

MEDIA STATEMENT

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SALGA encourages South Africans to take part in municipal processes through the public participation platforms municipalities provide

Local Government in South Africa is seen as a key institution for enhancing democracy and as a vehicle for development. Since the advent of local democracy in 2000, local government has been seen as the fundamental institution for making the state's political institutions inclusive of citizens and community groups in society and affording the people a voice in the decision-making process. The rationale for such an approach is that there is inherent value in giving people space to influence the decisions that affect them. It helps build capacity and thereby contributes to empowerment. Section 152 of the Constitution confirms several citizens' rights and, more specifically, the rights of communities to be involved in local governance. Fundamentally, local government legislation defines a municipality as comprising its political structures, administration, and community. Local government legislation clarifies that communities are an integral part of municipal governance of local government affairs.

Ordinarily, municipal councils have the right to govern local government community affairs, exercise the municipality's executive and legislative authority and; finance the affairs of the municipality. Financing sources include charging fees for services, imposing surcharges on fees or property rates, and (when allowed by national legislation) imposing tariffs on other taxes, levies, and duties when permitted by national legislation.

Equally, these councils have a duty to respect the rights of citizens in the way in which they exercise their powers, exercise their powers and use their resources in the best interests of the local community and; provide a democratic and accountable government. They should ensure that municipal services are provided to the local community in an equitable, and financially and environmentally sustainable manner. Additionally, municipal councils must encourage the participation of the local community, promote development and gender equity in the municipality. With regards to public participation, local community members have the right to participate in the decision-making processes of the municipality, be informed of decisions of the municipal council, and expect the council to disclose information about its business and finances. They have the right to attend meetings of the municipal council and its committees and demand that the council acts transparently and impartially. They may submit

recommendations, complaints or representations to the municipality and expect prompt responses from the same municipality. On the other hand, lies citizens' duties to utilise the procedures and mechanisms established to enable participation. Their right to participate in municipal decision making is linked to a duty to follow set processes. Local communities are obliged to allow municipal officials reasonable access to their property for the performance of municipal functions, comply with municipal by-laws, and respect the municipal rights of other members of the local community.

“One of the mandates of local government is to promote public participation. In terms of the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000), municipalities are legally obliged to encourage and create conditions for community participation. Councillors have to keep residents informed about decisions taken by the council and ensure that communities participate in the local government decision-making process through various methods such as contributing to the Integrated Development Plan, ward committees, consultation meetings, calls for public comment on critical issues and stakeholder meetings.

An Integrated Development Plan is a super plan for an area that gives an overall framework for development. It aims to co-ordinate the work of local and other spheres of government in a coherent plan to improve the quality of life for all the people living in an area. It should take into account the existing conditions and problems and resources available for development. All municipalities have to produce an IDP. Municipalities are responsible for its co-ordination of the IDP and must draw in other stakeholders in the area who can impact on and/or benefit from development in the area.

Once the IDP is drawn up all municipal planning and projects should happen in terms of the IDP. The annual council budget should be based on the IDP. Other government departments working in the area should take the IDP into account when making their own plans. The IDP is reviewed every year and necessary changes can be made. SALGA encourages local communities to participate in local government affairs, particularly in service delivery planning such as the Integrated Development Plan, performance management review, budget preparation and strategic service delivery decisions of local government.

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