



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OPINION PIECE

Born again to do the right things

22 September 2014

Minister of the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), Ms Nomvula Mokonyane surprised many delegates at the Presidential Local Government Summit 2014 recently by declaring that she was now more than happy that every local government official has been “reborn to do the right things” – returning back to basics – towards serving the needy people of this country.

Minister Mokonyane, quoting 2 Corinthians 5:17, which says “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things are passed away; behold, new things have come.” meant that the more than 2000 local government councillors, mayors and managers, who gathered at the Gallagher Estate, north of Johannesburg on Thursday, 18 September 2014, to relook at what bedevils service delivery imperatives, have now taken a positive outlook of returning back to basics to tackle these problems.

Indeed, likening this to the rediscovery of their faith, going back to basics in doing things is, Minister Mokonyane said, like “being born again”.

Minister Mokonyane was intent on driving the message home that there is a need to build a responsive, caring and accountable local government.

The summit resulted in the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) introducing a Back to Basics programme to monitor performance in municipalities. This programme comes after various reports showed poor performance of some municipalities resulting in service delivery protests.

The New Age Newspaper reported that CoGTA has also identified some of the issues contributing to poor service delivery. The report shows that in some municipalities there is a collapse in core municipal infrastructure in some communities resulting in services either poorly provided or not provided at all. The Back to Basics programme is an approach where those municipalities in a dysfunctional state have their performance and accountability systematically managed to ensure that there are consequences for non-performance.

Inadequate responses to service delivery challenges are also linked to breakdown of trust between communities and municipalities and councillors. This existent social distance between public representatives and the communities is a major cause for concern and reflects inadequate public participation and poorly functioning ward councillors and communities.

The viability of certain municipalities is a key concern because the low rate of revenue collection continues to undermine the ability of most municipalities to render services to communities. The resultant service delivery protests are a reflection of communities’ frustration emanating from this failure, particularly in the economically marginalised communities.



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Support will be given to those municipalities which are not doing well in critical areas of service. Incentives will be given to municipalities that are performing well by giving them more control over their resources and grants and encourage them to move beyond the basics and transform the local community. There will be a targeted and vigorous response to corruption and fraud. Supply chain management practices in municipalities will be closely scrutinised.

The key performance indicators that will measure that municipalities are performing in terms of the basics are: putting people first, delivering basic services, good governance, sound financial management and capacity building.

Regulations are yet to be introduced to ensure that reporting on the indicators is legislated.

Keynote address by President Jacob Zuma centred on the following issues:

- 1. Our unique Constitution enshrines socio-economic rights, including rights to dignity, water, sanitation, housing and other basic needs. Local government, working with other spheres, must provide these services efficiently and effectively, and in a caring manner.*
- 2. Progress has already been achieved in the provision of services to many communities.*
- 3. The Twenty Year Review highlights that challenges remain. We have to do better to promote good governance and the functioning of municipalities and also in the delivery of services. When services are provided efficiently, they will make our people's experience of local government a pleasant one.*
- 4. The National Development Plan identifies a number of areas for targeted action in improving governance and administration.*

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