

**9th ANNUAL SALGA NATIONAL COMMUNICATORS' FORUM: 25 - 27
FEBRUARY 2026**

***Elevate - Reclaiming Trust, Credibility and Citizen Connection in Local
Government Communication***

ADDRESS BY SALGA DEPUTY PRESIDENT: CLLR XOLA PAKATI on Wednesday,
25 Feb 2026

Programme Director, Ms Thami Ngubeni,

Deputy Minister of Cooperative Governance Dr Namane Dickson Masemola,

Deputy Minister in the Presidency, Kenny Morolong,

The SALGA Provincial Chairperson in Western Cape Alderman Donovan Joubert,

Leadership of SALGA, CoGTA and the GCIS,

Distinguished Communicators,

Colleagues and Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by welcoming all of you to the 9th Annual SALGA National Communicators' Forum.

This gathering reminds us of a fundamental truth, communication in local government is not a technical add-on, it is a core governance function. It drives accountability, strengthens transparency, and builds the trust that keeps local democracy alive.

When communication is weak, misinformation grows and confidence erodes. When communication is strong, communities are informed, engaged, and empowered to participate meaningfully in local affairs.

This year's theme; "**Elevate: Reclaiming Trust, Credibility and Citizen Connection,**" challenges us to raise the standard of our work. It calls on us to elevate trust in our municipalities, elevate the credibility of our institutions, and elevate the connection we build with every resident.

A Defining Moment for Local Government

We gather at a time of national reflection and renewal. South Africa marks 30 years of democracy and 30 years of SALGA's founding as the voice of local government. We also commemorate the 70th anniversary of the historic Women's March which is a poignant reminder of the power of civic participation.

In just a few months the Local Government Elections will usher in new leadership, higher expectations, and greater scrutiny. This moment demands clarity, leadership, and a renewed commitment to honest and accessible communication. As communicators, you stand at the centre of how our municipalities are understood, trusted, and held accountable.

The Current Landscape: Challenges and Opportunities

Our municipalities face real pressures: financial strain, ageing infrastructure, climate-related disasters, and public frustration over service delivery failures. At the same time, misinformation spreads rapidly and undermines trust.

But moments of difficulty are also moments of opportunity. This is our chance to rebuild the relationship between local government and the people we serve. As communicators you are the bridge between residents and institutions, conveying decisions clearly, ensuring the public's concerns reach leadership, and shaping how communities experience local government.

Turning National Priorities into Local Impact

In the 2026 State of the Nation Address, the President outlined a decade focused on implementation, stability, and capability. The agenda includes:

- Fixing dysfunctional municipalities
- Ending the water crisis
- Investing heavily in infrastructure
- Professionalising the local public service

However, communities do not live in national policy documents. They live in towns where these commitments must translate into real improvements.

Your role is to make the national vision tangible:

- Show residents how infrastructure upgrades will improve their daily lives
- Explain reforms in simple, accessible language

- Connect national programmes to the lived experience of households and communities

This is how we build understanding, manage expectations, and demonstrate progress.

The Local Government Election Period

Election periods heighten tensions and increase the spread of false information. In this environment, communicators must be the voice of calm, accuracy and fairness and contribute towards nation building.

Your role will be instrumental in ensuring that communities understand the transition process, they are guided through the changes in councils and administration, have access to timely information during coalition negotiations and you continue to counter falsehoods that can undermine the democratic processes.

Communicating the White Paper Review

The Review of the 1998 White Paper on Local Government is one of the most significant reforms in decades. It addresses outdated funding systems, administrative bottlenecks, weak capacity, and declining public trust. Even here your role as communicators is key to help communities to appreciate why the reforms are necessary and how the changes will impact on service delivery to the benefits of residents.

No reform can succeed without public understanding and buy-in. Your work ensures that communities are informed partners in shaping a more responsive and accountable local government system.

A Contemporary Communications Agenda

Beyond reforms and elections, residents need information that helps them navigate everyday realities. Your work is cut out as communicators.

1. Disaster Response and Climate Resilience

Climate-related disasters have become more frequent. This means that communication is now a life-saving function. Early warnings, evacuation instructions, and myth-busting are essential. Beyond emergencies, communities must understand long-term adaptation and what municipalities are doing to prepare for future risks.

2. Infrastructure Upgrades

Infrastructure renewal often brings temporary inconvenience and appreciating that transparency builds patience and trust as communicators you must be counted on to explain:

- Why disruptions are necessary
- How long they will last
- What benefits will follow
- What progress has been made

3. Safety, Vandalism, and Crime

Vandalism and cable theft damage communities and undermine service delivery. Communication can mobilise residents to report incidents, protect infrastructure, and support community safety initiatives.

4. Local Economic Development

People are searching for hope. When jobs are created, when training opportunities open, or when business support programmes become available, these must be amplified. Communicating positive developments strengthens optimism and pride.

5. Social Cohesion

In times of division, communication must build unity. Promote stories and initiatives that bring people together: community clean-ups, sports events, cultural programmes, or youth initiatives that foster shared purpose.

Embracing a New Era of Engagement

Today's communicators have tools that previous generations never imagined. Digital platforms allow municipalities to reach thousands instantly, gather feedback in real time, and host virtual town halls accessible to all residents urban or rural.

This era calls for interactive communication, two-way engagement, real-time updates and the use of multimedia and storytelling to build trust with communities.

The Power of Storytelling

Every municipality has stories of innovation, resilience, and progress. Consistently sharing these stories will contribute to building community pride, demonstrate tangible improvements and restore belief in local government

A Tribute to Municipal Communicators

Across the country, communicators work tirelessly — often late at night, often under pressure, and often without recognition. You calm angry meetings, dispel rumours, mobilise communities, and carry the voice of the municipality with professionalism and integrity. You are not merely communicators. You are nation-builders.

Your work can mean the difference between confusion and clarity, between anger and understanding, between distrust and cooperation.

A Call to Elevate

Now is the moment to recommit to excellence.

Let us elevate our work to rebuild trust.

Let us communicate with honesty, courage, and compassion.

Let us ensure the story of local government is told with transparency and hope.

When communication rises, local government rises.

And when local government rises, South Africa rises too.

Programme director, as I take my seat let me welcome Deputy Minister of Cooperative Governance Dr Namane Dickson Masemola and Deputy Minister in the Presidency, Kenny Morolong to come to the stage.

Thank you.