

## **How to save SA's failing municipalities**

**By Cilliers Brink MP - DA Shadow Minister of Cooperative and Traditional Affairs**

Recently the two words *step aside* have gained new political meaning in South Africa.

*Step aside* says the Kgeltengrivier Residents Association to their local municipality in the North West,

Says Astral Foods to the Lekwa Local Municipality in Mpumalanga,

And says municipalities run by the Democratic Alliance in the Western Cape to Eskom.

*Step aside*, so we can relieve the ANC of the responsibility of government, and ensure that water is clean, money is well spent to benefit the poor and that load-shedding doesn't destroy businesses and jobs.

*Step aside*, because enough time and money and human potential have been wasted by factionalism, tribalism and greed.

Following the leadership of the country, bottom up, President Cyril Ramaphosa is now telling some of his own comrades to step aside.

And when the President implores peoples to vote against corrupt leaders, we can only wonder which party the President will be left to canvass for in October's local government election.

*Step aside* is also the message implicit in the latest Municipal Financial Sustainability Index produced by Ratings Afrika.

They say that troubled municipalities needs a R51 billion bailout from national government to survive a liquidity crisis.

The DA has fought against money being diverted from basic services to bail out SAA and other zombie-state owned entitles.

But this does not mean that municipalities should now be bailed out.

If a municipality is run by a mayor and municipal manager who are corrupt or incompetent, giving that municipality more money will only increase its output of irregular and fruitless and wasteful expenditure.

To prevent the financial and institutional collapse of municipalities, we need to dig deeper. We need to go back to the beginning of democratic local government.

To quote Aristotle: *“The mistake lies in the beginning... ‘well begun is half done’ – so an error at the beginning, though quite small, has the proportion of a half to the whole matter.”*

So as to the question ‘what were the errors at the beginning’ of democratic local government, here are the answers.

*Mistake number one* – Cadre deployment, an ANC policy adopted at Mafikeng in 1997, for the stated purpose of subsuming the state under the party.

If politicians want to advance a party political agenda, they must stand for Parliament, or the provincial legislature, or the local council.

Politicians should not be appointed, based on political loyalty, as municipal managers, CFOs, chief engineers and city planners. These jobs require a non-political attitude and skill set.

The ban on municipal officials holding office in a political party, a provision of the Municipal Systems Amendment Bill passed late last year, is a step in the right direction.

But the shameless defence by President Ramaphosa of this unconstitutional and illegal practice at the Zondo Commission of Enquiry into state capture is a cause for serious concern.

*Mistake number two* – race-based employment equity plans, a requirement of the Employment Equity Act adopted in 2001.

It doesn't matter whether you apply regional or national racial targets in appointing and promoting municipal officials, the effect is to narrow the pool of skills and expertise available in local government.

Municipalities in the North West and the Free State will not be able to promote an engineer or financial manager who happens to be of Indian descent into their top management without flunking their own race-based employment equity plans.

This is because South Africans of Indian decent, according to the demeaning rules of racial demographic representivity, make up far less than 5% of the economically active populations in those provinces.

And yet, I can wager that people living in a bankrupt, broken municipality could not care less about the race of their local municipal officials, only that they are competent.

Mistake number three – BEE and preferential procurement, a combination of cadre deployment and race quotas in the spending of government money.

These policies do not empower ordinary people, they further enable state capture, elite enrichment and the breakdown of services and infrastructure.

These policies also prevent municipalities from compensating for their internal weaknesses, making it near impossible to procure value for taxpayers' money, and locking struggling municipalities into a loop of failure.

It is time for change, at the ballot box, but also here in Parliament.

While voters can this year tell ANC councillors and mayors to step aside, it is also time for the country to sidestep failed ANC policies.