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Remarks by Deputy Minister Thembisile Nkadimeng at the SAAPAM lecture on
professionalised local government

Theme: “Professionalized local government: a dream or reality”

Tshwane University of Technology, Soshanguve campus

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Programme Director

The South African Association of Public Administration and Management (SAAPAM)

Executive Director, Dr John Molepo,

Students,

practitioners,

academics and public intellectuals,

Good afternoon

Thank you for inviting me to join you all at this lecture on the professionalization of the local government sphere. I am pleased to be a part of this session, where I hope we will productively engage each other rather than me addressing you alone.

This session take place just over a year since we held the Local Government Elections. The elections as you all know, are a Constitutionally guaranteed opportunity for citizens to elect members of municipal councils in their respective cities or towns to represent their voices in local governance for the next five years.

These elections have resulted in an unprecedented 70 of the so-called “hung councils” in the country. The conclusion of these elections, therefore, has ushered in a new chapter for local government to continue playing a central role in our developmental agenda as a country.

Local government has in the 21 years of its existence emerged from being an institution that was subservient, racist, and illegitimate to an institution with democratically elected leadership and constitutional status that offers basic services to our people.

These include the provision of safe drinking water, sanitary facilities, electricity, housing, refuse collection, and public roads – all of which are basic human rights and integral parts of the right to dignity as enshrined in our Supreme Law, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

As a caring government, we are building a society in which every household will have access to basic services, where all feel safe and where no child goes to bed hungry.

We have, for example, between 2002 and 2021 recorded an increase from 84% to 88% on the number of households that have access to improved source of water.

The percentage of households with access to improved sanitation increased by 22, 4 percentage points between 2002 and 2021, growing from 61, 7% to 84, 1 %. The percentage of South African households that were connected to the mains electricity supply increased from 76, 7% in 2002 to 89, 3% in 2021. It is notable that refuse removal was much more common in urban than in rural areas (85, 4% compared to 11, 8%), while 86, 3% of households in metropolitan areas had access to these services.

In the City of Tshwane:

- 96% of people have access to water,
- 85% to sanitation,
- 89% to electricity,
- 85% waste management
- 81% of people have access to housing.

While a lot has been achieved, we should not be complacent as we are seeing failures to execute or render uninterrupted services to communities, with key challenges including the water crisis in Hammanskraal and surrounding communities.

We are working to improve the way we work as we understand that when local government works, basic services are provided efficiently and equitably, people's quality of life is improved, businesses thrive, economies grow, and the dignity of people is assured.

Because local government is where most of us interact with the government, it is important that we all understand what an ideal local government sector should look like.

Section 152 of the Constitution sets the objectives of local government which are to:

- (a) Provide democratic and accountable government for local communities
- (b) Ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner
- (c) Promote social and economic development
- (d) Promote a safe and healthy environment; and
- (e) Encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.

The objects of the Constitution on local government call on us to have a local government sector that works to create prosperous, resilient, sustainable, coherent, cohesive, integrated, non-sexist, vibrant and climate smart communities.

This is a huge task that will require the cooperation of all stakeholders to ensure a coherent and coordinated state response to building capable, accountable, financially viable and sustainable municipalities.

As we work towards attaining this, we would need to ensure the professionalization of local government administration to enable municipalities to perform their constitutional obligations. This has also been a continued call by President Cyril Ramaphosa in his indication that government intends to professionalise local government.

This is because we have always been the first to recognize that our municipalities confront a slew of issues in terms of leadership, governance, and political oversight, which has resulted in several dysfunctional municipalities.

The National Development Plan, which also bears witness to this, cites capacity difficulties as a major impediment to the establishment of a capable democratic developmental state.

It is our firm believe that both the executive and the legislature have important, although distinct, roles to play in enhancing local democracy and accountability and steering the municipality towards developmental outcomes.

The effectiveness of mayoral committees as an accountability mechanism has come under question. Whereas the executive committee system is designed to guarantee fair access to executive decision-making processes for political parties, the executive mayoral system reserves access to executive decision-making for parties represented on the mayoral committee.

The signing into law of the Municipal Systems Amendment Act, will strengthen several aspects of municipal administration.

The Act aims to professionalise local public administration by insulating senior municipal officials from political interference; provide for procedures and competency criteria for appointment of municipal managers and other senior managers; provide for the consequences of appointments made in contravention of the Act; prohibit municipal managers and other senior managers from holding political office in political party and promote an ethical local public administration through regulation of the employment of municipal employees who have been dismissed for misconduct.

Given the important role local government plays in the daily lives of people, disturbingly, the local sphere has the least resources and has the widest skills gap. At an administrative level, the capacity constraints of municipalities include not having sufficiently skilled staff in key areas such as community services and development planning.

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) attributes these shortages to a large mismatch between skills development plans and training efforts.

Working to address this, the promulgation of the Local Government Municipal Staff Regulations allows for us to set uniform standards and procedures for municipal staff establishment, recruitment, selection and appointments, performance management, and transfers of municipal employees. These regulations also introduce a Competency Framework which is the first step in ensuring that we have the right people in the right jobs.

The objectives of the Regulations are to:

- (a) Create a career local public administration that is fair, efficient, effective, economic and transparent.
- (b) Create a development oriented public administration governed by good human resource management and career development practices.
- (c) Strengthen the capacity of municipalities to perform their functions through the setting of uniform norms and standards for, *inter alia*, recruitment and appointment of suitably qualified and competent persons.
- (d) Ensure an accountable local public administration that is responsive to the needs of local communities.
- (e) Promote improved professional standards and conduct in local government by ensuring that staff adhere to professional ethics.
- (f) Establish a coherent HR governance regime that will ensure adequate checks and balances, including enforcement of compliance with the legislation.
- (g) Professionalise local public administration.

The Regulations for staff below senior managers are linked with competency requirements for each individual occupational level and this should be viewed as a game changer in the professionalization of local government.

As part of the implementation of these Regulations, a comprehensive sector-wide skills audit will be conducted to identify competency gaps and the root causes of capacity challenges and to determine the appropriate training and skills development interventions. The development of the above set of regulations seek to strengthen the institutional capacity in municipalities as envisaged in the National Capacity Building Framework.

We are also working on the training of councilors, human resource practitioners, and senior managers on the implementation of the Municipal Staff Regulations and Guidelines.

Programme Director

We have also identified a critical need to support and consolidate a vibrant artisan skills base for local government by capacitating current municipal officials as Artisans and including deployment of recent graduates with these skills, especially in electricity, plumbing, diesel mechanics and motor mechanics for local government service delivery.

We are also working to improve the working environment in municipalities in general as the ability to attract competent technical people, relies on an environment that supports and promotes professional practice and institutional capacity.

Lastly, we have to work together to deal decisively with corruption. Corruption threatens democracy and the rule of law, resulting in human rights abuses, lower standards of living, and fosters the growth of organized crime and other risks to national security. Corruption is a cancer because it robs the poor, impedes the provision of services, and prevents economic growth.

This chronic problem suppresses the sector's ability to perform fundamental services efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, as both individual and organizational disciplines deteriorate, it erodes the necessary professionalism required to accompany the delivery of those services to the public.

We are therefore working to not only strengthen accountability mechanisms within municipalities and across government but also foster ethical principles, practices of individual and collective social responsibility and accountability.

As I stated at the outset of my presentation, I would like our gathering to be more of an interaction than an address. With these few remarks, programme director, allow me to cease here and allow for us all to engage.

I thank you.