



MINISTRY
COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEECH BY DEPUTY MINISTER DR NAMANE DICKSON MASEMOLA AT THE 9th
SALGA NATIONAL COMMUNICATORS' FORUM**

CAPE TOWN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE

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Programme Director,
Deputy Minister Kenneth Morolong
President of SALGA, Cllr Phakathi
SALGA Officials
Councillors present
Esteemed Communicators,
Ladies and Gentlemen
Fellow South Africans

Good day

It is with a profound sense of appreciation to be invited by SALGA , to be part of this historic engagement while we are left with few months towards the upcoming municipal elections.

A period within which you colleagues will be having serious challenges, given the charged political landscape for electoral contests and possible fortunes of political formations in the body politic of our country.

It an honour to address you and share perspectives under the theme “***Elevate – Reclaiming Trust, Credibility and Citizen Connection in Local Government Communication.***”

This theme is profound in that it addresses the philosophical basis of representative and participatory democracy and the centrality of the people in social transformation.

It is well placed to ensure democratic integrity and embedding in communication professionalism and elevate trust and commitment.

As we are occasioned for discussions on communication, it is important to note that, Government Communication and Information Systems provide policy guidance in this regard, to ensure coordinated, honest, proactive, evidence based, direct communication utilising diverse media to facilitate access and objectivity.

This policy framework guides All-of -Government on communication to serve the people of our country better, because they have the right to information.

In applying this policy framework, we all know the inherent contradictions in the media and communication space. And this requires dialectical reasoning and relational governance to serve the public and the communities of the municipalities.

The constitution of the republic South Africa says” There is no government that can claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people”.

Meaning that the measure of success for the National Democratic Project should not only be based on self-assessment reports of municipalities and government departments but also on the feedback that we get from South Africans, on whose behalf we are meeting here today, to share lessons on how best we should serve them.

Therefore, this important annual national platform is dedicated to local government communicators to deliberate on the advancement of comprehensive, integrated and coordinated municipal communication, within the national landscape that determines the political temperature.

As such advancing communication with growth of personality is what is expected of all of us, demonstrated by content and articulation and not triviality of personalities.

We are meeting today when His Excellency President Ramaphosa has declared the year 2026, as the crucial year to Fix Local Government and transform the economy.

In doing so, we are fully conscious of Section 152 of the Country’s constitution as it articulates fundamental objectives of local government and as such appreciate the constitutional mandate bestowed on this sphere of government.

In this regard municipalities are expected to provide services and facilitate social and economic development of their jurisdictions among the key outlined objectives.

They are expected to ensure provision of water, better sanitary conditions, refuse removal, infrastructure provision and maintenance, roads maintenance and electricity supply. A matter that you know better from your municipalities given varied prevailing conditions.

Equally based on the principle of cooperative governance, both national and provincial government are enjoined by section 154 of the constitution to provide the much-needed support for municipalities to perform their functions.

This support also include focus on our collective ability to communicate.

Understandably so, without any ambiguity, conscious social forces in society expect this sphere to become a catalyst for development and transformation of local spaces to become habitable places to meet the daily social demands of the people.

Obviously, you are the people well placed in the sector to indicate whether all the functions are performed to the satisfaction of communities, by giving continuous feedback and updates on the performance and functionality of the municipalities.

We are meeting at a time when society is critical of government and confidence levels have ebbed due to various factors like performance gap's, malfeasance and malversation, inadequate communication and demands for information, weak accountability, systemic instabilities, crime and corruption to mention but few.

In fact, South African Social Attitudes Survey conducted by Human Science Research Council released in July 2025 gives a clear picture about the trust levels of the people on public institutions.

It shows the declined trust relations between public institutions and society.

A major concern on our side and this should be corrected, because we exist for service and leadership to society.

Similarly, Edelman Trust Barometer Survey conducted in 2024/2025 shows decline in trust levels between the people of this country and government.

The trust levels report is depicted as follows: -

- Employers:- 78%

- Business:-68%
- NGO's:- 63%
- Media:- 46%
- Government:- 36% which represents 7% trust growth from the previous 29% in 2024.

This report should serve as a barometer on how the people we are serving are perceiving us.

You are supposed to give the people enough, reliable and quality information about the performance of the public sector institutions and not spin-doctor information.

The relations, between the people and their public institutions are fragile and need leadership and organisational impact supported by transformative communication characterised by proactive empathy-driven approach, designed to shift perspectives, foster deep appreciation and understanding, drive behavioural and social change, rather than traditional communication meant just to exchange information and believe the people are satisfied and when they posture differently, institutions get surprised.

Today, communication is not a secondary function in government but a strategic function, central to developmental governance and provision of leadership.

Being at the coalface of service delivery, local government has more responsibility to communicate regularly and transparently with communities on their work, thus strengthening public trust, promoting active citizen participation and enhancing the credibility of municipalities.

This must be done with honesty and integrity because data driven leadership and management are what is required for quality decisions, impactful oversight and information to the public.

This summit is convened primarily for a national conversation of Local Government Communicators, on how communication as a development instrument could be used for sharing information, reaching out for developmental and educative purpose.

Part of our discussion today would be to assess the range of our policy application and the impact on the socio-economic conditions of the people. We also need to assess the extend to which our communication channels and mechanisms empower the citizens to access the opportunities for their social progress.

This important national meeting takes place when the national political landscape is complex and dynamic, given the realities of the moment, characterised by a form of national government (GNU) that is unusual to many South Africans, but the content of it and policies related there to, represent an aspiration for well-defined future informed by the Freedom Charter, that is profoundly elaborated in the National Development Plan and the Macro-economic Strategy of the country.

A fundamental question that we should continue to ask ourselves and you as transformation agents of communication revolution, among key tasks that you should perform, is to put into context the impact of the aforementioned prevailing circumstances, on the process of building united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, and prosperous society, as fundamental values enshrined in the constitution.

As agents of shifting the perspectives and deepening an understanding in our institutions for those who are positioned in the decision-making arena of the public institutions, you need to always ask yourselves questions like, what is the non-racial character of the decision I am about to take? Such decisions need to deepen the values in the public service and administration for nation building and social cohesion.

The grand ideas of pursuing an agenda for social progress, is furthermore advanced through the implementation of the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP), which articulates the priorities of the Seventh Administration. These priorities are to provide basic services and infrastructure, economic development, fighting poverty and addressing high costs of living, building a capable, ethical and developmental state.

Towards realisation of the agreed priorities, His Excellency President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa has announced a Trillion Rand Budget for the next three years to drive massive development in the country.

And to further enhance the green shoots and stimulate the economy given the positive projection by the World Bank on the economic growth of our country.

This national confluence of minds is an essential platform of planning, guiding and strengthening municipalities on how to occupy space on public discourse, takes place when social classes in society are at different levels of progress informed by proximity to the base which differentiates socio-economic conditions of the people based on implications of history and contemporary realities and difficulties.

Unavoidably, these circumstances determine the attitudinal relations between citizens and their government, consequently resulting into different relations that would need yourselves to manage.

Therefore, its paramount that, you should understand all of these factors and how they impact on your work and demonstrate abilities to guide you through communication.

This is the broad context within which you are placed as agents of change and practitioners of public discourse on the efficacy of government and public institutions for optimum relations with the citizens.

COMMUNICATION AS A CONSTITUTIONAL DUTY

Perhaps this broad reference provides a basis of understanding the strategic importance of communication.

In our democratic country, the mandate to engage and communicate with the publics is enshrined in our constitution.

The principles of accountability, transparency and openness are basic to communication services.

It requires public administration to be transparent and to provide the public with timely, accurate and accessible information and deepen the values and principles mention in section 195 of the constitution.

This means communication is not optional. It is a constitutional obligation in our constitutional democracy, that we fought for and ushered in through the democratic breakthrough.

As such, design of your municipal institutional capacity should have this pillar of communication as an important element of transformation and governance.

In a democracy, communication must provide timely, accurate, and accessible information to the public, facilitating transparency, accountability, and active citizenship.

This obligation ensures free flow of information and enables citizens to participate in democracy and make informed decisions and build trust consistently.

At local government level, where you operate, this responsibility carries even greater weight.

When water does not flow, when refuse is not collected, when electricity is interrupted, it is municipalities that face communities directly.

And it is you who must communicate with clarity and credibility.

Sitting here today, I am certain we can agree that you are not messengers but strategic players in the governance equation of your municipalities and custodians of public trust.

Communication revolution is characterised by amazing powerful digital and varied social media platforms that has changed the course of national and international relations, that shapes the political, economic and social behaviour and influence public opinions.

Therefore, communication strategies are required to support efficient service delivery, and you should fight misinformation/fake news and enhance social cohesion and help shape national unity.

Over and above all, we need to always remember that Government Communication is a strategic element to service delivery and the functioning of the South African government.

RADICAL HONESTY AS THE FOUNDATION OF TRUST

Trust cannot be rebuilt through branding campaigns. It is rebuilt through truthful communication.

Honesty means explaining delays openly, acknowledging constraints sincerely, and communicating corrective actions clearly.

Radical simplicity for purposeful messaging is what we should do as communication practitioners, mindful of hostile activism in the areas you are working in.

If a project is delayed because of whatever administrative processes, say so. If there are financial limitations, explain them.

If systems have failed, outline what is being done to fix them.

Silence breeds suspicion. Half-truths breed cynicism.

Transparency builds credibility. Communities may understand an honest and genuine explanation. They do not accept deception.

COMMUNICATING IN A DISRUPTED INFORMATION AGE

We operate in an era of social media, artificial intelligence and a 24-hour news cycle.

Information spreads instantly. Narratives are shaped quickly. Misinformation can undermine years of institutional work in minutes.

In this environment, silence is interpreted as incompetence. Delayed communication is seen as concealment.

We need communication that is proactive, strategic and anticipatory, communication at the tip of the spear.

This means framing issues early, addressing concerns honestly, and managing crises transparently before speculation takes root.

Reactive communication is no longer sufficient. We must lead the narrative with facts, integrity and agility.

We should be agile, demonstrate firmness of principle and meticulous execution of the tasks at hand.

COMMUNICATING NATIONAL PRIORITIES AT LOCAL LEVEL

Following the State of the Nation Address and later today the 2026 Budget Speech, communities are asking a simple but important question: “What does this mean for us”?

In a context of economic constraints, modest growth and fiscal pressures, it is essential that we communicate honestly about both opportunities and limitations.

Communities must understand how national plans translate into local action, how budgets are allocated, and what progress is being made toward development goals.

Our task, therefore, is to educate and contextualise, not just to announce.

There are major events currently shaping South Africa ranging from high-level political debates, key events, summits, critical infrastructure challenges, legal proceedings, etc, which requires government communication that is at the tip of the spear.

This is a government communication that is not passive, but proactive, strategic, rising beyond clutter, driving policy, and managing crises communication.

1. President has just delivered the SONA and debates were also concluded. The main question in this regard is how we profile the SONA 2026 as our commitment and statement of intent that is driving us towards the achievement of the goals, we set ourselves in the MTDP and the NDP.
2. Later today, Finance Minister Enoch Godongwana will deliver the 2026 Budget Speech. The speech will support will outline government's fiscal policy, tax strategy and economic priorities for the year ahead. The speech will also allocate funding to all the plans announced by the President during the delivery of the SONA. This bold move forward by our government requires a relentless communication which seeks to educate, changes perceptions and mobilise community support behind our programme of action.
3. We have concluded the 1998 Review of the White Paper on Local Government. We will soon releasing the 2026 White Paper which is based on the 30 years of experience we have as country and the lived experiences of communities. The new white paper must be profiled so that every South African understand the new vision and intent for local government.
4. Climate change is upon us, and we have not been spared, we are experiencing ongoing disasters. All these have harrowing implications for our country and those affected and impacted. The issue of Early Warning is key here looking at the role that you as government communicators should play to save lives and livelihoods. SAWS messages are early warning only when they are intentionally communicated to the targeted audiences.
5. We are finalizing several laws in our country in our sector which requires a communicator to know and understand them. It is this understanding that will ensure that these laws are communicated beyond doubt – (1) **Coalition Bill**; (2) **Intergovernmental Relations Framework Amendment Bill**; (3) **Fire Services Bill**; (4) **Local Government General Laws Amendment Bill**; (5) **Traditional and KhoiSan Leadership Bill – 2025**.
6. COGTA is working on the **Review of the Disaster Management Policy** response capabilities. This is necessitated by the increasing frequency and complexity of disasters, whether climate-induced events, public health risks, agricultural disease outbreaks, or social crises, require an adaptive, well-coordinated, and fiscally responsible response. Once this review is done, we need communications to popularize, educate and profile the new approach
7. Last year, we committed to move away from generic support and to focus on targeted interventions in municipalities that were experiencing severe financial and governance distress (**Municipal Performance Turnaround Strategy**). That commitment has been fulfilled over the past year. We prioritised municipalities where service delivery had collapsed, salaries were unpaid and governance systems had broken down. This work is done within the context of the ongoing

implementation and **institutionalization of DDM** which is firmly focused on delivery, accountability and impact.

8. Tomorrow, 26 February 2026, President Cyril Ramaphosa will deliver the Keynote Address at the annual official opening of the **National House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders (NHTKL)**. The discussions that ensue between government and traditional leaders should be communicated as part of our commitment to ensure that we restore the dignity of the Royal Leaders and their Majesties.
9. The **2026 Municipal Elections** are around the corner, and we will soon see concerted efforts to rubbish the work of government in the last 30 years of democracy. We don't conceal challenges, but where there progress in government, this record must be set straight.
10. **Coalition Shifts** might be the order after coming local government elections as it is already causing significant shifts in local governance and leading to challenges in some municipalities.
11. We will be celebrating thirty years of the democratic constitution.
12. The nationwide consultation process through the National Dialogue

The effectiveness of a government's communication, especially in times like now, is crucial to its legitimacy and upholding its reputation. We need a government communication which transcends all impediments and clutter to profile the good work done.

STRENGTHENING PARTICIPATION THROUGH THE DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT MODEL

The District Development Model places integrated planning and public participation at the centre of governance.

Ward committees, consultations and stakeholder forums must not become compliance exercises. They must become platforms for meaningful engagement.

When citizens are informed and empowered, they participate. When they participate, services align better with their needs. When services improve, trust grows.

We view communication as the bridge between planning and participation. Sitting here today, we view you all as our DDM Champions that must empower our communities.

EXPLAINING REFORMS AND LEGISLATION

Government is advancing key reforms to strengthen governance and stability in local government.

From coalition governance frameworks to intergovernmental reforms, improvements in fire services, amendments to local government laws and legislation supporting traditional and Khoi-San leadership - these reforms affect communities directly.

But legislation only achieves impact if it is understood. As communicators, you must know these reforms deeply so that you can translate legal language into practical meaning for communities. Policy must become accessible. Law must become understandable.

DISASTER COMMUNICATION AND CLIMATE REALITIES

Climate change is no longer theoretical. Floods, fires and extreme weather events are affecting communities across our country.

Early warning systems save lives only when messages reach people in time and in the language they understand. Disaster communication is not about public image. It is about public safety. You play an important role in ensuring that early warnings are intentional, targeted and clear.

PREPARING FOR THE 2026 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

As we approach the 2026 Municipal Elections, public debate will intensify. We must not deny the challenges facing some municipalities. But we must also ensure that progress is recognised.

There are municipalities achieving clean audits, improving service delivery and demonstrating innovation. Our responsibility is to communicate the full picture - challenges honestly and achievements confidently because if we do not tell our story, others will tell it for us.

CITIZEN-CENTRED AND TARGETED COMMUNICATION

The public is not a single, uniform audience. Different communities trust different voices and access information through different platforms.

Effective communication requires understanding who people trust, how they consume information and what concerns them most.

We continue to urge you to always communicate in human terms. Do not focus only on amounts spent. Focus on households connected, roads repaired, clinics built and livelihoods supported. As a country, we require you all to translate policy into lived experience.

INNOVATION DESPITE CONSTRAINTS

Yes, communication units face budget limitations that can hinder some aspects of communication, especially those that are reliant on paid for media channels. But innovation does not depend solely on funding.

Community radio, ward meetings, partnerships with civil society, collaboration with traditional leaders and responsible use of digital platforms can amplify messages effectively. While we fully understand the frustrations that come with not having adequate financial resources, but we also believe that creativity and commitment can overcome resource constraints.

CONCLUSION

Colleagues,

Communication is not about image management. It is about legitimacy. It is about participation. It is about accountability.

- When citizens are informed, they engage.
- When they engage, governance improves.
- When governance improves, trust grows.
- Not only trust alone but development and progress become evident.

Let us elevate our practice. Let us commit to ethical communication, radical transparency and citizen-centred engagement.

If we do this consistently, we will not only reclaim trust but we will also rebuild it.

And in doing so, we will help ensure that every municipality works, and that every community feels heard, respected and included.

I thank you.