintained that there is need for good leadership and enough resources to undertake all these important modalities. Ismail *et al* (1997:31) posit that people's participation can be achieved through town meetings (smaller communities) and organs of civil society such as, civic organizations and ratepayers' association (larger communities). It is for the government to promote opportunities for citizens to participate in public policy formulation. The twenty community members interviewed agreed that on the 'service day', they come only because it is difficult to get birth certificates, identity cards and passports in Maseru. People felt that it is better they attend this day so that they can access these important documents. The elderly said it is better to attend this day and get tested for high blood pressure, diabetes and HIV/AIDS because they avoid long queues at the health services in Maseru. This day the council has adapted after the public service day which the country celebrates to motivate public servants through sports, games and awards giving ceremony for those ministries that have performed well with a particular year.

The community members claimed that most people in Manonyane Community Council do not know about the meetings that the council held twice a month. This means that they cannot attend even if they just must listen without asking anything. As for the *pitsos* do not have rules as to how many should councillors have, they call *pitso* as and when they feel need arises. But community members mentioned that even at these *pitsos* they are still not aware of their role. Kapa (2013:13) opines that, it is likely that citizens may not be using the legally established channels for participating in the activities of their respective councils because they do not know that these exist. In a nutshell Basotho are not aware that they can submit or make any inputs in the council's decision making processes, by so doing it becomes difficult to hold councillor's accountable for whatever they do. Community members are not conversant with most of the decisions made by the council hence why it becomes difficult to hold leaders accountable for anything the council do. Only the street vendors were not happy when they were removed from the gate of the National University of Lesotho just before the graduation ceremony. They said nothing was discussed with them about that issue.

The respondents from the citizens when asked about the council's operations, they perceived it to be a body for allocation of land and taking care of pastures. They argued that there is not much that the council can do in order to delivery other services, they doubted the capacity of the council, since the central the government still does a lot. According to Kapa (2013:13) Lesotho has a unitary state with district urban and community councils that function as sub-national units of government. Manonyane Community Council, like other community councils, must work the second schedule of the Local Government act of 1997 which is:

- Control of natural resources
- Land /site allocation
- Minor roads (also bridle-paths)
- Grazing control
- Water supply in villages (maintenance)
- Markets
- Burial grounds (Local Government Act 1997)

Community members said they are used to the chiefs allocating land, looking after the grazing pastures and control all natural resources, now they are confused when the council is doing all what used to be done by the chiefs. They take the council as an organization that has brought change in the normal setting at the rural level. They have admitted that they do not know much about the council's operations. Shale (2004) maintains that, there is still ambiguity pertaining to the role of the traditional form of governance versus the modern system, starting from the Principal Chiefs and the members of parliament at national level and the chiefs and local authorities at the local government.

When asked whether they did attend the local government elections, only ten participated in the elections. Five felt that there was no need to elect the council because they did not know its importance. While the other five said they did not know the election date because the campaigning and canvassing was not up to the standards of the national elections' campaigns. This signifies

lack of information and education about the importance of the councils in the community areas. Some take local government as a representation of central government at the local areas.

Probing about whether they attend council's meeting to listen, only two had attended the councils' meetings. Others did not know about the meetings, or they did not know that they are allowed to attend. The two who had attended did not like the idea that they were not allowed to ask or commend during the proceedings of the meetings. All of these people did not know that they could ask for the minutes of the meeting to scrutinize or read for information. As Kapa (2013:13) observed they can also attend the meetings of the councils, except when confidential issues are discussed. However, Basotho have not used these opportunities because they were not aware of it, even those two who have attended they did not know their role in such meetings.

The community members agreed that they are aware of the 'Public Service Day' organised by the council. They claimed that they usually attend because they want to take advantage of accessing birth certificates and identity cards and other services provided on that day. They appreciate this day because it enables them to run away from long queues in Maseru where these services are offered. The community members were not aware of the National Decentralization Policy. They think it is the government document that does not have anything to do with them. It is in this document that popular participation is encouraged. While the Lesotho Vision 2020 (2004:5) maintains that, Lesotho will have a well-established system of local governance with full ownership and participation of the majority in decision making and local development. This means that people should take part in deciding about their areas and control their destiny. The community members have knowledge of Vision 2020 but they don't know its contents and how it affects them.

When asked about *pitsos* in which the councilors have to disseminate information, majority of the respondents said they did not attend such *pitsos*. Those who have attended may not ask anything or provide anything in terms of submission for consideration by the council. They were not even aware that as they air their views, opinions and interests, they may be contributing to the council discussions and decision-making. So they understand a *pitso* to be where they get information, it appears to be one-way channel of information for them. The councilors were to inform community members about whatever the council intends to do. The people were not aware that they can bring any issues to the *pitsos*. The central government through the Ministry of Local Government still maintains that, they can use *pitsos* and group-based dialogues to raise awareness and empower the citizens, also to sell the National Decentralization Policy to the public.

Participation of the community members in Manonyane Community Council has been limited to due to the following barriers:

1. Lack of capacity from the side of the councilors. They do not have enough autonomy from the central government, hence, there is nothing they can plan without approval from the centre. That is, there is too much control by the central

government over decisions. The government should, in conformity with the national Decentralisation Policy, allocate the requisite resources to councils in order to capacitate them.

2. The citizens are not well organized at the lower level. It becomes difficult to influence the council individually. Citizens are unaware that there are avenues that they can participate in the councils operations. They are also unaware that they can request council minutes of the meeting. The government should assist the council to make proper popular participation campaigns. There should be citizen's education and awareness programmes.
3. Decentralisation process is not yet clear, so the council is faced with challenges of lack of resources and also inability to organize effective campaigns for popular participation. The government should grant the council's autonomy to perform their functions and make decisions. Even if is limited autonomy it has to be clear to the councils.
4. *Pitso* has not proved to be an adequate channel of communication. People consider *pitsos* as forum for councilors to disseminate information only. Instead of *pitsos* maybe the dialogues could be undertaken where small groups could attend with councilors and make decisions that will affect such groups as farmers, women and youth and that all members should air they views.

There should be proper collaborative or joint planning and advocacy to promote accountability of elected officials to the citizens. The communities should be sensitized on the operations of local government through the councils within their areas.

“Local government in Lesotho is in its infancy, whereby we are all on a learning curve – the councils, the communities and the central government. The local communities need education on the roles and functions of the local government, the councilor's need more regular structured training on their respective functions and the central government needs to make follow-up on the training they give us as some of their recommendations are not applicable on the ground” (Setsabi et al 2008:64).

6. Conclusion:

The chapter has explored how public participate in the operations of councils in Lesotho. It has looked into the avenues that are available for citizens' participation in local government system in the country.

It has been observed that participation is not taking place as expected in the Manonyane Community Council. The decentralisation process which has been regarded as promoting citizen participation has not been able to unleash a higher degree of citizens' participation in Lesotho and particularly in Manonyane Community Council. However, there are some regulations that indicate that people could request the minutes of the meetings, or attend such meetings. It is observed that despite the given regulations regarding people's right many people are still ignorant.

Information does not trickle down to the community members about how they should relate to councils. The community empowerment seemed to be limited hence, there is no proper interaction between the council and its citizens, The Manonyane Community Council case has shown. There are no decisions that have been influenced by the communities in Manonyane Community Council. The councilors and citizens may interact in public a gathering (*pitsos*) in which information is one way from the councilors to the public. It is true the public may ask questions for clarification, but they do not know that they can influence council's decision-making processes. This means public empowerment through local government system is still far-fetched. The avenues for participation are not clear to the communities hence, they do not utilize them. Also that there is no way the community can hold their councilors accountable for their actions in any way because they do not know what they are expecting from the council.

Although the chapter is informed by the participatory democratic theory, it has been observed that in Lesotho through Manonyane Community Council the people who are affected by the decisions are not aware that they should influence such decisions. The full participation of social groups with needs in democracy and development has not been encouraged. It is up to the government to strive to find appropriate ways to increase their integration and effectiveness with the larger democratic system.

On the whole the government of Lesotho should arouse people's interest and promote the councils' active participation so that, the communities should not shun and be passive recipients of government programmes. Community councils are within the jurisdiction which is manageable for people's participation in the operations of the councils. Making democracy work requires informed and active citizens who understand how to voice their interests and aspirations. It is true that Lesotho decentralisation process is still in an infancy stage it has had only two election periods for the councils from 2005 and 2010 respectively. The government has postponed the 2016 local government elections to 2017 September.

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