

## **From the Speaker's Podium**

Some nineteen years down the line, we still remain trendsetters on matters of enhancing participatory democracy. We are undoubtedly the first to establish functional ward committees and put up a budget for ward committees' support. We also say without any shadow of doubt that we are the proud copy right owners of the concept of ward committees' conference, which has become an annual event for many municipalities in and outside our District and Province. In a rare and quite monumental feat, there has been seventeen uninterrupted ward committees' conferences that have been held thus far. The current financial year's instalment of the conference, held from the 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> August 2019 at Miami Lodge (Polokwane), was a mixture of the fanfare and hard work particularly on both the educational and capacity building fronts. The gumption with which speaker after speaker narrated Blouberg Municipality's state of participatory democracy as they waxed lyrical of the immeasurable strides made, had commentators going green with envy. When all was said, the conference went into the rigours of commissions to masticate prevalent problems and come up with at times unpleasant but yet diagnostic recommendations that would assist in turning around the service delivery challenges that bedevil the institution. Further elucidation on the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Ward Committees' Conference and resolutions/declaration thereof find expression elsewhere in the edition.

We remain the authors of the Council/EXCO Outreaches wherein all our quarterly council and monthly Executive Committee meetings are held outside council parameters, in the process affording communities the opportunity to directly interact and raise issues with the top most governance structures. Our outreaches have over the years grown immensely in stature and quality. Not only have we excelled in conceptualization of these and other mechanisms to shoot up participatory democracy, we have perfected them through monitored implementation over the years. In our quest to fortify what's arguably the most dominant force in the public participation stakes, all issues raised by ward committees and at all public participation fora serve in all governance structures including but not limited to; Portfolio, Executive, Petitions and Public Participation Committee as well as departmental and management meetings. The objective thereof is to ascertain that all issues raised receive the requisite attention to their logical conclusions. The stakes have evidently been upped and the onus lies with our contemporaries to "catch us if they can".

In our relentless effort to have innovations towards building on paths towards a municipality that is efficient, effective, accountable and responsive we are on the verge clinching an abler that will make communication with all stakeholders as seamless as possible. Our ward committees have since inception been honouring their scheduled bi-monthly meetings without fail. Mention has to be made of the fact that these ward committees do not meet for the sake of meeting, but meet over structured agenda to assess and further strategise on implementing their approved annual programmes, which include educating and mobilizing members of the public around the municipality's programmes. Suffice to mention that council has also approved the realignment of the ward committees' portfolios/desks in line with recommendations of the Provincial Department of Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs (CoGHSTA) for a uniform approach. The proposed changes are however, very cosmetic with the most significant being that ward secretaries are no longer responsible for any particular desk but will focus solely on the coordination aspect of such committees. All wards also held their mandatory public (report back) meetings. Given the amount and quality of inputs our people make in the public participatory platforms, it has become abundantly clear that our ward committee system is fully functional.

It is that time of the year where we keep our fingers crossed in the hope that we will achieve a better audit opinion. Notwithstanding all the capacity and human resource constraints, we remain steadfast. It is envisaged that given the commitment shown throughout the year, the ball will drop our way. We further urge our management to unequivocally devote their full cooperation to the entire audit process. It should be recalled that the process spells out the state of our being in respect of both financial and performance aspects of our

management. As institutional political principals, we however commit to accept full responsibility of whatever outcome the AG would have arrived at. The audit process looks more like an insurmountable task but we would like to urge everyone concerned to subscribe to the dictum, "sort out today's problems today, because if you leave it until the end of the week, you will have a week's problems to solve in one day".

It will be a travesty of justice on my part if I do not mention my utter disdain at the level of femicide and violence against women and children that continue to ravage our communities week in and week out. We are making an impassioned plea to the male folk to desist from and abhor such actions in the strongest possible terms. The detesting of such dastardly deeds should culminate into enlisting of law enforcement agencies at the slightest sign of such manifestation as failure to report a crime renders one a criminal himself/herself and may have one liable for prosecution. The upcoming festivities should be enjoyed with family and friends and we must leave no margin for error where women and children are concerned. It'd be appreciated if people could realize that they have the potential to bring change to our beloved country as Antony Robbins remarked, 'Each of us is endowed with innate resources that enable us to achieve all we've ever dreamed of and more. The flood gates can be opened by a decision, bringing us joy or sorrow, prosperity or poverty, companionship or solitude, long life or early death. So long!!!