



Local Government as a Human Rights Champion

Many of the rights often regarded as human rights are realised at the local level of government. The reason for this is that the vast majority of interactions between citizens and the government happen through the delivery of municipal services such as electricity, water, waste and sanitation.

The Bill of Rights, which is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa, grants the right for everyone to receive basic municipal services. This is what makes local governments indispensable to the promotion and protection of human rights.

How do local governments promote the realisation of human rights?

The Constitutionally entrenched responsibilities of local government in key areas such as the provision of basic services to communities in a sustainable manner, position municipalities as human rights champions.

The realisation of these rights is critical to the creation of equitable, inclusive, and sustainable communities that mirror the vision of a nation reconciled.

Data from annual general household surveys by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), is a good way to assess how local government has fared in fulfilling its Constitutional obligations and meeting community expectations.



Drinking Water

The provision of safe and readily available water is a human right that is essential to sustaining a healthy livelihood and maintaining one's dignity.

South African households' access to clean drinking water increased from 84.4% in 2002 to 89.1% in 2020. In addition, more households were provided with water in 2020 than eighteen years earlier.





Sanitation

Sanitation is another human right that is fundamental to human dignity. Nationally, the percentage of households with access to improved sanitation increased from 61,7% in 2002 to 83,2% in 2020.



Refuse removal

Refuse removal is fundamental to a safe and healthy environment. Regular refuse removal takes place for almost 62,7% of South African households. This is up from 56.1% in 2002.



Electricity

Access to electricity is regarded as a human right. It reduces poverty, improves health, increases productivity, and improves one's standard of living. The percentage of South African households that were connected to the country's main electricity supply increased from 76,7% in 2002 to 90,0% in 2020. Paraffin and wood as a source of energy for cooking continues to decline because of increased electricity access.

All the mentioned basic municipal services are human rights issues which are fundamental to the dignity, safety, health and well-being of people and communities.

Despite progress, more still needs to be done

Despite the achievements made to give expression to the Constitutional objects of local government by providing millions of South Africans with access to basic municipal services, much more still needs to be done to ensure that these rights become a reality for everyone, everywhere, everyday.

It is for this reason that the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), as the national voice of the country's 257 municipalities, on this 21st day of March 2022, joins hands with all branches of government, the private sector and civil society to reaffirm our commitment to the expansion and extension of all fundamental human rights to the people and communities we serve.

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