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Local Government as an Agent of Youth Development

South Africa's growing youth population presents government at the local, provincial and national level with an opportunity to harness the energy, potential and drive of this age demographic to take part in and influence decision-making processes that shape their communities and their own lives.

For Thapelo Maleke, Chairperson of the Local Government Youth Development Forum (LGYDF), municipalities have the responsibility of playing an active role in the development of young people (youth in South Africa are defined as those between 14 – 35 years of age).

Speaking ahead of the commemoration of Youth Day on June 16, Maleke said that with South Africa's youth populace being disproportionately affected by the country's most pressing social and economic challenges, local government, as the grassroots layer of government to communities, is uniquely positioned to respond to these challenges in various ways.



Thapelo Maleke: chairperson of the Local Government Youth Development Forum (LGYDF)

"The Local Government Youth Development Forum is a multi-stakeholder partnership of the South African Local Government Association, Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), the national Youth Development Agency (NYDA), the South African Youth Chamber of Commerce and the South African Youth Council (SAYC)..."

"The purpose of this forum is to harmonize collaborative efforts aimed at ensuring that youth



development happens at the local government level,” says Maleke

SALGA is the key partner in the LGYDF and its launch in 2017 was a major milestone for youth development in municipalities.

The LGYDF advocates for the total institutionalization of youth development in the local government sector from local to district and metropolitan municipalities.

An enabling environment for youth public participation in local governance

Local government legislation provides for the establishment of ward committees that act as the conveners of stakeholders in the community.

Ward committees play a crucial role in determining core municipal processes, such as the Integrated Development Planning (IDP), municipal budgeting and municipal performance management processes as a result of collaboration and dialogue with citizens.

These municipal structures offer various opportunities for young people to be elevated to the status of stakeholder in key decision-making processes that affect their immediate environment.

“We need to encourage young people to participate in Integrated Development Processes (IDP). That is why our slogan says “young people must take charge in leading their own development,” says Maleke.

Municipalities across the country are giving priority to the integration of youth issues into their council programmes. As a result, youth development projects/programmes are being incorporated into Integrated Development plans (IDP), service delivery and budget implementation plans.

Youth structures within municipalities such as Youth Development Units (YDU), are there to coordinate, facilitate, advise and monitor the mainstreaming of youth development policies and programmes for municipalities.

These youth units, together with youth forums in ward committees and youth councils maintain young people’s formal participation in decision-making processes at the local level.

Mainstreaming young people in the economy

Local government is the level of government closest to the people. Local government therefore has a better understanding of the social, political and economic challenges facing society and young people in particular.

In this regard, Maleke expressed his concerns that the commemoration of Youth Day was taking place under extraordinary circumstances. According to Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), South Africa’s youth unemployment rate now stood at 74% as per the expanded definition.

Equally worrying for Maleke was that when broken down, the unemployment rate for those aged between 15–24 years stood at 63.3% and 41.3% for those aged between 25–34 years.

In responding to this challenge, Maleke identified various national policies on youth development that filtered down to municipalities. Such policies play an important role in engendering the active involvement of young people in the economy.

The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2030 was developed and approved by the Cabinet in October 2020 and was launched in March 2021.

Its vision is: “Integrated, holistic and sustainable youth development in which young people not only realize their full potential in the social, economic and political spheres of life, but also their responsibilities in making a meaningful contribution towards building a better life for all.

The Integrated Youth Development Strategy (IYDS 2020) developed by the National Youth Development Agency provides guidance on the implementation roles and responsibilities of the National Youth Policy 2020–2030.



The purpose of the IYDS is to enhance the participation of young people through targeted programmes initiated by government, business and civil society, as well as support for programmes that encourage youth innovation, entrepreneurship development, skills development, including income-generating and wealth-creating activities.

SALGA has been leading the process that enables municipalities to develop their own IYDS at metro, district and local level.

“We are advocating for the institutionalization of youth development that starts with a council adopting a youth policy that is derived from the national youth policy. That will make municipalities progressive because even when you talk about IDPs and budgeting, youth development will be on top of the agenda,” says Maleke.

SALGA joins nationwide efforts to empower young people

South African municipalities can play a vital role in the implementation of youth empowerment measures at the local level. They can use various tools and methods, of which youth mainstreaming in decision-making processes at the municipal level is one of them.

With local government being the level of government where people first look to solve their immediate social problems, municipalities are well placed to develop strategies and programmes that respond to the aspirations, needs and priorities of young people in their communities.

It is against this background, that the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) on this Youth Day, commemorated under the theme, “The Year of Charlotte Manyika Maseko: Growing youth employment for an inclusive and transformed society”, pledges to redouble its efforts to empower young people in South Africa.

The organization also honours the brave young men and women in Soweto and other parts of the country who gave impetus to the fight against apartheid through their collective action on June 16, 1976.

Your efforts paved the way for future generations to enjoy the benefits of democracy today.

Follow hashtag:

#20YearsOfDemocraticLocalGovernment and look out for more activities planned for the 20 Years of Democratic Local Government on the SALGA website: www.salga.org.za and all out social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram.