

# **E-Citizenship and its Role in Promoting Participatory Governance in South Africa: A Durban Metropolitan Municipality Case Study**

**Paul Kariuki**

**ORCID iD:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5758-5343>

**Lizzy Ofusori**

**ORCID iD:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6036-619X>

## **Abstract**

Citizen engagement is a key factor in the successful and sustainable use of electronic platforms. It involves multiple activities ranging from collecting to processing raw data into useable formats that could help solve societal problems. As a metropolitan city, Durban seeks to become a liveable, inclusive city in which citizens are digitally capacitated to engage with it. However, there is a lack of insight into what drives Durban citizens to engage in local governance processes using various electronic platforms. This study aimed to identify factors that influence citizens' interests in engaging in these processes using the platforms.

To attain this objective, the researchers conducted a single case study of citizen engagement in Durban, South Africa, using a cohort of civic education facilitators sampled from a provincial-wide coalition of civil society organizations. Participants of the study were purposively selected based on their participation in local civic activities, in relation to governance promotion in the city as well as their exposure to various digital platforms used by the city to engage with citizens. Age and gender were considered to ensure a balanced participation of the respondents. Snowballing was used as a sampling technique to identify individuals who participated as key informants for the study.

The research found that citizens' own consciousness as active citizens

in society was an intrinsic motivator for engaging with the electronic platforms. The quality of information accessed on the various digital platforms used by the Durban Metropolitan Municipality did not deter citizens from engaging with it. Moreover, the fact that citizens felt that they could easily access information about the city was a strong factor towards deepening trust in the Metro's desire to engage with citizens. This insight is useful in informing decision makers at the Metro on how to stimulate and improve the digital platforms as a way of enhancing the engagement experience. Furthermore, the research draws some key lessons for policy makers to enhance e-citizenship by promoting participatory governance at the local government level.

**Keywords:** e-citizenship, participatory governance, South Africa, Durban Metropolitan Municipality, eThekweni City Council

## **Introduction**

E-Citizenship or digital citizenship is an emerging concept of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) that is gaining global momentum. This concept helps citizens to understand how technology can be used to create new statuses, privileges or rights that did not previously exist (Roots & Dumbrava 2016). According to Roots and Dumbrava (2016), e-citizenship is more than just an engagement tool; it is a way to prepare citizens for a technology-based society. In this emerging era of digital technology, governments are looking for approaches to revamp their open administration services to citizens, utilising the potential offered by ICTs (Lips 2006). Other than the paper-based public service delivery, governments are now creating e-citizenship service delivery in order to better serve the citizenry (Lips 2006). Governments are supporting all efforts to prepare skilful citizens who are capable of functioning efficiently in this digital age to express themselves in a wide range of situations; acquire, develop and implement solutions in different contexts; and utilise a broad range of tools and applications developed in the digital context (Lips 2006). These digital technologies not only provide ways to connect with others across the globe but also enable broader e-citizenship participation in democratic processes and in civil society action (Mossberger *et al.* 2007). e-Voting, petition platforms, blogs, crowdfunding sites and other online tools and forums offer new opportunities for citizens to contribute to

shaping political debate and driving ‘real world’ change (Kleinhans *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, it has,

the potential to reinvigorate a more ‘citizen-powered’ democracy; such a democracy might see citizens having a more direct determining influence on democratic processes, underpinned by closer and more responsive citizen–state interactions, and broader public representation in these processes (Dubow 2017: 4).

However, the level to which digital technologies can strengthen e-citizenship participation in democratic processes depends on the ability of the technology to mobilise advanced levels of engagement and action from citizens across a wider range of society (Dubow 2017). Citizen involvement in democratic processes can be enhanced through specific digital tools which include platforms that involve citizen inputs and views regarding policy formulation, or that seeks citizens’ opinions in the allocation of the local government budget. Dubow (2017) argues that at present these tools are not widely used and that their impacts on democratic processes are still uncertain.

## **Definition of Key Concepts**

### **E-Citizenship**

*E-Citizenship* or digital citizenship can be defined as a way in which people use Information Technology (IT) to engage the government, politics and society (Mossberger *et al.* 2007).

### **Participatory Governance**

Participatory governance is a process and structure designed to engage citizens and the government through institutional arrangements and political networks that facilitate supportive, collaborative-based discursive relationships among the citizens and government (Chen *et al.* 2009). Fischer (2015) describes participatory governance as a subset of governance theory which emphasises democratic engagement, particularly through deliberative practices. It is a concept that is increasingly gaining popularity. Gustafson and Hertting (2017) argue that there are three types of public governance: political, civic and development. Political and civic governance focus on issues that relate to human rights, while development governance deals with planning, budgeting, monitoring and

accountability of socio-economic development policies and programmes.

### **Active Citizenship**

It is important to first understand the definition of citizenship. Turner (1997) describes citizenship as a formal legal identity that a person inherits through a collection of lawful rights and commitments, controlling access to the scarce economic, political and social resources of society. Citizenship can be divided into social, civil and political citizenship. Social citizenship refers to the ability of citizens to have access to the right resources needed to live a civilized life in accordance with the prevailing standards of the society. Civil citizenship refers to the necessary rights needed to protect the liberty of individuals, which includes freedom of speech (Epstein *et al.* 2006). Political citizenship embodies the claim that citizens ought to participate in the democratic exercise, either as an elected individual (i.e. a politician) or as a member of a political community (i.e. a voter). Hence, Brannan *et al.* (2006) described active citizenship as the willingness to contribute to civil or political debate as well as to social action.

### **Participatory Democracy**

Participatory democracy can be defined as a process of mutual decision making that combines components from both direct and representative democracy (Pateman 2012). Alarcón *et al.* (2018) refer to participatory democracy as the responsibility of citizens to be involved in the decisions made by the representatives of the government that can impact the lives of the citizens. It can also be defined as a political system that allows citizens to participate in decision making, either by developing policy or holding a political position (Kaufman 2017). Alarcón *et al.* (2018) argued that, while the citizens have the ability or power to make decisions on policy proposals, the politicians assume the role of policy implementation. Similarly, Mutz (2006) described participatory democracy as a form of movement which may include the women's suffrage movement or civil rights movement that assemble a group of people to democratically make decisions for the group. A typical example of a participatory democracy is a town meeting where citizens vote or deliberate on major issues (Pateman 2012).

### **Accountability**

While Thomas (1998) defined accountability as the prevention of potential

abuse of power, Flinders (2017) described it as control with the ultimate aim of accountability systems. In a democratic society, accountability ensures that actions and decisions taken by public officials are suitable and transparent. According to Carothers and Brechenmacher (2014), accountability requires that the organisation's systems of reporting and controls are appropriate and made visible in the public domain. This is to ensure that the government administration meets the needs of the community which is in accordance with their stated objectives, thereby contributing to better governance and poverty reduction. Accountability implies that the actions of individuals and organisations should be explained to others in a transparent and justifiable manner (Ngulube 2004).

### **Good Governance**

Lipchak (2002) refers to good governance as the procedure the government uses to undertake functions and activities in a transparent, responsive and efficient manner and in which citizens engage the government in the quest for their mutually economic, social and political objectives. In other words, good governance refers to the values and standards that a government considers as it governs. Hence, good governance implies open, accountable, inclusive, and effective public organisations (Mungiu-Pippidi 2015).

### **Citizen Engagement**

According to Berger (2009: 340), '...engagement means activity and attention, an investment of energy and a consciousness of purpose'. In other words, engagement is a way of finding solutions to problems. Hence, Siebers, Gradus and Grotens (2018) define citizen engagement as a means of achieving a range of developmental goals which include increased social capital, improved public services and reduced poverty. Using such initiatives can bring about greater accountability, transparency and social inclusion, resulting in tangible improvements in people's lives (Bee & Kaya 2017).

### **Metropolitan Council**

In South Africa, a metropolitan council or municipality is a municipality that implements all the functions of local government for a city or metropolis. This is in contrast to areas which are primarily rural, where the local government is divided into district municipalities and local municipalities. In the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, no. 17 of 1998, it is laid out that this

type of local government is to be used for conurbations, ‘centre of economic activity’, areas ‘for which integrated development planning is desirable’, and areas with ‘strong interdependent social and economic linkages’ (Vyas-Doorgapersad 2014).

### **Legal Framework for E-Citizenship in South Africa**

According to Naidoo (2012), ‘... there are several legal instruments in [the] forms of acts, regulations and policies that guides the use of electronic devices and electronic services in South Africa’, for instance, the Electronic Communications Bill Act 36 of 2002, that transformed the South African Telecommunication and the Promotion of Access to Information Act, that endows constitutional right to information access (Naidoo 2012). Other policy measures include the Electronic Communications Transaction Act, the Minimum Information Security Standards, the Law Commission Issue Paper on Privacy Public Service Act, the Handbook on Minimum Interoperability Standards (MIOS) and the Open Source Software Strategy and Policy of 2006 (Mutula & Mostert 2010).

However, the citizens have encountered negative experiences which discourage the usage of e-citizenship in engaging the government owing to the inability of the South African government to effectively leverage the existing legal and infrastructural framework to improve the standard of living. Some of these negative experiences include poverty, insecurity and illiteracy (Mutula & Mostert 2010; Naidoo 2012). Consequently, citizens are dissatisfied with the success level in accessing services (Mutula & Mostert 2010).

However, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, in their, ‘Promoting Entrepreneurship for Development’ (UNCTAD 2015),

... some progress in e-government implementation in South Africa is noted as indicated by the UN e-government development rankings, from being 101 out of 192 countries in 2012 to 68<sup>th</sup> position out of 193 countries in 2018.

With such progress it becomes imperative then to assess whether this progress has also improved citizens’ experience with e-government services at local and municipal levels.

### Conceptual Framework for E-Citizenship

Several models are frequently used to provide insight into the success of citizen adoption of e-government new technology. These models are used to study user acceptance of technology or information systems. However, empirical studies have shown that factors from the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Diffusion Of Innovation (DOI) model play a major role in user acceptance of e-government services (Gefen, Karahanna & Straub 2003; Pavlou 2003). The TAM was developed by Davis, Bagozzi and Warshaw (1989). This theory is widely used to better understand end users' intention when using new technologies (Davids 2011). The TAM has been found to provide a consistent prediction of people's behaviour in relation to perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of new technologies' (Venkatesh & Davis 2000).

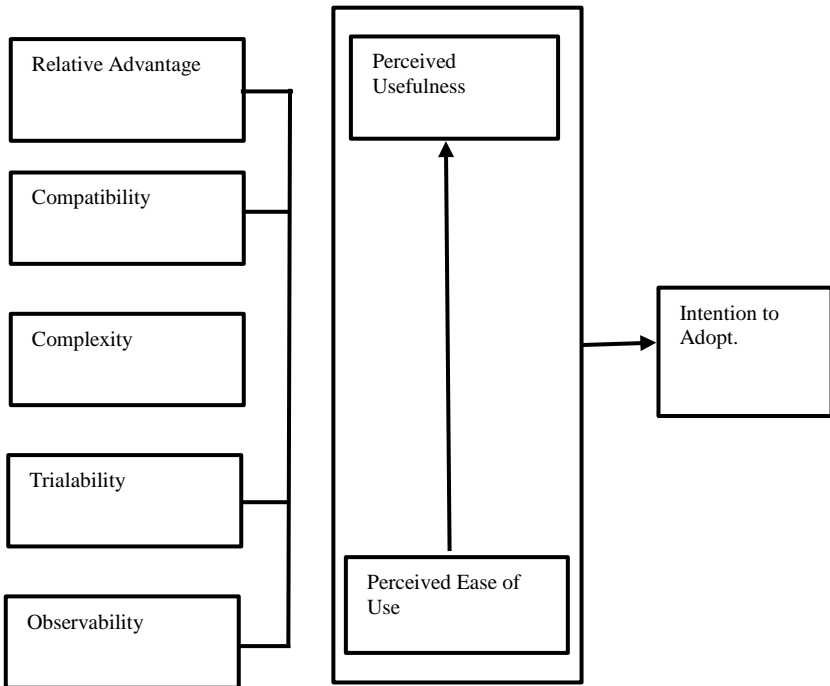


Figure 1: Factors for e-citizenship adoption of e-government new technology (Authors own)

When the TAM model was empirically analysed; the results showed that the individual behaviour of accepting to use an electronic system is associated with the quality of services (Venkatesh & Davis 2000). According to Pavlou (2003), measuring the quality of electronic services provides a clear insight into citizen behaviour when using them. In a similar view, the DOI theory is used to explain how new ideas and technologies spread among groups of people (Rogers 1995). It uses five innovative factors which include ‘relative advantage’, ‘compatibility’, ‘complexity’, ‘trialability’ and ‘observability’. Drawing upon these theories, this study conceptualizes a framework for e-citizenship as shown in Figure 1.

The conceptual framework takes into consideration the citizens’ decisions in adopting new technology. The framework integrates its constructs from the TAM and DOI model. It further describes the interconnection between the various components. The arrows between the components describe their relationships. The conceptual framework will promote e-citizenship adoption of e-government new technology and sustainability.

## **E-Citizenship and Participatory Governance in South Africa**

E-Citizenship participation in governance is generally recognised as part of democracy and governance in South Africa. It can be described as the use of ICT tools by the citizens to engage the government. e-Participation is therefore closely related to e-governance participation. It is enshrined in the 1996 Constitution and applies to various law-making processes, policies and institutions as well as to structures, statutory bodies and programmes. An example of a past e-participation project is discussed below.

In 2012, the Local Government ICT Network launched a model e-participation project together with a number of selected local authorities. They were given SMS credits and a direct call number. Citizens could then use these numbers to submit their proposals or complaints, and to report incidents such as power failures, burst pipes and potholes. Equally, the local authority could use the system to inform residents about scheduled council meetings, festivals or anticipated restrictions. The system is integrated into the local authority’s normal email system and is entirely voluntary.

This project is showing early signs of success. In Emakhazeni,



a rural authority in the province of Mpumalanga, there has been a significant fall in the number of complaints about poor services, and public attendance at council meetings has increased dramatically over the same period (Human Sciences Research Council 2013).

Dubow (2017) affirms that digital technologies have the potential to transform e-citizenship participation in democratic processes through the introduction of new mechanisms and practices, for example, by mobilising greater participation from people whose political engagement has traditionally been lower, by strengthening the voice of citizens in the public sphere, by enabling more direct participation in democratic decision making and by facilitating community support and cohesion. However, Modise (2017) argues that participatory democracy in South Africa is a great challenge for democratic processes due to the lack of adequate knowledge by citizens regarding political operation locally and internationally. The service delivery protests and marches are a clear indication that participatory democracy is a great challenge in democratic South Africa. Citizens carry out these protests to ensure the government listens to and considers their requests. Mawela *et al.* (2017) maintain that significant changes that can impact the lives of the community can only be initiated at the local government level. Similarly, Abrahams and Newton-Reid (2007) support that e-government programmes can be triggered by South African municipalities to enable citizens to interact with government using the full range of electronic media, through Integrated Development Plans (IDP) and incorporating relevant measures in growth and development strategies (Abrahams & Newton-Reid 2007). Hence, the local governments which are closest to the communities are best poised to deliver on a vision of e-government. Furthermore, the provincial and national governments need to offer supervision, support, mentorship and assistance where necessary (Modise 2017).

## **E-Citizenship Experiences in South Africa: Challenges and Possibilities**

According to Ochara and Mawela (2015), the key benefits of e-citizenship include strengthening citizen voices, facilitating social cohesion, sharing and interpreting data and supporting direct citizen participation in democratic processes. The government has established different technological-driven platforms through which citizens can engage with their government. However,

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... the degree to which digital technologies can strengthen citizen participation in democratic processes was felt to depend on the ability of digital technologies to mobilise higher levels of engagement and action from citizens across a broader spectrum of society (Dubow 2017: 6).

Similarly, e-citizen participation in democratic processes undoubtedly faces various challenges which include,

slow response rates to citizens' requests, lack of customer service orientation from public sector staff, limited and inconvenient hours offered by government institutions and long distances to reach government offices (particularly in rural areas) (Nkosi & Mekuria 2010: 149).

Moreover, sometimes government services are inaccessible owing to network failures, resulting in abrupt shut down of service provision which displeases citizens (Dubow 2017). In addition, some municipalities do not budget adequately for aging IT infrastructure which complicates efficient accessibility of municipal services electronically. As a result, citizens struggle to submit their information relating to services rendered to them by the municipalities, especially where payment for the services is concerned.

These challenges threaten the effectiveness of e-citizen participation and widen the exclusion gap, especially along socio-economic lines. It is argued that local government is at the forefront of understanding citizens' needs and is the 'delivery arm' of government. It is the obligation of municipalities to ensure that there is an improvement in services for underdeveloped communities. This will ensure that there is an equitable provision of services to all citizens (South African Local Government Association 2014). Furthermore, there is a need for a better understanding of how civic engagement and participation can be mobilised through digital technologies (Dubow 2017). Hence, it is essential that government addresses any challenges that need urgent responses in order to minimise citizens' disenfranchisement.

Drawing upon these opportunities of e-citizenship and the challenges that must be addressed to harness this potential, it is imperative to build well-networked communities, ensure transparency and trust in democratic pro-

cesses, and improve the information environment. By strengthening community networks and ensuring transparency and trust in democratic processes, digital technologies can enable citizens to make their voices heard effectively and effect positive social change in the public sphere (Dubow 2017). Furthermore, it will enable a digitally enabled citizenry to participate in the democratic processes, both at the local and the national level. Similarly, the digital provision of robust and tailored empirical data and citizen inputs can enable policymakers to make more evidence-based decisions for the greater social good (Dubow 2017).

## **Methodology**

This study followed a qualitative approach to collect data which was conducted in 2018 for 6 months. The qualitative approach was chosen to understand better the experiences of citizens as they engage with the municipality. To achieve this objective, the researchers used a cohort of civic education facilitators sampled from a provincial-wide coalition of civil society organisations. They were purposively selected based on their participation in local civic activities in relation to governance promotion in the city as well as their exposure to various digital platforms used by the city to engage with citizens. Age and gender were considered to ensure a balanced participation. Twenty civic educators were selected to participate in the study. Snowballing was used as a technique to identify individuals who participated as key informants for the study from the municipality. Five senior officials from the municipality were involved in the study. Data was collected through semi-structured and key-informant interviews telephonically. Thereafter, data was transcribed in preparation for analysis, which was done thematically. All interviews were conducted in English. These themes were identified based on the emerging dominant ideas that the researchers identified while analysing the data thematically.

## **Limitation**

The study focused on the Durban Metro owing to time and financial constraints. Moreover, some key municipal functionaries involved in policy development with regard to e-governance in the municipality were not available to be interviewed for the study. Thus, some crucial information that could have provided some key insights was not captured by the study.

Furthermore, the study did not focus on the rural areas because of the time constraints.

## **Findings and Discussion**

This section presents the findings of the study, followed by a brief discussion of the salient points for clarity. The emerged themes from the interview are summarised (Table 1).

**Table 1: Major themes that emerged in the qualitative analysis.**

S/n	Major themes
1	Inaccessible information portals in the metro websites
2	Use of one language on the website of the metro
3	ICT-related human resource capacity challenges in the metro
4	Limited citizen participation in online metro processes
5	Limited citizen digital literacy
6	Public-private partnership to enhance citizen digital literacy

### ***Inaccessible Information Portals in the Metro Websites***

The municipality has an extensive information sharing system on its website, but most respondents reported that it is inaccessible owing to its elaborate architecture. The respondents claimed that it is a challenge to navigate through the website in search of information. As one respondent claimed:

*The Metro has a good website ... however, it is so extensive in its layout and design that it takes some time to actually find the information that one really is looking for...one wishes it was simpler, especially for most of citizens who have limited knowledge about websites.*

As a result of the above, some respondents reported that it is challenging to make any input to any policy or programme documents, thereby limiting their interaction with the Metro:

*Our municipality is constantly working on projects and programmes that we as citizens should make an input [in].... but it is challenging*

*when one cannot navigate through its elaborate website ... we collect information continuously in our communities and we would like to share with the municipality through its website as it is easier... [We citizens] are always gathering information from our various interventions in communities across the Metro..... I'm sure that information would help the Metro in developing their own policies and projects.*

### ***Use of One Language on the Website of the Metro***

Additionally, the Metro uses English as the only language of communication on its website. This has limited the extent to which citizens can engage with the Metro effectively. As one respondent reported:

*The Metro's website is presented in English language .... whilst I understand that English is the language of business ... but ordinary citizens in this province [meaning KwaZulu--Natal] are isiZulu language speakers ... surely, some sections of the website should be in the local language so everybody can engage with the information and participate in any aspects of the Metro's work ... personally I feel limited to share information .... I have views .... but I cannot express myself powerfully like I would do in my own language [isiZulu] ...*

The Metro should consider dual language presentation on its website, so it can maximise its interaction with citizens. As one municipal official claimed:

*The Metro is able to re-design its website using dual language to cater for the demographics in the city...just like it does with its weekly newsletter ... which is presented in dual language and therefore everybody can engage with its content and explore further any possibilities of sharing their views ... this way the metro increases citizen participation in all its affairs and maximises its accountability to the citizenry ....*

### ***ICT-related Human Resource Capacity Challenges in the Metro***

Even though the municipality has an elaborate and functional website and information system, the respondents claimed that some municipal officials faced

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challenges in using the ICT mechanisms to engage with citizens. One municipal official claimed:

*There are challenges [ICT-capacity challenges]...that we are experiencing ... most of them relate to technical capacities such as using technology to communicate information with the public ... some of our staff are not tech-savvy ... sometimes they struggle using our various platforms to gather data and interpret it ....*

Moreover, there is no allocated capacity development budget for human resources assigned for ensuring that staff receive ICT-related training to sharpen their skills. As one municipal official claimed:

*Rarely do we attend training [ICT-related training] as there is no budget for such opportunities ... unless one self-funds to enhance one's own technical capacities, one might remain at the same level of knowledge and experience whilst things keep changing .... and without keeping pace with the times, we will not be able to improve on our capacity to deliver online-related services to the public efficiently and sustainably ....*

### ***Limited Citizen Participation in Online Metro Processes***

Furthermore, public participation in the Metro online processes remains ad hoc and uncoordinated. This is partly owing to low digital literacy levels prevailing among most citizens and also because of the absence of feedback portals on most of the Metro's online platforms. Citizens cannot relay any of their views through the Metro's online platforms because there is no provision for it. This limits the extent to which citizens participate in a system that is primarily aimed at sharing information and eliciting engagement from the public. As one respondent reported:

*Our Metro should consider setting [up] a section on its online platforms where we [citizens] can share our views and ideas on any aspect of its work ... at the moment it is impossible as there is not portal where we can make input ... but it is disheartening when one cannot find a way of sharing ideas and thoughts ....*

This scenario can often lead to the exclusion of the public from the broader decision-making processes such as those that relate to local development planning processes. Limited public participation in such processes may result in the Metro imposing its plans on communities and ultimately any of its interventions.

### ***Limited Citizen Digital Literacy***

Digital literacy is a critical factor in enabling effective e-citizenship. e-Participation is highly dependent upon an individual's capacity to interact via online digital platforms. In circumstances where digital literacy levels are low, citizens lack confidence to engage online with the government. As one respondent reported:

*Most of us [citizens] are not well acquainted with internet or anything related to online [activities]...personally I struggle with using the internet, I was never exposed to it until recently where I got an opportunity to attend a community-based training offered by a local NGO (non-governmental organisation), then I got some skills but still it [the training] is not sufficient [for me] to make use of the internet as effectively as I should ...*

It is important to note that digital literacy is much more than the skill of using technology to engage via a technology-based platform. It also includes the ability to read and write. Stated differently, this contextual understanding of digital literacy is critical because without using this inclusive meaning of digital literacy, an important aspect of learning which includes problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity will be left out. Therefore, digital literacy is an empowering process whereby an individual not only acquires skills and competency but also gains insights on how to take advantage of positive aspects of using technology whilst at the same time learning to avoid the negative aspects associated with it.

### ***Public-Private Partnership to Enhance Citizen Digital Literacy***

In relation to the above point, it is critical that the Metro explore public-private partnerships that would help in addressing digital illiteracy which presently

impedes effective e-citizen participation. As one municipal official contended:

*The government should do something about it...it should encourage the private sector and civil society to assist in training ordinary citizens to be more digitally-literate so they can engage with the Metro via its online platforms ....*

Undoubtedly, partnerships are important in addressing any gaps that limit the efforts of the government in enhancing effective citizen engagement. Therefore, it is imperative that the Metro explores opportunities where such partnerships can be identified, nurtured and leveraged to the extent that they can be mutually beneficial to ordinary citizens' e-literacy.

## **Discussion**

Citizens' participation is a key indicator of a thriving democracy. The use of technology has made it easier for citizens to participate actively in government processes at all levels of governance. Technology has made it possible to bring the government to the people, thereby mobilising them to participate in its programmes and processes. The main objective is to deepen engagement between the state and the citizenry.

Given the long and painful past of South Africa under the apartheid regime which was characterised by the politics of exclusion, the post-1994 democratic government has been working tirelessly to ensure that every citizen has an opportunity to participate in its plans aimed at improving engagement, even at the local governance level. However, this ideal has been met by post-apartheid reconstruction challenges of re-building a fragmented society faced by multiple socio-economic and political complexities. It is in addressing these challenges that the use of technology becomes a critical mechanism for bridging the gap between the state and her people.

Technological advancement has enabled governments to improve public administration as well as developing mechanisms of providing citizen-centred public services. The government has established different technologically-driven platforms through which citizens engage with their government. As the study revealed, there are various challenges at multiple levels, ranging from digital illiteracy among citizens to inaccessible information portals of government sites. Whilst this chasm is enormous, it needs an



urgent response to close it and minimise the disenfranchisement that comes with it as it further widens the exclusion gap, especially along socio-economic lines. It is therefore imperative that government addresses any challenges that threaten effective e-citizenship. The following section suggests some pragmatic recommendations for consideration.

## **Recommendations**

The study makes the following recommendations based on its findings:

- The municipality must address citizens' digital literacy so that citizens are empowered to effectively interact with the municipality and allow the citizens access public services. Customer service experiences are critical in a competitive business environment and municipalities are not immune to this competition;
- Connected to the above point, the Metro should explore possibilities of forming public-private partnerships so that joint interventions related to equipping citizens with relevant digital knowledge can fast track digital literacy levels among the public. The partnership could involve the private sector, academia and civil society as stakeholders to work together in tackling digital illiteracy;
- The Metro should work harder to enhance the digital capabilities of its human resource base. As indicated by the findings, some of the municipal functionaries assigned to manage municipal information portals lack the essential digital skills of engaging online with citizens. Improving its human resource ICT-related capabilities will go a long way in enhancing citizens' experience of government services at the Metro level;
- The Metro should also consider improving its information portals so that citizens can engage with these with minimum challenges. Accessing information via online platforms was noted as an ongoing challenge experienced by most citizens and this needs to be improved so the citizens can access government information and services. Moreover, it is critical that all the Metro's services and information are

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presented in a coherent way in formats that are easily digestible by its citizenry, a critical aspect of ensuring sustained participatory governance; and

- The Metro could consider establishing community-based digital hubs that make it possible for citizens living outside of the Metro to have an opportunity to access government information and its services. Most peri-urban areas are under-served as far as digital services are concerned. There is a need for the Metro to invest in these communities and enhance their accessibility to its services, thereby improving their participation in local governance processes through enhanced access to information. Additionally, citizens can provide useful feedback about the Metro's services, information that can be used to improve government policy. By way of giving feedback, citizens are able to enhance their own capabilities to review government project and programme proposals available online and contribute towards shaping their direction.

## **Conclusion**

E-Citizenship is still in its infancy in South Africa and certainly in its formative stages of development in the Durban Metro. It has a significant role in promoting participatory governance in the country and at the local level. However, with advances in technology coupled with the commitment from government to fully utilise technology in enhancing its engagement with citizens, it is necessary that participatory governance is improved. This improvement will depend on enhancing citizens digital literacy so that they are able to interact with the metro's online service delivery platform. This way participatory governance will be enhanced as citizens engage with government for any of its public services.

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Paul Kariuki  
School of Management, IT and Governance  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
[pamirry@gmail.com](mailto:pamirry@gmail.com)

Lizzy Ofusori  
School of Management, IT and Governance  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
[lizzyofusori@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lizzyofusori@yahoo.co.uk)