



Liaison, Dialogue and Research

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Policy Dialogue Report

28 October 2021, Zoom Platform

SALO Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue on Local Government

SALO PUBLIC MULTI-STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

THURSDAY 28 OCTOBER 18:00-20:00

SPEAKERS INCLUDE:



MODERATOR:
LWAZI SOMYA
SALO



COUNCILLOR MARK
KLEINSCHMIDT
(DA CANDIDATE
WARD 60)



BUSISIWE NXUMALO
DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON OF THE
ANC GABY SHAPIRO BRANCH
(ANC CANDIDATE WARDS 58
AND 59)



DR TRUST MATSILELE
ACADEMIC,
RESEARCHER AND
JOURNALIST



Executive Summary

The Southern African Liaison Office, in partnership with the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, hosted a multi-stakeholder dialogue on local government elections on 28 October 2021. The meeting sought to strengthen democracy through dialogue which aims to build consensus on matters impacting local government, and to facilitate knowledge sharing amongst citizens, activists and political actors. Amongst the panellists were ward councillor candidates Mark Kleinschmidt and Busisiwe Nxumalo representing the Democratic Alliance (DA) and African National Congress (ANC), respectively, together with researcher and journalist Trust Matsilele. SALO's Fowzia Davids gave the opening remarks and Lwazi Somya chaired the meeting. The key themes of this discussion were youth participation at the local government level, whether documented migrants from the African continent or SADC should be allowed to vote in the local government elections, the local government's role in protecting the vulnerable and marginalised groups, and gendered local budgeting.

Background

Local government elections in South Africa have historically been a more contested terrain than national elections, with a greater propensity for violence due to a lack of service delivery and party political infighting. Many municipalities in the country are facing significant financial troubles and are on the brink of collapse. In the last two years, the pandemic has also had lasting shocks and impacts on worsening structural poverty in South Africa. Several coalition governments emerged from the 2016 local government elections, new political parties have since formed, and independent candidates are now participating in the space. Going into the 2021 elections, South Africa was faced with many challenges, including the critical levels of youth unemployment and youth exclusion, gender-based violence, and increasing xenophobic sentiments from leaders and political parties.

Plans for local government elections

Mark Kleinschmidt, the incumbent ward candidate in Ward 60 from the DA in the City of Cape Town, said his past experience as a community activist and a former headmaster has prepared him for the task of leading the ward once again. He is an 'action man' and has worked closely with the safety and security sector, the civic sector, and the education sector, including creating youth and senior development programs. Busisiwe Nxumalo, the ANC's ward 58 and 59 candidate, said they aim to provide effective leadership and honest serving and restore the dignity of the community. They pledged *"to ensure that the youth, the LGBTI community and women are prioritised as beneficiaries in the city's policies, plans and programs and [to ensure] that there is increased safety and security,*

particularly for students as the wards are very student dominated". Nxumalo planned to ensure that the LGBTQIA+ community and women living in the wards are represented in the City's policies, plans and programs and that resources reach everyone on an equal basis. If voted in, Nxumalo would *"prioritise responsive service delivery and ensure a quick resolution of the service request logged by residents and also facilitate easy access for residents to actively participate in the development of the city's policies and plans"*.

Youth participation in local government elections

There is generally low youth participation and youth interest in elections in the country and political parties and candidates have not been able to bring young people to the polls. The youth are a very important demographic and constitute about 37% of South Africa's population. Youth unemployment currently sits at about 60% which has potentially made them disillusioned. Local government elections are a critical sphere of government that is close to the communities and affects the daily lives of people, and young people need to be a part of that. Kleinschmidt said social media would be a great marketing tool to get young people to the polls. He also said that politics needs to be more attractive to young people through educative means to get them to participate in the election processes. As a young person, Nxumalo said;

"We need to be at the forefront of taking charge of our future. We cannot build it without participating as we are the future of this country... as we embark on many hashtags of social movements...the ideals and ambitions of those hashtags will only become true if we're at the forefront of putting policies in place to make it happen. We need to challenge the status quo. We're going to be able to use our voices and concerns directly to challenge them through the City Council".

Researcher and journalist Trust Matsilele said, *"the lower participation of youth in electoral politics in South Africa is not an outlier... we shouldn't try to speak as though youth are monolithic groups"*. Studies done by the University of Johannesburg and the Institute of Security Studies suggest that corruption may be the reason young people are disengaged in electoral politics and that young people do not trust that voting will bring change, especially regarding job creation and the growing inequalities amongst poor black people. Matsilele further noted that youth apathy which results in not voting should be considered a type of political communication. Through non-participation, they are indicating that they do not resonate with the current political parties and that the ANC government has contributed to the failure of young people to participate in electoral politics. The general youth distrust in the system may be attributed to their marginalisation in processes and policies in various government structures.

Protecting vulnerable groups

The role of government in the protection of vulnerable groups is directly linked to the policies of the political parties that candidates represent. It is a marker of inclusivity and reflects an intention for the creation of a better future. To protect vulnerable groups and young people, Kleinschmidt said education was an important tool for young people to change the world. He said

“We would promote young people because they are not the adults or the voices of tomorrow: they are today's voices. So we would surely and definitely promote, empower, and encourage more and more young voices to be heard in council. The road to education is always under construction and we can empower our youth in terms of education.”

Nxumalo noted that vulnerable groups are those who are often left disempowered, voiceless, unheard and isolated by society. The LGBTQIA+ community is often overlooked in conversations and oftentimes left out. In 2021, the ANC launched its LGBTQI+ desk as it recognised that gendered minorities have a voice in the political space. No other political party has done so. Nxumalo further noted:

“The ANC is actually one of the only political parties that is fully inclusive. The city is very divided based on race and class, and it's very exclusive and doesn't work for all people. We really need to work towards having a city and a council that works for all people, and not just a few.”

“Our ANC Gaby Shapiro branch, working alongside strategic partners, made sure that there were amendments... made towards the Prevention of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech bill, and also creating public awareness about it and to ensure that the rights of those marginalised are dealt with”.

Allowing migrants the right to vote

The rising cleavages between the migrant population and South Africans result in flare-ups of violence, more recently in Gqeberha between the Somali migrants and the taxi industry. The integration of migrants into our communities, especially in local government, is important and ward councillors need to serve migrants in various ways as a constituent. In developed countries like the United Kingdom, migrants belonging to the Commonwealth countries have been given the opportunity to vote at the local government elections as they form part of the population. With a diverse community in South Africa, the possibility of such an electoral system being implemented would need political buy-

in. Kleinschmidt recognised the role African countries played in the liberation of South Africa, especially the liberation movements in the SADC region, and said

“we can have our front gate open, we can have people like nurses and doctors and priests and nuns, but we’re also going to have people who are going to be bringing in negative elements into our country.”

Kleinschmidt also said that he was able to shelter migrants that were in danger as a result of the xenophobic attacks in 2009 and in the spirit of Ubuntu has had a wonderful working relationship with migrants from different nationalities. He further said those who carry South African identity documents must be allowed to vote as prescribed by the Independent Electoral Commission guidelines.

Nxumalo had more to add on allowing migrants to vote in South Africa. They said,

“There shouldn’t be any reason why migrants shouldn’t vote, as they also form part of the communities and constituencies that we all represent. They also have the right to have their voices heard and their issues attended to, as they also then form part of the marginalized community which is often overlooked and not heard. The Constitution guarantees everyone within the borders of South Africa fundamental rights. And as such, it only makes sense for them to vote because they too are affected by the decisions of our government. We should also remember that Africa is part of SADC and many other UN treaties [and] that we also have humanitarian responsibilities and treaties that we should pledge ourselves to”.

Trust Matsilele shared some thoughts on the migrant vote in South Africa:

“I think at times we expect too much from South Africa when it is a very young democracy, it is still maturing. I think expecting South Africa to allow migrants to vote now probably could be too early. If it happens, South Africa would have leapfrogged over a number of other African countries that haven’t even moved closer to that or even had such kinds of conversations.”

He further added that *“beyond thinking about this issue of bringing the migrant community into electoral politics, we also have to start thinking about how we start to imagine these outside migrant communities, first as human beings who are not so different to local communities - so that when we try to bring them into participation, even on local government matters, we elevate their franchise to the same level with local votes.”*

Youth apathy and disengagement in politics

Another matter of concern that was noted during the dialogue is the lack of participation from young people in public engagement activities and how young people would be able to participate and contribute to their community. This has resulted in some discontent at the local level because they also cannot address service delivery issues, even in the City of Cape Town. In Kleinschmidt's experience, he said it was important to develop a partnership with the resident in the ward and the officials the councillor serves with. He encouraged residents to form part of multi-sector, community-based organisations and different forums but also acknowledged that information sharing would be necessary to resolve such a problem. Nxumalo, who is contesting in the student-oriented ward, said when elected as ward councillor they would facilitate easy access for residents to participate in the development of the City's policies, programs and plans by hosting resident forums and having continuous and open engagement.

The 2021 Local Government Election and political participation will be an indicator of what will happen in the coming election otherwise. On the possible outcomes of these elections, Matsilele said,

“People who don't participate in elections are usually the ones who come and decide the fate of an election. So my assumption is that if we would have over 50% youth demographic voting in this coming election, we would certainly have some earthquake movements either in the Western Cape, or even in the metros - Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela [Bay], or Tshwane. We would certainly have some movements because when you have a new voting demographic coming to the electoral politics that are neutral, they usually come to change the outlook of politics. If you have low morale, that will usually benefit incumbent political parties.”

Gendered local government budgeting

Gendered budgeting has become essential given the racial and gendered disparities in the country. The candidates were urged to reflect on gendered budgeting and the possibility of introducing this to the City Council meetings. Kleinschmidt said

“Freedom, fairness, opportunity and diversity are the cornerstones of the DA and it's those cornerstones which we use to underpin [policies], especially where gender is concerned. I think that the DA was definitely one of the first parties that embraced this...we embrace each and every person, regardless of race, creed, or colour and so that is definitely one of the policies of the DA”

Local governments could do more to address inequalities and move towards gendered-budgeting policies. Matsilele said international politics were a direct reflection of the micro-level politics where we see a high prevalence of male political actors in comparison to women, even though demographics suggest otherwise. The inclusion of more women in political and decision-making spaces would ensure gender-sensitive budgets.

When asked what a non-racial City that works for and extends to the underprivileged communities looks like, especially under the currently DA lead municipality, Kleinschmidt said,

“67% of our budget is spent in previously marginalized areas like Khayelitsha, Langa, and so on and it’s very important [for those] who serve those areas [to] take full responsibility and be accountable for the spend in those wards.”

Kleinschmidt further highlighted that the City has a budget of R3 billion allocated to indigent households and that residents have not applied through their councillors to receive the rate relief. For Nxumalo,

“the City of Cape Town doesn’t work for all people. It’s very much divided on race and class and we need to make sure that those who have been left behind are prioritized in the city’s plans, policies and programs...when you turn and look in the townships, there are consistent issues that have been there for years that are unfixed. The City only works for a few and we need change now.”

First 100 days plan

If elected into the City of Cape Town’s council, DA candidate Kleinschmidt and ANC candidate Nxumalo highlighted what they would advocate for and implement in the first 100 days. Kleinschmidt said

“service delivery is an important aspect, equitable distribution of resources, communicating, forming partnerships with your community-based organisation and with the business sector, reaching out to every sector of the community.”

For Nxumalo,

“the first is about ensuring that the youth and queer people and women are prioritised in the city’s beneficiaries and policies and plans. The second is ensuring that there [are] increased safety and security, particularly for students, queer people, and women living in both these wards. The third is ensuring that the city’s

policies, programs, plans, and resources reach all people on an equal basis. The fourth is about prioritizing service delivery and ensuring a quick resolution of services that are logged by the residents. The fifth is ensuring that [there is] easy access for residents to actively participate in the city's development plans.”

Xenophobic electioneering

Despite this being a municipal election, issues that are not related to local governance such as COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and xenophobia have also been used as campaign tools. There has been the weaponisation of vaccine hesitancy by the African Christian Democratic Party, Action SA has sparked fears over migrants and a new direction of political engagement has been seen - electioneering similar to that of the USA. To this, Matsilele added,

“it's easier to target immigrants, in part because they don't wield any form of organized power in a host country...even if the entire immigrant population would just wake up and be absent, we would still have the same problems that we have like unemployment, corruption, crime, all these other crises that we face as a country, they'll still be there”.

He further added that politicians have been smart about this by using it to appeal to the deeper fears of the voters - it is easy to feed voters with misinformation. He cautioned against the spread of this misinformation saying that,

“[xenophobia] might start as immigrant populations, but increasingly, it moves to minority tribes, for example, you end up hearing sentiments around Tsonga or Venda or other minority tribes within the community”.

Electing young people

As a youth candidate, Nxumalo was asked why they thought it would be important to elect young people to positions of leadership at a municipal level. They replied,

“we cannot build a future without us actively participating in it... and we need to be continuously challenging the status quo. We're going to be able to [raise] our voices and concerns to the City Council to raise the issues that are affected by young people. Local government is one of the spheres that are very close to the people and affects our daily lives and we need to actively participate in City Councils.”

Homelessness, land and spatial planning in the City

Another key issue to be addressed is how to deal with homeless people and how they can be supported going forward. Kleinschmidt said that through the Social Development Directorate, the DA-led City of Cape Town has been able to provide shelters for homeless people, although this has not been adequate. He attributes this to a by-product of human settlements and noted that the City had a responsibility to protect the homeless. Kleinschmidt further called on all residents to put their heads together to find a solution for the homeless. In the past, the City of Cape Town has been accused of creating anti-homeless infrastructure like spikes under bridges across the city and fining homeless people.

The DA administration recently sold sacred land belonging to the Khoi people, a vulnerable group in the City of Cape Town. Spatial planning is also a huge problem because it drives racial inequality often in favour of private sector development with the approval of the City. Nxumalo added that

“the City mustn't give approval without engaging the communities that are directly affected.”

Matsilele added that there is always collusion between political actors, leaders in local government, and national government with big cooperations, however, through civic engagement citizens in community processes and programs can work to push for change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Matsilele added

“I think democracy survives because citizens are actively engaged, not just on elections, but also outside the election. So our focus shouldn't just start and end with elections. I think we need more civic participation outside the elections. You need more concerted effort from citizens to push for change.”

The analysis and recommendations included in this paper do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the paper are the sole responsibility of SALO and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.

About the Southern African Liaison Office:



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts.

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