

**COMMUNICATION FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN
RURAL NORTH-EASTERN LIMPOPO PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA**

By

Bernard Naledzani Rasila

(11592957)

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Institute for Rural Development

School of Agriculture



University of Venda

SOUTH AFRICA

Promoter : Dr M.J. Mudau

Co-Promoter : Prof J. Francis

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ABSTRACT

There is a challenge of communication gap between government and community members around the world. Mutale Municipality in Vhembe District of South Africa is not immune to this challenge. This communication gap results in lack of community participation in matters of governance. Lack of community participation is adverse to the realization of Developmental Local Government in South African. Developmental Local Government is the local government that is characterized by citizen participation in all matters of government including those aimed at community development. This study was undertaken as a response to the need to enhance communication in order to nurture effective Developmental Local Government in rural area-based communities.

Qualitative study was conducted on the state of communication between communities in rural areas and local Municipality. Unstructured interviews were used in this study. The objective of the study was to improve communication between local municipalities and rural area-based communities in support of the envisaged effective Developmental Local Government. It was found during the study that indeed there was communication gap between government and rural-based communities. It was also found that there was poor community participation in matters of governance. The study further revealed that existing models, structures and channels of communication played important roles in consulting and mobilizing community members but failed to take them through so as to make them full participants in matters of governance and government's developmental initiatives. They failed to bridge the communication gap between municipalities and their communities as community members were only introduced to developmental initiatives and left still unable to participate or being part of the initiatives. Also realized was the strained relationship between structures of the Municipality which are communication vehicles. Key structures such as the Ward Committees are excluded in communication programmes of the Municipality. Management of Mutale Municipality also indicated lack of understanding of the goals of Developmental Local Government while at times the political leadership and the administrative management blame each other for lack of effective communication between the Municipality and its rural-based communities.

Communication gap negatively impacts on the lives of people staying in rural areas. Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, successive governments of South Africa have endeavoured to empower rural area-based communities, aiming to create a better life for all through promoting development at grassroots community level. However, this has been hampered by lack of community participation in matters of governance. When community members do not take active roles on matters of governance they turn to be passive recipients who do not do anything to improve their lives. As indicated, at times they turn to protest against government institutions out of frustration caused by lack of information. To remedy this, the study indicated that there was a need to develop a new communication framework. This communication framework was aimed at providing opportunity for full community participation in matters of governance. In this framework, government and the community members communicate as equal participants of the communication process. The two parties become equal active participants as they plan, implement, monitor and evaluate the process together. This framework is based on the notion of community-based planning where community members are no longer passive recipients of developmental initiative of government.

It was recommended from the study that there was a need for the development of communication framework that will guide on the best way a Municipality can involve community members in all matters of governance. Wards Committees have to be represented in communication activities of the Municipality. There was also a need for skills development for community structures such as the Ward Committees and Traditional Leadership on issues of communication and development. These recommendations are also in line with the key elements of the National Development Plan (NDP) of South Africa, that of mobilizing community members to work with government and be active participants on matters of governance. The NDP was initiated in 2011 by the National Planning Commission as a long term initiative aiming to realize the goals of Developmental State not later than the year 2030

Key words: Effective communication, Development Local Government, Local Government, Rural Development, Community participation.