

**MINISTRY
COGHSTA
NORTHERN CAPE**

MEDIA PRESS STATEMENT

By

MEC BENTLEY VASS

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Address by the MEC for Cooperative Governance Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs, Mr. Bentley Vass on the challenges faced in municipalities

The Head of Department; Mr. Lenkoe
Chief Directors;
Citizens of the Northern Cape;
Members of the Media;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning,

I am privileged and honored to be speaking to you on matters that have either a direct or indirect impact on our communities.

First allow me to extend my sincere apology on the hindrance of service delivery to our communities, more especially on the interruption of water. I assure you that we are working closely with the Department of Water and Sanitation and Municipalities to sort out the water challenges in the various communities.

Parallel to the water issues, we are working very hard to try and catch up to housing rectification and building, as mentioned before the Northern Cape receives a baseline of R354 813 000 for Human Settlements, regrettably this does not allow us to work as effectively and efficiently as we would wish to. As a result, we are constantly in talks with the Minister of Human Settlements, Mmamoloko Kubayi on ways to improve housing delivery in the province.

Water Challenges in Magareng

The municipality is currently working on the construction of the bulk-water pipeline on the old N18 Margrieta Prinsloo Bridge. The work was regrettably disrupted on Saturday, 10 June

when the pressure of the water released was too strong, damaging the work being done on the pipeline.

This has set back the temporary solution for water supply to communities as the river is currently full to its capacity. This means that the municipality cannot send people to the worksite up until the river levels come down. We are aware of the frustration this causes to the community and ask that they practice a little more patience before the emergency repair work can resume.

The community is currently being serviced by means of water tankering;

- Department of Public Works, Roads and Infrastructure has given 2 trucks;
- The Office of the Premier has given 2 trucks; and
- The municipality itself has 3 trucks

Making it a total of 7 trucks, this covers all 6 wards in the subregions.

As a long-term solution, the Department is funding the municipality R5.5m for the construction of the bulkwater pipeline to the old N18 Margrieta Prinsloo Bridge. This amount was approved 14 March 2023.

This project is well underway and the construction period is estimated to be 4 months. This is a permanent intervention and the most sustainable solution in the restoration of water supply in Magareng municipality. The project is currently on month 3 of construction works and is estimated to be completed by end of July 2023.

Still Water Houses

There are currently 147 houses in Stillwater, we had a team go out to visit the area. Upon the feedback from the team, we requested an investigation to be launched on the project. Based on the forensic report, that came back recommended “urgent remedial work” by the National Home Builders Registration Council.

On receipt of the forensic report, we wrote to the Minister of Human Settlements, Ms. Mmamoloko Kubayi requesting the approval to implement remedial work, and not only on the Stillwater project but others that have been identified through the investigation.

We plead with our communities to bear with us, we are much aware of the needs that are accompanied by frustrations on housing issues. We assure you that we are working timeously to ensure that housing delivery takes priority, my team is in constant talks with the Office of the Minister negotiating on ways to increase the Northern Cape budget so that we are able to deliver more houses.

Municipal Senior Managers Appointments

In our last media press conference, we spoke to issues of Senior Management appointments in Municipalities. I am happy to report that we have some progress with regards to that; the vacancies are filled as follows;

- Municipal Managers are currently standing at 15 of 31
- Chief Financial Officers 20 of 31
- Director Technical Services 21 of 28
- Director Town Development Planning 5 of 8
- Director Community 8 OF 13

We are working tirelessly to make sure that these positions are filled, I must however admit that the number of applications we receive are making it rather a difficult process, as most applicants do not meet the required qualifications and/or skills, not to mention the lack of experience.

The Municipal Systems Amendment Act (Act 3 2022) which was amended last year speaks to the appointments of senior managers. In it we are guided as to how appointments should be made.

This legislation stipulates the following;

- It enables the Minister to determine, by regulation or guidelines, the minimum level of skills, expertise, competencies and qualifications for appointment of municipal managers or acting municipal managers.
- An appointment of a municipal manager will be declared *null* and *void* if the person appointed does not meet the prescribed competency requirements.
- Inserts appointment procedures to ensure that a vacant post of municipal manager is advertised nationally to attract as wide as possible a pool of candidates.
- A person may be selected for appointment as municipal manager only from this pool of candidates.
- If the pool of candidates is insufficient, the municipal council may re-advertise the post.
- Provides for the Minister to exempt a municipal council from these strict appointment requirements if the municipal council is unable to attract a suitable candidate, which may happen especially in the rural areas.
- Enjoins municipalities to report recruitment and selection outcomes to the MEC for local government and the Minister - in order to ensure compliance with the Act.
- If the MEC has any reason to believe that an appointment is made in contravention of the Act, the MEC may request the municipal council to correct such an appointment or to invoke a declaratory order to force compliance with the Act.

- Failure by the MEC or Minister to respond to the appointment process and outcome within the timeframes, the appointment of the senior manager will be deemed to be in compliance with this Act: Provided the municipality submitted all relevant documents as prescribed.
- Provides for secondment of an acting municipal manager by the MEC or Minister if the municipal council fails to attract a suitable candidate.
- Enjoins municipalities to report recruitment and selection outcomes to the MEC for local government and the Minister - in order to ensure compliance with the Act.
- If the MEC has any reason to believe that an appointment is made in contravention of the Act, the MEC may request the municipal council to correct such an appointment or to invoke a declaratory order to force compliance with the Act.
- Failure by the MEC or Minister to respond to the appointment process and outcome within the timeframes, the appointment of the senior manager will be deemed to be in compliance with this Act: Provided the municipality submitted all relevant documents, as prescribed.

As COHGSTA we had a roadshow earlier this year, conducting workshops on the legislation in all five districts. We put emphasis on attracting the relevant skill and professional candidates.

We will not compromise on this guideline, failure of municipalities to abide accordingly will result in appointments deemed null and void.

Coalition Governments

With the multi-party coalition municipalities', we have observed that instability is rife, as a result it has a direct impact on service delivery, merely because coalition governments currently have no regulatory framework that exists to governing, notwithstanding the Coalition framework proposed by SALGA.

National COGTA has announced a regulatory framework to guide multi-party coalitions within municipal governance, including clearly defining the political and administrative interphase to eliminate tensions in the delivery of services. In the interim, provincial government will intervene to stabilize those municipalities to facilitate service delivery.

Auditor Generals Findings

The Audit outcomes were released last week. In the report of the Auditor General, she makes the following observations with regards to the Northern Cape municipalities;

That the financial statements are prepared by consultants because the municipalities have no capacity to prepare them;

- The prepared financial statements by the consultants are in themselves not quality reports;
- There are four municipalities that are consistently receiving disclaimed opinions over a period of years ranging from 2-7 years
- The AG also points at 16 financially distressed municipalities which disclosed material uncertainty about their financials
- And on leadership and management, the Auditor General points at “the slow response to the findings and recommendations meant to improve the situation on audit outcomes”
- She also raises the issue of vacant positions of senior management in municipalities

We take note of these observations, and will most definitely explore ways to rectify these challenges together with the municipalities

Despite the challenges that have been pointed out, four Municipalities have been found with unqualified opinions, namely; Hantam, Namakwa District Municipality, ZF Mngcawu District Municipality and Frances Baard District Municipality. Six were found with unqualified and 15 with qualified.

Allow me to congratulate the four municipalities with the unqualified opinions and encourage them to keep at this pace, and in the same breath plead with the rest of municipalities to jump on that train.

MunMEC Resolutions

In our last MunMEC meeting that was held on 18 April 2023, we resolved that Traditional Leaders need to be invited and must partake in these meetings because they play an important role in linking our communities to government and vice versa.

In that meeting we discussed the Municipal Eskom debt. We currently have 5 municipalities that are debt free with Eskom and 10 municipalities are assisted with the implementation of cost-effective tariffs.

We requested that Eskom review their billing system, as well as look into the National Treasury circular that speaks to the writing off of debts.

Municipalities raised that we should start looking into the possibility of going off grid, invest in solar hubs as they have done in the ZF Mngcawu District.

These are all options that we are exploring to see how best we can assist both municipalities and communities. We are aware that paying of tariffs is challenging to different households.

We encourage people to update their personal information on the various municipal database systems, so that should they be indigents they are recognized as such. We also plead with those who do not fall into the indigent category to please pay their tariffs, revenue collection is the one thing that keeps municipalities afloat, and without it, municipalities are bound to fall into debt.

Some of these municipalities are poverty stricken, this being the reason why they are unable to keep up with revenue collection. You find that the number of unemployed people far surpass those that are employed. Thus, we plead for the updating of the data system, this will help the municipality with tracking of revenue collection and finding ways to deal with the counseling of the debt that can be accounted for.

We have noted the enquiries on the non-payments of salaries and have investigated the matter, this appears to be news from the previous year. Municipalities have assured us that they have not experienced in the current year.

Initiation Schools

Colleagues, winter is upon us, with the initiation season taking its position, pronouncement of the start of the schools will be 24th of June, the pronouncement was made CONTRALESA in May. We want to guard against the illegal and/or ungoverned schools that plan to pop up.

The Customary Initiation Act 2 of 2021 aims to provide for the effective regulation of customary initiation practices and it wants to ensure that safe initiation practices take place, and protects the lives of young initiates.

Illegal initiation speaks to those that are not sanctioned by the Provincial Initiation Coordinating Committee (PICC). This is the structure that calls for the registration of traditional surgeons, caregivers and principals of initiation schools.

With this said, we call on the cooperation of all stakeholders who are to part take in this process.

This brings me to the end of my statement to you, I hope we find each other well within what I have presented to you.

I thank you