

**Address by MEC for Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs,
Hon. SPD Skhosana at the Thembisile Hani Local Municipality's Ward
Committees Indaba; 05 April 2013**

Executive Mayor of Thembisile Hani, Cllr NJ Mahlangu

The Honourable Speaker, Cllr P Moseri,

MMC's

Councillors

Ward Committee members

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to address you at this important gathering that is aimed at reflecting on the status of our ward committees in the municipality.

The existence of ward committees system in our local government is a clear indication that our ANC-led government is a government of the people by the people. It is very important to note that public participation is enshrined in our constitution in order to ensure that our people take an active participation in government issues.

Local government is the sphere through which most ordinary citizens experience government in any form. It is here that the concept of the ***“people shall govern”*** must find expression and that all people, no matter how poor, should be heard and their needs addressed.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, 1996, and subsidiary legislation such as the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998, and the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000, provides a strong legal framework for participatory and cooperative democracy in the local government sphere.

The Constitution also sets out the objects of local government. Participatory democracy is a key element of two of these objects, namely:

- to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities, and
- to encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in matters of local government.

The Structures Act provides for the establishment of Ward Committees as an effective structure to encourage community participation in municipal matters and also provides that the purpose of a Ward Committee is to enhance participatory democracy in local government. Ward Committees have the local knowledge and understanding of the communities they represent and are, therefore, important role-players in local governance and democracy.

The value of community participation for local government is both moral and practical. The main moral reason is that participation deepens democracy. Practical reasons include the fact that participation can improve information, needs identification and service delivery in communities; build community solidarity and enhance the toleration of

differences, expose corruption and even improve wealth distribution. Over and above this, community participation instills ownership and creates a partnership between the community and the Municipality; and this further limits areas of conflict between these two parties. Ward committees and all public participation programmes are some of the measures introduced by government to ensure that we deepen democracy in our communities.

As government we are doing a lot of good work to improve the lives of our people but in order for our efforts to be realised it is important that we remain in touch with our communities. Local government remains the sphere of government that is closest to the people.

We, at the Provincial and National government can have a lot of programmes and interventions aimed at improving our people's lives but if those programmes do not meet the exact needs of the community and find space in their daily lives, then everything we do will be a futile exercise and a waste of resources.

Having you as ward committees actively playing your role ensures that all development in your respective wards is informed by the needs of the community and not what we (government) think is needed. This makes it a bottom up approach rather than a top down approach. This is expressed during IDP and budget consultation forums which are very important processes at local government.

Ward committee members serve as advisers not only to their ward Councillors but to government as a whole because they are on the ground and have a better understanding of the issues facing the communities because they live among them. The Ward Committees advisory role makes it easy for our ward Councillors to perform their duties knowing that their constituents are equally on board with latest developments.

Ward Committees are supposed to hold meetings at least once a month where they discuss matters affecting the community. With the leadership of the Ward Councilor they must call at least one ward community meeting per quarter where they give feedback to the community on issues raised by the community in previous meetings and other platforms, and also consult the community on any matter of interest to the community. The Ward Committee must assist the Ward Councilor and ensure that he/she calls community meetings. The issues raised and/or discussed in these meetings must find space in other processes within the Municipality, which includes Council meetings.

If we have fully functional ward committees we are able to stay in touch with communities and continuously receive feedback and strengthen relations. I cannot think of a more appropriate mechanism to ensure that we share information with all our communities than ward committees because even the composition of these committees is representative of all structures in the different wards

This brings me to the matter that is of great concern to me, the sporadic unrests that we are seeing in some parts of the province. With fully functional ward committees, we should not be seeing such protests that seem to catch us of guard. How is it possible that we go sleep at night and everything is calm and we wake the next morning and we are confronted with a very volatile situation that disrupts peoples daily activities and in some cases destroys public property, and we do not know about this? It raises serious concerns of how much we are in touch with our communities, and it also raises questions on how much we regularly interface and give feedback to our communities.

Government at provincial and national levels should not hear about problems hampering the daily lives of people such as water, housing and roads, on television yet there are Ward Committees within our municipalities. The monthly reports compiled by Ward Committees must reflect on these challenges and the province through a reporting process must know about the challenges at local level.

Active participation by communities in government programmes means that we can all proudly say that indeed people are governing as it was declared in the Freedom Charter as adopted by the real Congress of the People in Kliptown in 1955 that “The people shall govern”.

The effective functioning and use of Ward Committees means that we fully understand and comply with our government’s message that “Working together we can do more”.

Challenges facing our communities can never be resolved over night, but partnerships with various stakeholders and active participation by citizens will make it easier to address these challenges.

We are confident to say that since the ANC government came into power a lot of work has been done and continues to be done to improve our people's lives. To date community members through ward committees have played a significant role so that our communities can have access to clean water, houses and electricity.

We are also making a humble appeal to all municipalities in the province to prioritise public participation in all their activities. As government we are tasked with delivering quality services to all our people.

This is a mammoth task that can be easily accomplished if we join hands as different stakeholders to provide services and programmes. We must always make sure that our people are aware of our plans, the progress we are making in the implementation of these plans and any challenges that we encounter.

Fully functional ward committees are very instrumental in making sure that communities continue to hold their public representatives accountable. Accountability remains one of the most important democratic principles that our government is committed to upholding at all times.

We are aware that there are still some challenges faced by ward committees. Some of these challenges include the following;

- Ward Committees do not have operational Plans
- No uniformity and consistency in terms of reporting by Ward Committees. The reporting system on service delivery does not feed well to the district and the province and it is unable to send early warning signs for other spheres of government to intervene. Municipalities cover their short-comings until there is a protest than to act proactively.
- We still have Ward Councilors who do not call Ward Committee and community meetings. And a number of those who manage to call meetings they do not table service delivery matters to Council.
- Problems linked to voluntary nature of Ward Committees
- Political rivalry between the Ward Councilor and Ward Committee members
- Lack of human resources and financial resources in the Speaker's Office
- The non-functionality of Ward Committees
- The non-functionality of both the District and Provincial Speakers' Forums which must deal with all matters of Public Participation
- A number of municipalities are still failing to recognize the role of Ward Committees, hence they are always sidelined
- Lack of administrative support for Ward Committees by municipalities
- Unavailability of an efficient and effective system of processing service delivery issues from Ward Committees

To address some of these challenges, as a department we are suggesting the following;

- Speakers of Municipalities must come up with mechanisms of ensuring that ward councilors convene Ward Committee meetings
- Public participation should conduct workshops to capacitate secretaries of Ward Committees on their roles and responsibilities
- Public participation should assist Ward Committees to develop Ward operational plans
- In cases where a Ward Committee does not reach its full complement because of relocation of members, the ward committee must be re-established
- Speakers and Ward Councillors as custodians of Public Participation should always bear in mind that their responsibility is to ensure that Ward Committees do comply and submit reports to council.

Part of our role is to coordinate capacity building programme as part of support. In 2012 together with the Local Government Seta we have provided capacity building toward committees in the form Induction Workshops, Clarification on roles and responsibilities for Ward Committees, Ward Councillors and CDWs and Training for the Ward Committee Secretaries. These trainings have been highly commended by the participants as it has given them so much knowledge about how local government operates.

The effectiveness of Ward Committees depends on the administrative support provided by municipalities. There are municipalities that take the issue of Ward Committees very seriously and there are those that do not see how they fit into the operation of the municipality. Municipalities must begin to recognize the existence of these structures because they represent the communities that they serve.

It is also important to acknowledge the commitment displayed by ward committee members while performing their duties. It is not an easy task but we are glad that we have community members who are willing to sacrifice their valuable time in return of a very minimal stipend.

I am confident that in performing their functions they have also gained valuable skills that will assist and empower them as individuals. You have displayed your patriotism in a greatest form.

As it was in the olden days the establishment of Ward Committee structures is and must be consistent with the spirit of volunteerism. We really need to uphold that as it is key to the development of our communities. However, volunteerism alone cannot bring change if all necessary resources are not channeled accordingly. The Government has therefore seen the need to put some resources in place to fund the Ward Committees programme. With effect from July 2012, National Treasury has made a provision of R500.00 per ward committee member to all municipalities on grade 1 to 3. I am aware that there are some municipalities that are still not paying these allowances despite the provisions made.

We will be looking closely at these municipalities to see what they are doing with the funds provided by National Treasury because they cannot be used for something else other than what it was intended for. The out of pocket or allowance covers the following areas:

- Communication
- Transportation
- Meals

While taking serious consideration of the need to pay this allowance it is important to take note at the fact that there are municipalities that cannot even afford to provide water for their communities. Therefore, this imperative that this payment must be made on the basis of the following:

I must however add that this money cannot just be paid without a monitoring mechanism for the performances of the ward committees, to make sure that it is indeed used for the intended purposes and the results thereof. We are looking at tightening the monitoring mechanism for the performance of the ward committees in relation to the functionality or performance of members. We want to make sure that the payment of out of pocket expenses must be linked to the following functionality indicators. These include –

- Number of Ward Committee meetings held and percentage attendance by members
- Number of community meetings organized by Ward Committees and percentage of ward community

- Submission and tabling of ward reports and plans to the Council
- Number of door-to-door campaigns
- Number of complaints from the community registered and attended to
- Distribution publications over a period of time

Going forward we need to do things right. The establishment of Ward Committees must focus on how we give our communities a voice that will change their situation to the better. We must encourage communities to be organized; when they are organized we must then recognize their existence and make sure that we listen to their inputs. This will assist us address our current challenges where you have individual members of Ward Committees representing themselves and causing confusion because they do not account anywhere.

We need to ensure that there is fair representation of women, the youth, the disabled, senior citizens, and that the process takes into account the people in the rural areas. It is equally important that these groups must use this platform in a wise manner to make sure that they genuinely advance the needs of our people. The Department in line with legislation has issued guidelines that will give direction in terms of the elections of Ward Committees. This includes amongst other things how the establishment of Ward Committees must be conducted and the signing of the Code of Conduct by elected members. We are now moving from **'functional to effective'** Ward Committees and for us to achieve that we need to work together to ensure that. We will only be effective if we positively contribute to the lives of the ordinary people of this province.

I am happy to note that best performing municipalities in the province with regard to ward committees are from the Nkangala District. These are Dr JS Moroka, Steve Tshwete and Thembisile Hani. The DR JS Moroka has introduced the adopt a ward by each senior manager from the municipality. These managers assist in referring issues raised by ward committee to the relevant departments. Steve Tshwete has developed an effective reporting template, which the province is rolling out to all other municipalities. This template makes it easy for referrals to relevant departments and report backs to the communities. Thembisile Hani is the only municipality in the province that has provided its ward committees with reflector jackets with the ward committees members names.

I must also indicate that here in Thembisile Hani Local municipality, you have shown that you take the issue of Ward Committees seriously. All 32 Ward Committees that have been established are fully functional. I am also happy that all Ward Committee members receive their out of pocket expense of R1000.00 a month.

We must build on the successes attained and in cases where we did not achieve the desired results we need to go back to the drawing board and identify measures to improve.

I am confident that other municipalities will also learn from Thembisile Hani and pay attention to Ward Committees. We must share these experiences with each other, if we are to improve public participation in the province. Let us make use of our public participation programme to reach out to all communities.

I thank you.