



## **MATJHABENG MUNICIPALITY**

### **Youth and governance: towards a developmental state**

On 16 June 2015, South Africa will be commemorating the 39<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the heroic students uprising carried out by learners mainly in Soweto. Students protested against the imposition of the Afrikaans language as compulsory medium of instruction. Although the setting was in school, the apartheid government wanted to use the learning in Afrikaans as part of its grand plan to indoctrinate young people, and therefore the rest of society with the prejudicial notion of Afrikaner supremacy and black inadequacy. On the other hand, young people resisted the oppressive language for they correctly understood it as a gimmick to strengthen the oppression of the natives. Their rejection of the imposition was part of the popular resistance aimed at building a new South Africa based on the ideals embellished in the Freedom Charter.

Throughout history, young people have always been active participants and drivers of revolutions. At least from the 1910 moment when South Africa was established as a consequence of the 1960 treaty between warring factions of whites and afrikaners, young African people have always been at the centre of all critical moments until 1994. On the other hand, young people in different parts of the world are often recruited to participate in conflicts as soldiers either in defence of regimes in power or in mutinies. It is also common to see young people in greater numbers participating in protests in Africa, Europe, South Africa and elsewhere where calls for change are made.

South Africa is youthful country. This feature has both advantages and disadvantages. The country can be guaranteed of brighter future if massive investment in education is achieved and sustained. Education is often linked with better and healthy lifestyles and greater economic opportunities. On the other hand, the failure of the state to grow the economy and redistribute income to address social policy matters risks the scourge of youth bulge. This is currently a big problem in most of middle income and ‘third’ world countries.

The above scenarios leave us with one take home message. States are can only ignore youth at their own peril in governance processes. In our case, South African constitution is largely public participation driven. In light of the youthful nature of our population, our public participation can only be meaningful and responsive only if and when it prioritises youth engagement, consultation and involvement. The notion and practice of public participation

finds more credence in local government legislation on matters of policy formulation, budgeting and implementation.

It is for this reason that Matjhabeng Local Municipality always asks the correct question: where is the youth in what we do? In the last 12 months, we prioritised the strengthening and repositioning of Matjhabeng Junior Council (MJC). Since its establishment 30 years ago, the MJC predominantly focused on Welkom-based schools. Through our maturing relations with the Department of Basic Education, we managed to get most of the schools throughout Matjhabeng to participate in the Junior Council. There are coordination challenges that still need to be worked upon; but we are making a headway.

The term of the current council is almost over. However, we are taking measures to establish a civic body/organ of young people in our area whose primary focus will be to educate and empower young people on matters of governance processes. We have learnt that most of the protests young people participate in are based on lack of understanding of government, its structures and processes. Such a body will comprise of all youth formations based on political, economic and social interests. It will help in strengthening participation mechanisms already in place such as ward committees, Community Development Workers, Community Liaison Officers, public meetings, imbizos, etc. This is part of pursuing our goal of being a benchmark municipality.

We are also working on establishing the Matjhabeng Youth Parliament. This platform is about creating a platform for dialogue between young people themselves and between young people and the council. We are striving towards ensuring seamless and continuous engagement with the public as part of the government's programme of 'Back to Basics' for municipalities. Working with other municipal departments and government departments (and entities), the office of the Speaker will spearhead these processes.

We are everyday working towards building a democratic developmental state by 2030. Its realisation rests heavily on the extent to which we create platforms for young people in governance processes. Among its objectives is ending poverty and unemployment. Unemployment problem in South Africa is essentially youth unemployment. As young people always say, nothing should happen for youth without youth. This is what we will be focusing on in the coming few months on matters of aspects.

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