

How long must the people struggle before poor performing municipalities get their act together?

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After almost a decade as a ward Councillor, fresh from the coal face of government, I have in depth knowledge of what causes municipalities to regress and deteriorate. Here's a Councillor's perspective:

It doesn't matter the quality of work done at a national level, if the people cannot feel, see and experience it at a local level.

So, I've been to my first committee meeting last week. Yet again we were met with SALGA's strategy to deploy technical experts in weak municipalities, closer monitoring, tighter oversight and vague suggestions of restructuring. We've already been there with Siyenza Manje Turnaround Strategy in 2009, we've done that with Project Consolidate in 2004, we've got the t-shirt with Back to Basics and the scars to prove it with Operation Clean Audit.

It's time for an aggressive approach to radically break from the past approaches if we want to solve regression in our municipalities. *Gemeenskappe het nie meer geduld oor met plaaslike regering wat faal nie. Dis hoog tyd vir vars innoverende idees en strategieë om geïmplementeer te word. Dit kom voor asof ons dieselfde strategieë oor en oor implementeer maar 'n ander resultaat verwag.* We'll never get different results from trying the same thing over and over again.

The recent Auditor-General's report can attest to the fact that previous recommendations and suggestions were not implemented, and completely disregarded in most municipalities who refused to comply. Poor to non-existing accountability measures are in place for mayors, senior officials and municipal managers.

If we want One South Africa for All, those who fail to implement changes must be held legally accountable for financial misconduct and mismanagement, and must be dismissed when found guilty. Wherever non-compliance with financial legislation has occurred, investigations must be conducted. Where cases of fraud and corruption occurred, civil litigation must follow suit. If we want One South Africa for All, a culture of accountability must be fostered within local government. President Ramaphosa himself said and I quote: *"There must be accountability as in all parts of the state where systems fail."*

Honorable Minister Dlamini-Zuma, the system failed if only 18 out of 278 municipalities got clean audits. According to the MFMA, a clean audit means that transparent systems of basic financial and governance reporting is in place. This means we are not even getting the basics right. What will the consequences be for both the political and administrative leadership for this 10% decrease in unqualified audit opinions on financial statements? What disciplinary steps will be taken and when. Who will be held responsible when 92% of municipalities were found non compliant with key legislation? The people are suffering. It's not a better life for all but a bitter life for all.

We must ask ourselves why do 12 DA-run municipalities in the Western Cape achieve consistent clean audit status? Let us not listen politically, for these are the facts. The Government Performance Index Report for 2019 have found that out of the top 20 best performing municipalities, 11 are run by the DA, and 4 by the DA in coalition with other parties. Of the bottom 20, nine are in KZN, 7 in the Eastern Cape, and the IFP runs 4, the rest of these non-performers are mostly ANC-led. These figures are worrisome and encourage political unrest.

The main cause of deteriorating financial sustainability is a leadership incapable of sound governance. According to the latest Municipal financial stability index, published by Ratings Africa, the only province whose governance practices are considered sound, is the Western Cape. The rest are either in serious financial trouble or financial distress, mainly due to poor or nonexistent oversight and the abuse of political power.

If we want One South Africa for All there must be constant monitoring of Implementation action plans. Regular performance evaluation must take place and deficiencies in internal controls must be addressed. All CFO vacancies must urgently be filled. The question is when, the answer is now.

If we are serious about improving the audit outcomes, we need less reliance on external consultants and when we do make use of consultants, a skills transfer must be a prerequisite. We need equipped staff and less incompetent cadres if we truly want to professionalise local government. People development is crucial. It is because of a lack of human capacity that inappropriate appointments in critical positions are made, and this must be addressed urgently. We need to appoint managers with skill and experience to implement sound budgetary practices.

Kodwa nini? Ngoku. Political appointments leads to senior managers without relevant qualifications despite section 72 of the Competency Guidelines for Municipal Managers and Senior managers directly accountable to Municipal Managers. Let's address this culture of nepotism and patronage that hampers oversight and accountability. The question is when, the answer is now.

The DA believes and will continue to fight for a clear separation of powers between the state and the ruling party. Political appointments must be clearly defined, ring fenced and based on fix term contracts.

On the question of what causes municipalities to regress the AG said on a podcast on 702 FM we must not look below the councillors for answers for they are the leadership. So let's strengthen, train and capacitate our leadership especially with regards to legal support and advice. Political interference is the down fall of municipalities. *Politici tree op asof hulle amptenare is en die amptenary tree op asof hulle politici is.* Clearly defined separation of powers between political parties and municipal councils are needed.

There is a lack of bylaw enforcement, and poor revenue collection. *Baie munisipaliteite sit met miljoene in oninbare skuld en gaan swaar gebuk onder hierdie las.* Monies owed to municipalities are increasing yearly due to poor dept collection strategies. *Laat die wat kan betaal, betaal. Veral besighede en staatsdepartemente of sny hul dienste.* The latest Financial

census of Municipalities says that debt owed to municipalities amounts to R72, 4 billion. Indigent registers are high, yet no strategies are in place to help these indigents become economically active.

Ons moet herbesin oor die Gemeenskap Werk Program CWP, en oor presies wat as nuttige werk beskou word. Papiere optel en sypaadjies skoffel is nie nuttige werk nie.

Almost 50% of municipalities don't have an approved policy on water and sanitation maintenance and no road maintenance plans.

Meer as 30% van munisipaliteite het waterverliese hoer as 30% selfs in droogte geteisterde areas. Kom ons begin daar! Die vraag is wanneer. Die antwoord is nou!