

The Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) 2019 non-financial census on municipalities (NFCM) report, which highlights that more people are gaining access to basic service delivery, has been welcomed by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA).

The NFCM, which measures selected aspects of service delivery, including water, electricity, solid waste management, sewerage and sanitation, has shown that local government in South Africa is making meaningful progress in delivering basic services to the communities they serve.

The report, which was published on Wednesday, 31 March 2021, has shown that municipal bucket toilet use continues to decline and municipalities are providing more water, sanitation, waste removal, and electricity services.

As the national voice of local government in South Africa, SALGA is pleased to have observed that there has been a steady decline in the number of bucket toilets supplied by municipalities, from about 81 057 in 2015 to about 42 434 in 2019. This represents a 47.6% decrease.

This means that significant strides have been made in providing communities from the most vulnerable areas with better forms of sanitation.

There are, however, some municipalities which have been struggling to eradicate the bucket toilet system. Municipalities in the North West and Free State recorded an increase in the use of bucket toilets in 2019 compared with 2018.

This is primarily due to the challenge of bringing services to un-proclaimed informal settlements.

In terms of basic services, the number of consumer units receiving the four basic services (water, electricity, sewage and sanitation and solid waste management) has gone up from 2018 to 2019.

For the period under review, the highest percentage increase was recorded in the provision of sewerage and sanitation (7,6%), followed by solid waste management (5,8%), water (5,2%) and electricity (4,2%).

The provision of such services enable people to live a life that is consistent with human dignity and while significant gains have been made in that regard, the local government sector must strengthen its resolve to overcome the remaining barriers and ultimately enhance the quality of life of every man, woman and child.

SALGA has also taken note that the number of consumer units receiving services for free have declined. This is due to municipalities having changed their systems for the identification and management of indigent households.

The improved mechanisms that municipalities have put in place have enabled them to identify the rightful beneficiaries (indigent households) and households that can afford to pay for services are now being billed accordingly.

SALGA also calls for the greater inclusion of women in local government. The report's examination of the municipal workforce, in particular on gender representation across various levels of management, shows that gender inequality persists in the sector.

The report revealed that in 2019, 254 of South Africa's 257 municipalities had a sitting mayor. Of these, 90 (35%) were female and 164 (65%) were male. In addition, 71% of section 56 managers were male and only 29% were female.

This paints a worrisome picture and it indicates that the participation of women in local government decision-making on an equal footing to men, is still a long way off.

Greater efforts have to be made in order for women to play a full and active role in the sector and local government, because of its proximity to the daily lives of people, must be at the forefront of that task.

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