



NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES DEBATE: TAKING PARLIAMENT TO THE PEOPLE

16 February 2011

Honourable Chairperson of the NCOP

Honourable Members

As we march towards the 2011 local government elections, we are pleased to join in the debate and reflect on the initiative to take parliament to the people and the report, aimed at fostering closer linkages between politicians and the people. For us as executives in the provinces and municipalities, the report gives us an opportunity to reflect on progress made and to confront the gaps in the service delivery chain.

The NCOP, in particular, plays a crucial role in forging coherent government for the country in that it is a platform for engagement to take place between national policy and legislative direction for the country. Indeed, the Taking Parliament to the People gave the NCOP a significant opportunity to promote dynamic interaction with provinces and municipalities, as a House, bringing the NCOP closer to provinces and municipalities.

But chairperson, as indicated by SALGA in our speech during that week, our greatest challenge as a government has been embracing the constitutional spirit and ethos of cooperative governance. Effective performance against our Constitutional mandate requires a coherent and co-ordinated set of support initiatives among the spheres of government. The belief that we are one government is yet to be solidified in policy practice and implementation, as evidenced by the issues raised during that week. It is here that the legislative arm of the state plays a critical role in solidifying this culture in policy and legislation. We have spoken and written much on intergovernmental co-operation, but our policy and legislative practice often tells a different story.

The issues raised during the Taking Parliament To the People public hearings on local government matters, namely on roads, housing and land issues, are

not new - and these are all concurrent functions. But it does highlight the interrelatedness of competencies between the spheres, necessitating a high degree of cooperation and synergy. The three sphere system is a complex system to operate, which results in inefficiency, overlapping roles, long decision-making processes, weak information flows, and the dispersal of public sector skills and experience within the state. Indeed, the ANC Policy Conference discussion document of 2007 noted then that

The period of negotiations in the 1990's defined the present form of government in South Africa...A decade of practice raises the question whether the form of state is still appropriate to the conditions prevailing in South Africa today. Practice also shows that in response to the concrete challenge of developing the country the three sphere system of government is in fact undergoing an evolution, some aspects of which have begun to transcend the existing form of state. In particular the lessons of local government transformation have raised profound questions about the organisation and performance of the other two spheres of government...

In view of the 2011 elections and the key policy decisions which need to be made, we must revive the debate on the extent to which the powers and functions designated to local government enable it to effectively and efficiently meet its developmental mandate. There remains, in our view, a fundamental mismatch between the notion of developmental government and its powers.

As far back as 2001, the powers and functions debate was acknowledged at a Special President's Coordinating Council (PCC) Workshop held on 14 December 2001. At that meeting the PCC resolved that in order to build strong local government, its status must be enhanced within a stable cooperative governance framework. In giving effect to this objective, the current distribution of functions, including the powers and functions of local government, must be re-assessed.

Chairperson, it is 10 years later and while the local government turnaround strategy promises to address these issues, the legislature must ensure that the policy framework and proposals put forward in fact meets our constitutional imperative and is ultimately conducive to efficient service delivery. Taking Parliament to the People is an important platform to gauge the extent of reforms needed to address the fundamental policy issues.

To some degree, the issues raised during that week also exposes the weaknesses of communication between ourselves and other spheres of government as well as with our communities. As government, it is our collective responsibility to moderate unrealistic policy expectations. Continuing to set abstract targets and policies that apply across the board, irrespective of local government's actual capacity to deliver them, is a formula for unrealistic and unmet promises that will further undermine public confidence" in local government. Simplifying or streamlining regulatory

frameworks, policy goals and reporting systems wherever possible would also go a long way towards making things easier for municipalities to deliver on our mandate.

In Conclusion

Taking Parliament to the People was another successful engagement and is becoming a critical platform to gauge the gains made to date by highlighting some of the fundamental constraints hampering government in our quest to effect development. In the main, if we can foster a culture of oneness and support amongst the spheres, rather than focusing our energies on turf battles, it will go a long way to ensuring that we give effect to our developmental mandate. The legislative arm of the state plays an important role in ensuring that this culture is entrenched in the executive actions of the respective spheres.

Chairperson, we remain committed to working with the NCOP and our partners in government and the sectors to ensure an integrated approach to service delivery so that the developmental vision of local government, so eloquently articulated in the White Paper on Local Government, is realised.

Through our interaction and representation of our membership, SALGA will continue to engage the national legislative process to ensure the institutional integrity of local government on the one hand and the efficacy of service delivery on the other.

I thank you.

Hon Cllr W Mxolose
SALGA