

9TH SALGA NATIONAL COMMUNICATORS' FORUM

*"ELEVATE - RECLAIMING TRUST, CREDIBILITY AND CITIZEN
CONNECTION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION"*

THEMBA SEPOTOKELE

25 – 27 FEBRUARY 2026

CAPE TOWN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE

9TH SALGA NATIONAL COMMUNICATORS' FORUM

***“AGENDA SETTING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AHEAD OF THE
FIERCELY CONTESTED 2026 LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ELECTIONS AND BEYOND IN THE ERA OF GOVERNMENT OF
NATIONAL UNITY AND COALITION GOVERNMENT”***

STRATEGIC MEDIA ENGAGEMENT IN MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENTS



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INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Relations between the state and the fourth estates are always frosty.
- ❑ Understanding the role of the media in a democracy is key and critical.
- ❑ Since the dawn of democracy, lack of media training has been identified as a challenge.
- ❑ Although government and the media play different roles in a democracy, they have shared and common values in building a country.

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INTRODUCTION

- ❑ The globe is looking at South Africa as we navigate through all the challenges of the first thirty year of demoracys, moreover how we reposition the country as a winning nation.
- ❑ It is the responsibility of the media and government to portray a true picture of the country.
- ❑ Journalists and spokespersons too, should appreciate their respective roles in building government and media relations.
- ❑ Minimise tension between the government and the media.

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CONTEXT

- ❑ GENERALLY, VOTER TURN-OUT IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS LOWER THAN THE NATIONAL & PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS
- ❑ 2000 AND 2006 LGE - *TEST OF DEMOCRATIC POLICIES, PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS*
- ❑ 2011 LGE - *CONSOLIDATION*
- ❑ 2016 LGE - *HOSTLY CONTESTED*
- ❑ 2021 LGE - *HOTLY CONTESTED*
- ❑ 2024 LGE - *FIERCELY CONTESTED*
- ❑ 2026 LGE - *FEROCIOUSLY CONTESTED*

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THE IMAGE, BRAND AND CREDIBILITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- ❑ Acknowledge and appreciate the challenges and complexities of local government.
- ❑ With 253 municipalities country-wide with different dynamics competing for media space,
- ❑ Local government is governed by a plethora of policies and legislations.
- ❑ Support to municipalities started with Project Consolidate, to Local Government Turn Around Strategy, Back-To-Basics and District Model of Local Government.

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MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- ❑ Who sets the agenda between **government and the media?**
- ❑ As municipal spokespersons you are the face and voice of local government
- ❑ You should be combat ready to engage both internally and externally

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MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- ❑ The role of communicators is to profile the work of **local government and its leaders**.
- ❑ Communicate the **plans, policies and programmes** of municipalities.
- ❑ Pro-actively communicate the **successes and challenges**.
- ❑ Pronounce on commitments to **improve service delivery and governance** at local government level.

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MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- ❑ **Pre-Elections** - Educate the public about constitutional right to vote.
- ❑ Assist the IEC in communicating messages.
- ❑ Substantiate on why citizens ***must register to vote and to vote.*** (*not to just to put an X*)
- ❑ Plan and host ***voter education campaigns.***
- ❑ Protect and defend the ***credibility*** of the electoral body.

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GOVERNMENT AND MEDIA RELATIONS

- ❑ **Post-Elections** - Sustain government communication on *government programmes plans, achievements and challenges.*
- ❑ Build, enhance and nurture *government and media relations.*
- ❑ Occupy the *media space.*
- ❑ Write and contribute *opinion pieces* and *engage on radio talk shows, debates and discussions.*

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MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- ❑ Newspapers, radio and television most often than not scream stories of ***corruption, mismanagement, lack of service delivery and instability in local government.*** However, ***the voice of government is missing.***
- ❑ Spotlight more on political personalities ***not government policy, plans and programmes.***
- ❑ Complexities and challenges of GUN and coalitions with ***endless motions of confidence at local government level.***
- ❑ Tensions between ***political personalities and parties.***

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MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- ❑ It's important to win the *battle of ideas*.
- ❑ Deploy forces strategically, *on air, on sea and on the ground*.
- ❑ *Joint planning, collaboration and partnership* between national, provincial and local government.
- ❑ Leverage on *existing and new media* contacts to set the agenda.

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MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- ❑ You are the **face and voice** of local government.
- ❑ Communicate with **clarity, conviction, and confidence** amidst the **chaos and confusion**.
- ❑ Articulate the message of local government policies, programmes and plans with **purpose, precision and poise** despite the cacaphony of noise.
- ❑ State of the **Cities and Municipalities Addresses, campaigns and outreach programmes**.

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MEDIA AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- ❑ Invest and support **Community Media** and the **MDDA** mandate.
- ❑ Adjust and adapt **social and digital media**, despite its challenges, it presents an opportunity for municipal communicators.
- ❑ In the world of “**Digital First**”, set the agenda through **X, Facebook, Instagram, Tik-Tok and Podcasts** to maintain and sustain local government digital footprint.

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REWARDING AND CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE IN MUNICIPAL COMMUNICATION

- It's commendable that SALGA is *honouring and celebrating* municipal communicators.
- In my seminal book, *Being A Spokesperson*, about the relationship between journalists and spokespersons, I implore government to celebrate, reward and honour spokespersons like the media does.

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► CONTACT

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