

YOUTH month 20 22

One of South Africa's youngest councillors wants young people to have more influence over the decisions that affect their lives, here's why.

At 27, Lwazi Phakade, Ward 51 councillor in Langa Township, Cape Town, is one of South Africa's youngest councillors and doesn't take his obligations and responsibilities for granted after approaching the 2021 local government elections campaign as an underdog.

On the campaign trail, he very early became aware of ageist attitudes, and in particular, age-based stereotypes of young people as having no interest in public affairs.

Undaunted by the obstacle, he sought to disprove this stereotype by earning the endorsement of local communities in the densely populated township he called home.

"The belief that young people are not capable only because they are young is a fallacy. We might be young, but that does not mean we aren't capable. The truth of the matter is that young people are not being given opportunities to prove themselves," said Phakade.

Commonality of service delivery challenges across communities

Phakade, who is among 400 councillors between the ages of 20-29 to have been elected to 257 councils across the country, grew up in between Egcuwa, a village in the Eastern Cape and Langa, a sprawling and poverty-stricken township that lies in the shadow of one of Africa's leading tourist attractions, Table Mountain.

Though one area was a village, and the other, a township, the connecting story threads between the two was a lack of service delivery.

"I grew up between the two areas and it was always interesting to see the difference between where I lived in the city and the lack of service delivery there, and also where I lived in the village, and the lack of service delivery there as well," said Phakade.

A passion for service and activism

It was this growing awareness of the common struggles shared by marginalised communities across the country that ignited Phakade's passion for service and activism for pressing social issues.

He honed in on this passion when he joined the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) as a teenager and continued to nurture it at Stellenbosch University, where he formed part of #Feesmustfall, a student-led protest movement for free tertiary education.



Phakade then put his BA degree in social dynamics to work in local government, the sphere of government closest to people's everyday needs.

"This is a sphere of government where you can impact people's lives directly. You deal with everyday bread and butter issues. That's why I joined local government because I have a passion for people," he said.

Housing and living conditions in Langa

The historical background of Langa as a township designed by the apartheid government to house black migrant workers, influenced Phakade's interest in social justice issues, particularly adequate housing and living conditions.

He reflected on what it meant to live in a township that grapples with inadequate housing and water and sanitation problems as well as an upward trend of people flocking to such areas in search of economic opportunity.

"Ever since I started being a councillor, I realised that while housing is a national issue, it is also a big issue in the City of Cape Town.

"Cape Town is seen as a center of economic opportunity by people from outside, therefore there'll always be an upward trend in people flocking to the city," Phakade said.

How local governments should engage young people

Phakade shared his reflections on why the turnout among young voters in South Africa traditionally lags. He said it was important that councils are reflective of the communities they represent for young people to feel that they have a voice in local decision-making.

He added that political parties could also influence young people's political participation in society by fielding more younger candidates for election and that strategic municipal planning meetings such as ward, Imbizo and Integrated Development Planning (IDP) meetings, should be made less formal and more engaging to ensure relevance for young people.

"We need to de-formalise our set up of meetings for us to attract young people. They should be less bureaucratic and long agendas are unnecessary," said Phakade.

SALGA commemorates Youth Day.

SALGA joins hands with all three spheres of government and all stakeholders- including the private sector and civil society in commemorating the 46th anniversary of the 16 June Soweto uprising.

Local government commits to strengthening and deepening the engagement and participation of young people in local decision-making

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