

Blouberg Municipality



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News Release

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE IN PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Today we are hailed champion of public participation throughout the country because of, amongst others, the effectiveness of our Ward committees System. Blouberg Municipality has always regarded its Ward committees as the important mobilizing agent for community action. This critical municipal stakeholder was established in terms of the Local Government Municipal Structure' Act (117 of 1998). It started with 16 wards and today the Municipality has 21 Wards and has for the past nine years been convening Ward Committee's Forum/Conference affording them an opportunity to share the problems and success stories they come across as foot soldiers between the Council and the community.

The 21 wards translate into 210 ward committee members. Each ward is manned by 10 ward committee members who are selected from a broad range of interest groups that are most relevant to the key performance areas of the Municipality. The areas include municipal services such as water, electricity, housing, sanitation, roads, storm-water and drainage and social services including health, safety and security. The Blouberg Annual Ward Committee Conference dates back from 2003 and has been running year after year without fail.

The best practice of public participation model in Blouberg has been shared with various municipalities throughout the country and has featured in two of the most prominent publications commissioned by the national Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. In 2006 the then Department of Provincial and Local Government (dplg) issued a publication titled Project Consolidate - A Collection of Case Studies : Knowledge Management Series Vol 2 in which the Blouberg story featured as Case Study 4 of the total of 8 stories told from across the country. These were stories on different topics and ours therefore represented the national story on participatory democracy. In addition our story was compiled and narrated on a DVD by the national department. The second Blouberg story has been published in a handbook commissioned by the national Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs called : From Functionality to Effectiveness – Deepening Democracy through South Africa's Ward Committees, issued in November 2010 by then Minister, the Honourable Sicelo Shiceka.(May his soul rest in peace). Our story is titled "Strong Democratic Processes Build Strong Ward Committees." Our contribution to the national perspective and discourse on participatory democracy and the ward committee system is therefore beyond doubt and vitiates the conclusion that we are among the best.

Prelude to the 2012 and the Tenth Ward Committees Conference goes like this : In August 2009 Blouberg Ward committees converged at Tshipise near Musina . Themed Age of Renewal- Participatory democracy Remains The Future, conference afforded ward committees from all 18

wards then an opportunity to share their achievements, challenges , new ideas and discuss what they expect from the political leadership and senior management. In 2010 all roads led to Bela - Bela in the Waterberg District. This 8th Ward Committee Conference was merged with the 1st Blouberg Water Summit under the theme: 'Turning around participatory democracy to accelerate service delivery'. Magoshi; SANCO; Provincial Departments and Chairpersons of bought farms took part to plan together with the Municipality and resolutions were taken pertaining what has been the headache to most rural municipalities in the country. In this conference stakeholders during commissions raised all water problems and resolutions were taken on how to reduce theft of diesel pump machines, and getting rid of illegal connections amongst others. To this date progress reports on implementation of Summit Resolutions remain high on the performance plan of the Municipality's Department of Technical Services. At Indermark the Ward Committee has recently mobilized the community to sever all illegal connection to municipal infrastructure, resulting in water shortage being a thing of the past. We are indebted to this kind of ward committees, which have indeed graduated from functionality to effectiveness.

At that Conference the Executive Mayor of the Capricorn District Municipality Cllr Lawrence Mapuolo committed to continue working with Blouberg Municipality to come up with cost effective ways of investing in training of the ward committees as well as intensifying partnership with magoshi in implementing service delivery .

The 9th Annual Ward Committee Conference, again in Bela-Bela , was celebrated under the theme, ' Overcoming the Pangs of Hunger Towards Prosperous Society through Participatory Democracy, the conference brought together and harmonized relations among the key stakeholders with diverse interest.

One notable aspect about the Conferences over the years has been the ability to influence decisions that culminate into resolutions of Council. The Out of Pocket Expenses have always been debated upon at respective conferences before ultimately being adopted by Council. Today ward committees receive over a R1000 in out of pocket expenses, an essential increase from R100 a month a year ago. In order for the ward committees to keep tabs with developments it was resolved that the following be standing items on all ward committees bi-monthly meetings : Conference resolutions, responses on issues raised by ward committees and their responses from municipal departments; and the state of the Municipality's finances.

Another proud dimension relates to the number of ward committees who ultimately become councilors. Sixteen (16) of the current crop of councilors were at one stage or the other members of ward committees with the cherry on top being that two of those serve in the Executive Committee. That gives credence to the fact that the amounts of education imparted particularly during the conferences and beyond prepare ward committees for future assignments and therefore making it easier for them to grapple with issues relating to governance and thus effortlessly adjusting in their assumption of leadership roles.

The mother of all Blouberg ward committee conferences will be held on the 14 – 16 September 2012 in Bela-Bela. This tenth anniversary Conference will be filled with memories and reflection on successes and challenges of the past

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