

Media Statement

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Statement of SALGA on the occasion of its last National Executive Committee meeting in the 3rd Local Government term ahead of Municipal Elections 2016

The National Executive Committee (NEC) of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) met on Tuesday, 08 July 2015, in Johannesburg, Gauteng Province. This is no ordinary meeting as it marks the last gathering of the NEC in the 3rd local government term ahead of the democratic municipal elections on 3 August 2016.

Customarily, the meeting of the NEC discusses critical issues affecting local government and shapes the implementation of predetermined objectives set by those in positions of influence and power within councils. The meeting further analyses contemporary issues and the challenges facing the local government environment and society at large.

The NEC exercises authority of SALGA in between the National Conferences and National Members Assemblies and consists of the chairperson, three deputy chairpersons and 6 additional members elected separately by National Conference and provincial chairpersons who are ex-officio members of the NEC. It meets bi-monthly and these meetings are rotated between the nine provinces allowing SALGA to engage with member municipalities in the various provinces. The NEC develops and reviews the organizations strategic priorities and activities also adopting SALGA's administrative policies.

High on the agenda of the NEC today: State of Readiness for Implementation of the Integrated Councillor Induction Programme, Post the 2016 Local Government Elections, Report on the signed Local Government Service Charter for Implementation in Municipalities, gender equity as driven by the SALGA Women's Commission, which shall convene the last SALGA Women's Lekgotla in Johannesburg on 13 - 14 July, and the Preparations for the SALGA's Provincial and National

Conferences 2016 after the municipal elections.

This week's NEC also takes place at a time when South Africa's state of local government comes under the spotlight as to how much progress has been made, not only in the current term, but since its inception over the last 15 years.

On 5 December 2015 the country celebrated 15 years of democratic local government. This period helped local government to reflect on the journey made in the context of expanding legislation and mandates for the sector. While there have been challenges in legislative compliance and policy implementation, they have been major gains in service delivery extensions that have been made in the local government sector, the NEC noted.

In SALGA's own review report marking the 15 years of democratic local government, it recognizes that major differentials in municipal institutional capacities and widespread poverty, inequality and unemployment has in some cases undermined the sustainability of local government and its ability to raise the necessary revenue to ensure effective service delivery. One of the key areas of concern indeed, include the unsustainable and non-existent revenue bases especially in rural municipalities and the declining willingness and decreasing ability of households to pay for the services they consume.

The NEC also notes that over the past few months, South Africa has been inundated by a number of surveys and important indicator research studies undertaken by various entities aimed at defining both the national discourse and the state of our nation in the 22 years since the attainment of the democratic South Africa. The studies mirror the outcomes of SALGA's reviews that the depressing economic challenges confronting the world in general and South Africa in particular, have a direct impact in the local government sector such as poverty, unemployment and inequalities.

The surveys include, among others, Statistician General's Community Survey 2016, Financial Census, Non-financial census of municipalities, the Auditor General's Report, National Treasury Section 71, Gauteng City Region, SA Cities Network report, and many other notable reports, not excluding the National Development Plan as well as its accompanying Diagnostic Overview, which all, collectively, describe what is the problem in South Africa, and why the country finds itself in the current state.

Put this together, these studies serve as sources that provide indicators at national, provincial and municipal levels for planning and monitoring the performance of specific development programmes such as education, health, sanitation, water supply, housing, transport, unemployment, poverty levels, and many other important indicators.

The overarching conclusion of the studies is that the depressing global economic climate, worsened by the legacy of apartheid; structural poverty, unemployment and growing inequalities are the main drivers of the social ills confronting our nation. This is echoed in the SALGA's 15 year review of the democratic local government. Despite this challenge, municipalities have delivered. Significant progress has been recorded in delivering water, sanitation, electricity and refuse removal. Key successes include: 84.4% of households had access to electricity in 2011, 80,5% of households had adequate access to water in 2011, 73% of households had access to flush, chemical or ventilated pit toilets; and 63% of households had access to refuse removal. The increase in the number of households in South Africa from 10.8 million in 2002 to 15.6 million in 2014 meant an expansion of basic services delivery.

Furthermore, SALGA as a body mandated to transform local government to enable it to fulfil its developmental mandate undertook a study called Perception on Community Protest. The study found that there is a limited relationship between local government performance and community protests. SALGA's Perception on Community Protest outlines that poverty and unemployment are the main evils for the current discourse.

Despite all these surveys mirroring the societal challenges and the mammoth task we face towards transforming the legacy of apartheid, most often, the blame is always shifted to local government as the main culprit.

The NEC noted that whilst the conclusions of these reports tend to highlight the problem areas in the three spheres of government, local government should not be detracted from the sterling work being undertaken by many of our municipalities across the country since the inception of democratic local government in 2000.

The Local Government Perception on Community Protests study established that community

protests have a link to economic conditions. The more people rely on government to survive, the more likely they are to protest on seemingly insignificant matters or over issues that are widely believed to have been resolved. While local government has made tremendous advances in extending services to all South Africans in a relationally short space of time, the need is so great in many communities that even a basic package of services does not have the intended consequence of raising communities' living standards to a commonly held level of aspiration.

The NEC reiterates that Section 26 of the Local Government Municipal Structures Act, 1998, current councilors will retain their positions until the results for the 2016 elections are declared. This means that the council and all political structures can proceed with their day to day functions until the elections results for 2016 election is declared.

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