



DEPARTMENT OF
CO-OPERATIVE GOVERNANCE,
HUMAN SETTLEMENTS & TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS

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Media statement by the Department of Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs on Public Participation Dialogue

For immediate release

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The MEC for the Department of Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs, Mme Makoma Makhurupetje convened a Public Participation dialogue that was held at Polokwane today (05 September 2017). The dialogue was attended by the Premier of Limpopo, Honourable Stan Mathabatha, The Deputy Minister for COGTA, Honourable Obed Bapela, District and Local Municipalities Mayors, Speakers, Chief Whips, Municipal Managers and all other stakeholders in municipalities including Traditional Leaders. However, the MEC had to leave the dialogue to go and attend an urgent meeting at Vuwani with stakeholders affected by the demarcation impasse.

In explaining the objectives of the Public Participation Dialogue, the MEC, Mme Makhurupetje said that it is aimed at harmonizing relations between, Traditional Leadership, Ward Councilors, CDW's and other community structures, to communicate and share best practices from various stakeholders with regard to public participation related activities; to identify mechanisms that can be put in place, to close the gap and improve trust between citizens, public representatives / government, and Traditional Leaders; to strengthen public participation through effective communication channels; as well as to explore possible mechanisms of encouraging greater involvement of communities in the affairs of local government.

Supporting the objectives, the COGTA Deputy Minister, Mr Obed Bapela said that CDW's are an important layer of the civil service that ought to be shielded away from politics at all cost, if they are to play a critical role in service delivery. He said this was a grave mistake that was committed in the past and therefore, going forward, what needs to be done is to reposition the programme to play its role in the delivery of services.

Traditional leaders as part of the dialogue and represented by the provincial chairperson of the Traditional House of Traditional Leaders, Kgoshi Malesela Dikgale also shared the practical lessons on poor stakeholder coordination at a local level that cooperative governance can never work in a rural area if all stakeholders are not properly harmonized. He demonstrated that non-cooperation at a Ward committee level is the weakest link and this is where government needs to nib the problem in the bud. He says this can be started by for example, sharing office space and resources at traditional councils.

The dialogue noted that in terms of local government legislation, Municipal Speakers are the guardians of public participation and many of them are seen to be exercising their responsibilities in many municipalities. Section 152 of the Constitution places an obligation on local government to encourage the involvement of community organizations in matters of local government. Municipalities are therefore required by law without failure to develop a culture of community participation and create mechanisms, processes and procedures, to involve communities in the planning, performance management, budgeting and service delivery of the municipality.

The dialogue also had four commissions that suggested various ways in which citizens can participate in decision making at municipalities especially at a local level. These included ward committee meetings, budget consultations, Integrated Development Planning Forums, Mayor's Imbizo's, Ward Councilor feedback sessions, Public Broadcaster and Community radio feedback interviews, Customer satisfaction surveys, Municipal publications, Feedback through Social media platforms, Face-Face interactions with Businesspeople, Hawkers, Traditional leaders, Youth, Women and so on. Public Participation should not just be done for public relations purposes, compliance or symbolic reason. It is important that all of these platforms are popularized to enable communities to know exactly where they should direct their frustrations to, so that they are not left with no option other than violent protests.

Dialogue participants agreed that participation is one of the cornerstones of democracy and has equal benefits for politicians, officials and civil society alike. It also helps to build an informed and responsible citizenry with a sense of ownership of government developments and projects.

Speakers discouraged consultations of communities only during the local government elections as it is important to know that between the elections, decisions that are taken by Councils do impact on the lives of residents which may spark either a positive or a negative reaction. Municipalities should always be conscious of the fact that communities are continuously undergoing change and are confronted by day-to-day problems which need immediate solutions. The nature and the cause of problems also change over a period of time.

Apart from harmonizing the relations of all stakeholders in a local government, a dialogue declaration was read by the Head of Department, Mme Ngaka Mosehana, that outlined commitments of various stakeholders to strengthen and enhance public participation at local government level.

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